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The Experience of Becoming a Teacher Leader

Cory G. Smith
Utah State University

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THE EXPERIENCE OF BECOMING A TEACHER LEADER

by

Cory G. Smith

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree

of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

Education

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2021
ABSTRACT

The Experience of Becoming a Teacher Leader

by

Cory Smith, Doctor of Philosophy

Utah State University, 2021

Major Professor: Scott Hunsaker, Ph.D.
Department: Teacher Education and Leadership

Teacher leadership has become an increasingly important aspect of school reform and evaluation. While much has been stated in the literature regarding the benefits of teacher leadership, literature is lacking in describing the process of a teacher leader and the effects this experience has on the teacher leaders themselves. Using distributed leadership theory and authentic leadership theory as a guide, this study takes a phenomenological approach to the experience of becoming a teacher leader as viewed through the eyes of 11 junior high school teachers from a single school district.

The findings of this study suggest that distributed leadership and authentic leadership theories provide appropriate guiding theories for examining teacher leadership. The findings also suggest the importance of initial events, or events that help teacher leaders recognize their influence and lead to further leadership experience, as well as the qualities that these teacher leaders possess that they believe led to formal leadership positions. The findings also suggest the presence of driving passions, or strong beliefs
that motivate teacher leaders’ work. Additionally, this study suggests the importance of administrators in the development and support of teacher leaders. The findings also reveal the perceptions these teachers have regarding changes they have experienced as leaders, their influence on students, school, and colleagues, and benefits and tolls that have come as a result of their leadership experience. A conceptual framework is also presented that describes the process of becoming a teacher leader.

(263 pages)
Teacher leadership has become an increasingly important aspect of school reform and evaluation. Teacher leadership is often viewed as teachers leading either through formal positions or influencing others informally. There is a lot of research describing the benefits of teacher leadership, but there is little that describes the process of a teacher leader and the effects this experience has on the teacher leaders themselves. This study examines the experience of becoming a teacher leader as viewed through interviews with 11 junior high school teachers from a single school district.

The findings of this study suggest the importance of initial events, or events that help teacher leaders recognize their influence and lead to further leadership experience, as well as the qualities that these teacher leaders possess that they believe led to formal leadership positions. The findings also suggest the presence of driving passions, or strong beliefs that motivate teacher leaders’ work. Additionally, this study suggests the importance of administrators in the development and support of teacher leaders. The findings also reveal the perceptions these teachers have regarding changes they have experienced as leaders, their influence on students, school, and colleagues, and benefits and tolls that have come as a result of their leadership experience. A model is also presented that describes the process of becoming a teacher leader.
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Cory G. Smith
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

As a young teacher in the initial years of my career in education, I wanted to improve my teaching skills to become the best teacher that I could be. My focus was primarily on my curriculum and my students. I was assisted in this effort by good mentors, as well as school and district-based professional development opportunities. Experiences such as a district associates’ program, which allowed for conversations with other teachers and administrators about the moral dimensions of teaching, expanded my view of what good teaching could be. I began to realize that good teaching was not just limited to what I could do alone within the walls of my own classroom, but that teachers could have a positive influence on departments and entire schools.

This realization that my influence could and should extend beyond my own classroom was further enhanced when my principal took an interest in giving me opportunities to expand my role as a teacher. She offered me opportunities that I never would have known to seek for myself. One of these opportunities was to serve as the eighth-grade team leader. In this team, we worked together as eighth-grade teachers to identify students who were struggling academically and to plan ways to assist them as a team of teachers. No longer did I see myself as a teacher operating alone, but instead I saw how a group of us working together could have a wider influence on our students. While I still spent a great deal of time focused on my curriculum and my students, as a team leader I now saw myself and my role as a teacher as part of a greater whole. These were our students, and we could find ways to help them together. My view of my
influence, and of our influence as teachers, was expanded.

In time, further leadership opportunities were offered to me. Again, these opportunities came through invitations from a principal who took a personal interest in my development as a leader. While helping to open a new middle school a decade into my career, I became, at the request of my principal, a department chair (or collaboration team leader, in my district’s terminology) of a team consisting almost exclusively of first-year teachers. At the same time, I was asked to mentor a teacher intern. I was busier than I had ever been as a teacher; I felt overwhelmed at times. I occasionally felt that I did not know what I was doing, and yet I felt as though I had never been happier in my career.

In the years since, I have directly mentored four student teachers and ten interns, served as a mentor to many more teachers new to our school, assisted with school data analysis, assisted with coordinating end-of-year testing, and facilitated two school accreditations. Throughout all of these experiences, my primary focus and my primary role has remained a classroom teacher.

These experiences have brought me deep satisfaction in my career, rewarding interactions with fellow teachers, and an expanded view of how my school and district work to serve students. Mentoring other teachers has allowed me to assist new teachers in being successful, but it has also helped me improve my own teaching and find greater confidence in my own teaching ability. While as a new teacher I was content to improve my own teaching in my own classroom, I now see myself as a part of a greater educational whole. As I work to assist other teachers to be their best, my own teaching benefits. As the teachers at my school improve, our students benefit. While in this
profession I will always see myself as a teacher first, I now value this new dimension of my teaching: my work as a teacher leader.

Problem Statement

In an era of increased emphasis on school reforms, teacher leadership has emerged as an important factor in initiating and maintaining school change (Hanuscin et al., 2009). This results from the complexity of modern school organizations and federal mandates (Angelle & Schmid, 2007), the need to transform schools into learning organizations (Shah, 2017), the likelihood of maintaining change (Muijs & Harris, 2003), and the suggestion that improving K–12 education requires the combined efforts of all stakeholders (Bond, 2011). Because of their firsthand knowledge of teaching and of school culture, teachers are uniquely suited and legitimately deserve to be part of such efforts (Bond, 2011; Hanuscin et al., 2009; Phelps, 2008). In addition, administrators are increasingly focused on managerial and accountability demands. While school principals have traditionally been looked at as the source of school leadership, no longer can principals be the only sources of leadership within a school (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001). Sustainable school improvement needs leadership involvement at all levels (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001). In their review of the teacher leadership literature, York-Barr and Duke (2004) contended that our schools need “active involvement” (p. 255) of individuals at all levels, to make lasting impacts and that teachers “rightly and importantly hold a central position in the ways schools operate and in the core functions of teaching and learning” (p. 255). Teacher leaders are needed to fill the leadership gap
If teacher leadership is needed, it is helpful to know what teacher leadership is. Currently, the literature does not provide an agreed-upon definition (Bond, 2011). This lack of a unified definition could come from the sizable nature of the term teacher leadership (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). This wide perception could be due to the historically evolving views of what teacher leadership is (Shah, 2017). Even literature written in the current wave of teacher leadership does not settle on a single definition. In synthesizing literature on teacher leadership, Bond compared these differing views to a continuum. On one end are those who contend that teacher leadership requires a formal leadership role; on the other are those who believe that any teacher who remains in the classroom and teaches well can be called a teacher leader.

Teacher leadership can be formal or informal. Some of these formal roles include instructional specialists who share instructional strategies, curriculum specialists who assist teachers in developing curriculum and shared assessments based on agreed upon standards, teaching coaches, mentors to novice teachers, school committee members, department chairs (Harrison & Killion, 2007), staff developers and data analysts (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001). Some examples of informal teacher leadership roles include encouraging parental involvement, helping other teachers solve problems, team collaboration (York-Barr & Duke, 2004), as well as modeling new instructional practices and fostering a positive school culture (Bond, 2011).
Statement of Purpose

While the impetus for this study was initially based on my own experience of becoming a teacher leader, the review of literature has focused the purpose on broader questions on the topic. This includes knowing whether those who fill formal or informal roles have had similar experiences to each other in the process of becoming teacher leaders. The focus of the study will be on teacher leadership at the personal level and how that personal experience interacts with variables such as subject area assignment, school-level factors, and pressure to improve student outcomes.

Research Questions

This research was a phenomenological study. Given the above stated purposes, the research questions for this study were as follows.

1. How do teachers who are seen as teacher leaders perceive the similarities and differences they experience in the process of becoming a teacher leader?

2. How do teachers who are seen as teacher leaders believe that the process of becoming a teacher leader has changed them?

3. What do teachers who are seen as teacher leaders view as the benefits or tolls to themselves personally, to the school as a whole, and to other people in the school setting?

This study is important because it utilizes a phenomenological approach to better understand the processes by which teachers become teacher leaders. This is an area identified by literature as needing further research (Wenner & Campbell, 2017) and the phenomenological approach provides insights into the development process from the point-of-view of those who have first-hand experience of becoming teacher leaders. This
study also examines the potential effects that individual school contextual factors have in contributing to or impeding the development of teacher leaders, which are also areas which could benefit from additional research (Wenner & Campbell, 2017).
CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW

Historical Views of Teacher Leadership

Current perceptions of teacher leadership have likely been shaped by historical views of leadership. Teacher leadership literature has proposed that there have been three phases or waves in the development of teacher leadership. The first wave involved teachers taking administrative roles such as department chairs, master teachers, and union representatives. While teachers did hold official positions of power, the leadership structure in this wave emphasized the existing hierarchical structure of school leadership, and teachers were not involved with instructional leadership (Silva et al., 2000).

The second wave of teacher leadership began to focus on teachers as instructional leaders rather than managers improving school efficiency. While teachers were exercising leadership more closely related to their classroom work, they were “apart from” (Silva et al., 2000, p. 780) their daily work and these new leadership responsibilities often moved them out of the classroom for at least part of the day.

According to Shah (2017), schools are currently in teacher leadership’s third wave, which began in the 1990s. This third wave of teacher leadership represents a time when schools structures are being modified to more fully allow teachers to participate in leadership as part of their “day-to-day work” as classroom teachers (Silva et al., 2000, p. 781).

The majority of the literature on teacher leadership has been published in the past
30 years. Two major reviews of that literature have been conducted in that timeframe that pulled together the then-current thinking about teacher leadership. The first was conducted by York-Barr and Duke in 2004; the second is a more recent literature review conducted by Wenner and Campbell in 2017. Because of the excellent summations of the extant literature provided by these reviews, this literature review draws heavily from those works. However, important studies that illustrate major points are drawn from literature that may have been reviewed in these seminal reviews. In addition, work that has occurred since the Wenner and Campbell review is included here.

York-Barr and Duke’s (2004) review of teacher leadership examined literature from 1980 to 2004 and sought to answer the question, “What is known about teacher leadership?” (p. 256). They reviewed 140 potential teacher leadership articles and included 100 in their review. Of these 100, 46 came from peer-reviewed journals. Forty-one were studies or reviews of studies. Of those, 14 were grounded in theory. York-Barr and Duke identified several weaknesses in the existing literature. In their view, these included small-scale case studies using convenience samples, self-report methodologies, few theoretically based studies, and definitions of teacher leadership that were too broad to make comparisons across studies.

Wenner and Campbell (2017) stated that the purpose of their literature review was to provide a “rigorous examination of the empirical research” (p. 135) that had taken place since York-Barr and Duke’s (2004) review. Wenner and Campbell also indicated their desire to fill in some of the gaps in the research that were identified by York-Barr and Duke. In their review, Wenner and Campbell used “teacher leadership” as their
search terms and limited their search to articles published after the printing of York-Barr and Duke’s work to those papers published in 2013. Wenner and Campbell’s inclusion criteria yielded 54 empirical, peer-reviewed research studies with data methods that had been triangulated, with multiple methods of obtaining data, and had a sample size of five or more teacher leaders. The teacher leaders in the studies had to retain classroom responsibilities.

**Basics of School Leadership**

Before examining teacher leadership specifically, this review first briefly examines leadership in schools in general. In a literature review of how school leadership influences student learning, Leithwood et al. (2004) submitted that leadership is something that provides direction and exercises influence, and that effective leadership is generally considered to be a major factor in school success and student learning. While Leithwood et al. did not provide information on the criteria for the studies they examined for their review of school leadership’s effect on student learning, they indicated that the literature they reviewed fell into one of three general categories: qualitative case-studies; large-scale quantitative studies examining the direct and indirect effects of school leadership and student achievement; and large-scale quantitative studies on specific leadership practices. Leithwood et al. also determined that the literature at the time suggested that effective school leadership fell into three categories of leadership practices: purposes, people, and structures and social systems.

While the Leithwood et al. (2004) review recognized the importance of state and
district-level school leadership, they also examined the importance of good school-level leadership, particularly that of the school principal, who they indicated can create and sustain competitive schools, provide instructional guidance, and develop and implement strategies to improve schools. Successful principals, they reasoned, also empower others in their schools to make significant decisions.

**Guiding Theories of Teacher Leadership**

In his 2011 synthesis paper of teacher leadership, Bond said the following regarding theories, “Theories provide a strong foundation, explain scholars’ thinking about a phenomenon, and provide a rationale for action” (p. 284). In the material that follows, several authors have indicated their guiding theories regarding the fostering of teacher leadership.

**Identified Theories of Leadership**

York-Barr and Duke (2004) synthesized the existing literature to identify four theories of leadership. The first theory they identified was participative leadership, or leadership emphasizing the decision-making processes of the group. The second theory identified was leadership as an organizational quality, as opposed to an individual quality, as well as a quality that cannot be separated from the social context. This implies that school-level factors could influence teacher leadership. The third theory reviewed by York-Barr and Duke was distributed leadership, which also emphasizes the interactions and interdependence between the teacher leader and his or her environment. Finally, York-Barr and Duke identified parallel leadership between school administrators and
teacher leaders, with teachers focusing on instructional leadership and administrators focusing on strategic leadership.

While York-Barr and Duke (2004) identified several leadership theories to ground teacher leadership, Wenner and Campbell (2017) discovered that only 33 of the 54 studies they reviewed, or 61%, were grounded in at least one theory. Distributed leadership was the most commonly cited theory, appearing in 19% of the studies reviewed. Democratic/constructivist leadership appeared in two studies. Other leadership theories used in studies include, structure and agency, parallel leadership, transactional leadership, and communities of practice. While distributed leadership accounted for only 19% of the studies reviewed, the fact that distributed leadership was used more than any other leadership theory suggests, according to Wenner and Campbell, that the literature might be moving toward using it as a guiding theory of teacher leadership.

Distributed Leadership

The theory of distributed leadership assumes an ability for school stakeholders to work collaboratively in an environment where the marked difference between followers and leaders “begins to blur” (Muijs & Harris, 2006, p. 962). Leadership becomes less structured as authority and decision-making are distributed among those with formal and informal leadership roles (Bond, 2011). This theory allows the possibility for all involved to be leaders (Muijs & Harris, 2006).

Muijs and Harris (2006) used distributed leadership as their lens in their case study of ten schools in England that were identified as having improved due to increased teacher leadership. These authors reported that their interviews with teachers in these
schools revealed that the term “teacher leadership” was generally not familiar to the teachers. However, these teachers were demonstrating leadership behaviors. They further identified five areas where teachers were in distributed, teacher leadership roles: shared decision-making, collaboration, active participation, professional learning, and activism. However, these authors also used the term “shared leadership” almost interchangeably with “distributed leadership” in their study (see pp. 964, 966, and especially 968). This interchange of terms could indicate confusion in the literature regarding differences between the theories of distributed and shared leadership, or perhaps the difference between the two is in name only.

Leithwood et al. (2004) cited distributed leadership as a theory through which empowering others in the school in leadership, such as teachers, might be examined. They indicated that distributed leadership had become a recent area of school leadership research, even though the concept of distributed leadership was decades old. Leithwood et al. proposed that distributed leadership theory overlaps with shared, collaborative, participative, and democratic leadership, and that there can also be non-individual sources of influence in distributed leadership, like organizational phenomena. They indicated that distributed leadership could be viewed in a holistic way, where attention is paid to the interdependent nature of those who are providing the leadership within the school. In considering distributed leadership, Leithwood et al. contended that distributed leadership provides many benefits within schools, including reducing error that might result from the limited information that is available to any single leader, benefiting schools through the abilities of more individuals, involving members in leadership
activities having more opportunities to reflect on the school as a whole, and providing
greater opportunities for people to learn from each other.

Distributed leadership suggests that leadership not only resides with one
individual at the top of the organization, a principal in the case of schools, but with all in
the organization who act as leaders, both formally and informally. Distributed leadership
does not imply that principals abandon leadership, or that leadership is duplicated
throughout the school (Muijs & Harris, 2003). Instead, the theory of distributed
leadership assumes an ability for school stakeholders to work collaboratively (Muijs &
Harris, 2006). Leadership becomes less structured as authority and decision-making are
distributed among those with formal and informal leadership roles (Bond, 2011). This
theory allows the possibility for all involved to be leaders (Muijs & Harris, 2006).

An example of importance of principal support of distributed theory is the Klein
et al. (2018) 3-year phenomenological qualitative study of eight secondary-level science
teachers from a grant-funded professional development program. The study reported on
the four participants Klein et al. best felt represented the group. These participants were
interviewed, and lesson plans, self-reflections, and future plans were collected. The
findings of this study implied that while the four participants were interested in
participating in distributed leadership, internal and external limitations, such as
administrative support, clearly defined leadership roles, and the teachers’ own definitions
of teacher leadership, limited their involvement.

**Authentic Leadership**

The literature suggests that authentic leadership could also be an effective theory
for grounding teacher leadership, as authentic leadership has many aspects similar to good teaching practices (Greenier & Whitehead, 2016). While there is no one accepted definition for authentic leadership, it has intrapersonal, developmental, and interpersonal aspects. Authentic leaders exhibit five characteristics:

1. They know their purpose
2. They have a strong sense about the right thing to do
3. They act on their values and are disciplined
4. They are fervent about what they do
5. They develop relationships of trust with those they lead (Northouse, 2010).

In addition, their role as leader has been shown to be central to who they are; their self-beliefs are well-defined and consistent; their goals represent their values; and their behavior matches their self-concepts (Shamir & Eilam, 2005).

According to Northouse (2010), authentic leadership is intrapersonal in that it involves leaders being aware of what is going on within themselves. They assign meaning to their life experiences, and they draw on the power of those stories. The developmental aspects come from the idea that leadership is something that can be developed and cultivated within the leader. Interpersonal processes come through the relationships that authentic leaders have with their followers. It is a shared relationship where leaders and followers affect each other.

Greenier and Whitehead (2016), in their quantitative study of 56 English as a Foreign Language teachers, suggested that teachers with traits consistent with those found in authentic leadership have the potential to profoundly affect the learning culture of their classroom. Building relationships with other teachers is an important part of being a teacher leader (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Greenier and Whitehead also
contended that empathy and good communications skills, components of authentic leadership, can benefit teacher leaders in working with their students, as well as colleagues and administrators.

**Conceptual Frameworks for Teacher Leadership**

Teacher leadership literature has indicated a difficulty in showing ties between teacher leadership and student learning. At the conclusion of their review, York-Barr and Duke (2004) presented a conceptual framework that suggested a path by which teacher leaders could influence student learning (see Figure 1).

This conceptual framework consists of seven components which York-Barr and Duke (2004) divide into four steps along the framework’s path. The first step in their framework consists of three components. York-Barr and Duke label the first component *teacher leaders*. By this they mean the characteristics of teacher leaders. The second component is identified as *leadership* work, meaning the type of work teacher leaders are doing. The conditions that support the work of teacher leaders are the third component. York-Barr and Duke (2004) identify these first three components as the “foundation upon which teacher leadership is possible” (p. 289).

The next three components suggest a pathway by which teacher leaders can affect student learning. The first step in this pathway is the means by which teachers lead, or the means of teacher leader influence. The next step is the targets of teacher leadership influence. The final step in this conceptual framework is the intermediary outcomes of teacher leadership. The ultimate goal of this framework is increased student learning.
Wenner and Campbell (2017) indicated that few studies have used this conceptual framework as a guide. They believed that there is a need for future research to do so to continue to inform teacher leadership practice without duplicating prior research efforts.

In one exception to Wenner and Campbell’s (2017) claim, Sinha and Hanuscin (2017) used a phenomenological multiple case study of three science teachers to create a model to illustrate the teacher development process of an individual teacher. Data from interviews, blog posts, and life stories were coded using York-Barr and Duke’s seven dimensions as a guide. Sinha and Hanuscin’s development model is shown as Figure 2.
Sinha and Hanuscin viewed teacher leadership as having three components: teacher leadership views, or what they understand leadership to be; teacher leadership practices; and teacher leadership identity, or how they see themselves as a leader. In this development process model, the teacher leadership practices component was derived from the York-Barr and Duke model. The identity and views components came from Sinha and Hanuscin’s literature review and the results of their study. Sinha and Hanuscin concluded that teacher leaders become leaders when the components of teacher leadership identity, views, and practices are aligned.

**Figure 2**

*Teacher Leadership Development Process*

More recently, Smylie and Eckert (2018) presented a model for teacher leadership development. This model (see Figure 3) emphasizes the development of the leadership environment and culture, instead of focusing on individual teacher leaders. In their model, teacher leadership outcomes of attitude and decision-making, school improvement, improved teaching, and improved student learning, are the ultimate goals. This model assumes several prerequisite factors to be present in the school. These include principal support for teacher leadership, the initial capacity that teachers have for leadership, the work that teacher leaders are involved with, the resources that are

Figure 3

Model for Teacher Leadership Development

available for developing teacher leadership and teacher leaders, and school organizational conditions that might support or inhibit teacher leadership. This model suggests interrelationship among these prerequisite factors. For example, as teacher leadership is developed in the school and more teachers have positive experiences with teacher leadership, it can create cultural conditions supportive of future teacher leadership. The opposite is also true: poor experiences with teacher leadership, perhaps due to a lack of support, can make it harder for teacher leadership to develop in the future. Principals, and other leaders at the school, both administrative and existing teacher leaders, play a central role in this plan for teacher development. According to Smylie and Eckert (2018), current leadership creates the climate for future leadership and can be a facilitator and a source of support or restraint for the development of teacher leadership.

The ultimate goal in each of these three models is improved student learning, theoretically achieved in these models when teacher leadership is present. Sinha and Hanuscin’s (2017) model addresses the concept of how teacher leaders come to realize they are acting as leaders. It also shows how the conditions illustrated in York-Barr and Duke’s (2004) model could be applied to developing a teacher leaders’ sense of identity, their leadership views, and leadership practices. It does not show a direct pathway to increased student learning, however, but instead assumes that student learning will occur when a teacher leader’s identity, views, and practices are aligned.

Eckert provide a model that considers the interrelated actions of the teacher leader and the school environment.

**Formal and Informal Teacher Leadership Roles**

Similar to the first wave of teacher leadership, formal teacher leadership roles are named, official positions that fit into the top-down, hierarchical leadership structure. Those who fill these roles are chosen by administrators. The mismatch found in teacher perceptions of leadership, as identified by Baecher (2012), is perhaps explained by teachers viewing leadership solely through the lens of formal leadership roles. Some of these formal roles include instructional specialists who share instructional strategies, curriculum specialists who assist teachers in developing curriculum and shared assessments based on agreed upon standards, teaching coaches, mentors to novice teachers, school committee members, department chairs (Harrison & Killion, 2007), staff developers and data analysts (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001). Bond (2011) suggested that teachers identified by formal roles can often be viewed by their colleagues as “pseudo-administrators” (p. 287) if they are involved with evaluating other teachers. When these formal roles take the teacher out of the classroom, it is in alignment with second wave thinking.

Bond (2011) suggests that teacher leaders who adopt informal roles tend to naturally materialize outside of the established hierarchy. From this perspective, teacher leaders have no formal position or authority, instead they use influence derived from teacher respect (Bond, 2011). Some contend that in order for a teacher to be accepted as a
teacher leader by their peers, they must first show that they are a capable and accomplished teacher (Crowther et al., 2009; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001), and that this legitimacy cannot be conferred by a formal title but must be given by fellow teachers (Crowther et al., 2009).

Literature has provided some examples of informal teacher leadership roles, such as: encouraging parental involvement, helping other teachers solve problems, team collaboration (York-Barr & Duke, 2004), as well as modeling new instructional practices and fostering a positive school culture (Bond, 2011). Informal roles also include being a catalyst for change and a life-long learner (Harrison & Killion, 2007). When informal and formal roles allow teachers to participate in meaningful leadership work while remaining in the classroom, this is in line with the third wave of teacher leadership.

Regardless of whether a teacher leader accepts a formal or informal leadership role, or a role that is somewhere in between, it appears from the literature that teacher leadership is not “hypothetical” (Crowther et al., 2009, p. 26). Instead, it “reflects a combination of significant professional values and processes…and distinctive personal convictions and capabilities” (Crowther et al., 2009, p. 27).

Teacher Leadership Knowledge, Skills and Dispositions

Baecher (2012) conducted a qualitative study of 24 teachers who recently graduated from a Masters TESOL program. Five teachers were chosen for in-depth interviews. One of Baecher’s research questions was: “What kinds of professional development are needed to train and support teacher leaders?” Analysis of the teachers’
comments suggested that teacher leaders gain leadership knowledge in three ways. The first was through apprenticeship or learning from an administrator or another team leader. The second was through participation or learning by observing. This training was often mentored through another teacher leader. The third means of leadership development was through self-help, or a recognition that the current school leadership was not meeting a need. According to Baecher, these teacher leaders stepped in to fulfill those needs.

While the literature reviewed was rich with recommendations for necessary teacher leadership knowledge, skills, and dispositions, many of the recommendations came from journal articles that were not empirical studies. Scholars suggested other knowledge that teacher leaders should possess. Knowledge of themselves as leaders has been advocated by Bond (2011), Pucella (2014), Shah (2017), and Smylie and Eckert (2018). Knowledge of others was indicated by Bond (2011) and Shah (2017). Bond (2011) and Shah (2017) also advocated for knowledge of teaching, while Phelps (2008) and Shah (2017) advocate for knowledge of change. Several scholars suggested that teacher leaders should possess a knowledge of school culture and school climate (Bond, 2011; Phelps, 2008; Pucella, 2014; & Shah, 2017). Phelps (2008) and Pucella (2014) recommended that teacher leaders possess a knowledge of reforms and issues in education, and Pucella (2014) and Shah (2017) called for a knowledge of diversity in learning. Phelps (2008), Pucella (2014), and Shah (2017) recommended that teacher leaders possess a knowledge of theories of leadership, and Shah (2017) called for teacher leaders to understand content, adult learning theory and management knowledge.

In addition to certain knowledge, there are empirical studies and journal articles
that discuss skills that teacher leaders should possess. The most common skill found in the literature is interpersonal skills, such as collaboration, mentoring and relationship building. These skills were identified by Muijs and Harris (2006) and in Munroe and Driskill’s (2014) qualitative self-study of a Texas middle school teacher leader returning to classroom teaching after 3 years working out of the classroom as a mentor coordinator. Nurturing relationships also emerged as a major theme in interviews conducted with three northeastern U.S. secondary teacher leaders with broad experience in school and district-level leadership in Silva et al.’s (2000) descriptive case-study. A qualitative study involving elementary and secondary math teachers and their administrators in the southwestern U.S. (Uribe-Florez et al., 2014) also revealed interpersonal skills as an important for teacher leaders. Interpersonal skills were also discussed by other scholars (Bond, 2011; Phelps, 2008; Shah, 2017; & York-Barr & Duke, 2004).

The next most frequently cited skill was technical expertise of teaching and learning, which appeared in Leithwood and Jantzi’s (1998) qualitative look into teacher leadership and student engagement in urban, suburban, and rural elementary and secondary schools in Canada, as well as Munroe and Driskill’s (2014) descriptive case study discussed earlier. The skill of technical expertise was also discussed in Shah’s (2017) literature review and York-Barr and Duke’s (2004) expansive literature review.

Other skills that are frequently cited in teacher leadership literature are leadership skills (Bond, 2011; Margolis & Deuel, 2009; Munroe & Driskill, 2014; Shah, 2017), and vision (Munroe & Driskill, 2014; Phelps, 2008; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Inquiry and self-reflection are also mentioned (Munroe & Driskill, 2014; Phelps, 2008; York-Barr &

While teacher leadership knowledge and skills are more widely discussed in the literature, teacher leadership dispositions are less frequently discussed. Many of these discovered in this literature review arose from Eargle’s (2013) study of a single social studies team in a rural southeastern high school in the U.S. Using Dempsey’s theory of teacher leadership as a framework, Eargle indicated evidence of teacher leaders exhibiting dispositions of teacher as fully functioning person, reflective practitioner, scholar, and partner in learning. None of these dispositions were identified in other empirical studies, although Pucella’s (2014) discussion of teacher leadership also recommends the disposition of reflection.

Self-confidence was identified by Muijs and Harris’s (2006) interviews of teacher leaders and was also suggested as a desirable disposition by Bond (2011). Bond also indicated respect for others, willingness to serve, enthusiasm for teaching and learning, genuine care for students, reliability, flexibility, and optimism as desirable dispositions.

While knowledge, skills, and dispositions of teacher leadership are mentioned frequently in teacher leadership literature, Angelle and Schmid (2007) concluded that this area needs further research. The results of their qualitative study of 51 rural elementary, and secondary teachers and 14 administrators in the southeastern U.S. identified five themes of teacher leadership, but they also identified a need for further research into school contexts, and principals’ understanding and use of teacher leadership.
Importance of Teacher Leadership

A review of literature conducted by Leithwood et al. (2004) concluded that “leadership is second only to classroom instruction among all school-related factors that contribute to what students learn at school” (p. 5). York-Barr and Duke (2004) contended that our schools need “active involvement” (p. 255) of individuals at all levels to make lasting impacts and that teachers “rightly and importantly hold a central position in the ways schools operate and in the core functions of teaching and learning” (p. 255). Similarly, Wenner and Campbell (2017) proposed that teachers can be of particular effectiveness in promoting change within schools due to their knowledge of the “complexities involved with teaching” (p. 134).

York-Barr and Duke (2004) stated that teacher leadership had become a research focus partly due to the reform efforts in American schools in the 1980s. They contended that these reform initiatives led to increased status and rewards for teachers, increased excellence in teachers and teaching through continuous improvement, increased teacher participation in educational decision-making, and the career ladder and merit pay efforts of the 1980s. However, there is some questions as to whether teachers currently feel adequately involved in decision-making or have opportunities for advancing professionally (Ingersoll & Perda, 2009).

In prefacing their 2004 literature review, York-Barr and Duke proposed that teacher leadership should receive focus due to the benefits of employee participation, as modern schools are too complex to be effectively led by a single principal. York-Barr and Duke also highlighted the instructional expertise that can come from teacher leaders and
how that expertise might benefit peers and new teachers. Their literature review also listed the benefits that might come to teachers through the process of becoming, and being, teacher leaders. These benefits include teacher retention, a greater understanding of the “big picture” (p. 258) of schools, and increased learning through the leading experience. Finally, York-Barr and Duke raised the possibility of benefits to students because of teacher leadership.

More recently, Wenner and Campbell (2017) suggested that, with an increased focus on teacher leadership, there should also be an increased focus on empirical research of teacher leadership. They presented three reasons for this research. The first reason was that teacher leadership had become a part of school reform efforts and topic of policy makers, as well as a part of some university teacher education programs. Second, Wenner and Campbell drew attention to the increased educational accountability from political interests and that teacher leadership had then become a part of some teacher evaluations, such as those used in Idaho, New York, Washington, Kentucky, and Arizona. Last, there remains the ongoing issue of teacher attrition and the possibility that teacher leadership might be a way to reduce that attrition.

The literature suggests that one cause of teacher attrition is the deprofessionalization of teachers. Hodges et al. (2013) studied 12 science teachers from four schools in the southeastern U.S. Using semistructured interviews and focus groups, Hodges et al. identified several factors that caused teachers to feel that their professional knowledge had been devalued. These factors include, principals restricting teachers from offering advanced courses and after-school conferences to benefit the community,
principals focusing on what teachers are doing wrong instead of valuing what they are doing well, and principals who limit access to supplies needed for teachers to teach effectively.

Ingersoll and Perda (2009) used surveys conducted for the National Center for Education Statistics in their study of school staffing difficulties. They identified other possible causes of teacher attrition, such as inadequate planning time, little teacher involvement in making school decisions, lack of time for collaboration, lack of autonomy, and not enough opportunities for professional advancement. These are similar to concerns raised by Wenner and Campbell (2017) in their discussion of potential tolls to teacher leaders.

Factors That Promote Teacher Leadership and Benefits of Teacher Leadership

York-Barr and Duke (2004) uncovered three general conditions that emerged in the literature that promote teacher leadership. The first was school culture and context, the second was roles and relationships, and the third was structural factors. York-Barr and Duke reported an overlap among these general conditions. Due to the similarities between school culture, context, and structural factors, for the purposes of this review, I am choosing to combine York-Barr and Duke’s three contexts into two: (1) school culture, context, and structures, and (2) roles and relationships.

School Culture, Context, and Support

A school-wide focus on learning, reflection, and inquiry, as well as a culture of
teamwork, shared-responsibility and shared decision-making were found by York-Barr and Duke’s (2004) review to be conducive to promoting teacher leadership. A school culture that encourages initiative and has communities of professionalism was also found to be favorable to teacher leadership. York-Barr and Duke discovered that schools that had a culture of valuing teacher leaders as role models promote teacher leadership. Examples of structural factors identified in York-Barr and Duke’s review included time for teacher leaders to do their work, support through professional development, a removal of hierarchical leadership structures, and school-level decision-making involving teachers.

Wenner and Campbell (2017) discovered themes of increased feelings of professional growth through teacher leadership, which is similar to the culture of professionalism as described by York-Barr and Duke (2004). Teacher leaders in the studies Wenner and Campbell reviewed often felt more confident and satisfied professionally, as well as having a sense of purpose and empowerment. In addition, teacher leaders reported growth and improvement in their teaching and an increased desire to better themselves and grow professionally. Some studies reviewed also indicated that as teacher leaders improve their leadership skills, they seek out other leadership opportunities. Wenner and Campbell also identified the importance of external leadership training for teacher leaders, particularly the support networks that form with other colleagues in the training program.

Similar to York-Barr and Duke’s findings (2004), Wenner and Campbell (2017) identified the need for time and structures that allow teacher leaders to do their work.
Culture was also found by both reviews to be important to the work of teacher leaders. Wenner and Campbell also identified a culture of trust, an ethic of care, shared leadership, penalty-free risk-taking, continuous learning, and common vision to foster teacher leadership.

**Roles and Relationships**

York-Barr and Duke (2004) also identified roles and relationships as conditions that promote teacher leadership. Teacher leaders seemed to be most effective when they are able to build relationships within the school. Additionally, York-Barr and Duke found that it was important for other teachers to view the teacher leaders as having instructional expertise. Last, York-Barr and Duke noted the importance of the type of work that teacher leaders did. If the teacher leaders are involved in work that relates to teaching and learning, they are more successful, as compared to administrative or management work.

A mixed methods study of 18 Israeli high school chemistry teacher coordinators conducted by Hofstein et al. (2004) implied that the skills and experience they gained by becoming teacher leaders helped them have better relationships with their colleagues as they came to realize the individual needs of their fellow teachers. A phenomenological study conducted among 41 teachers and principals in elementary schools in California suggested that teacher leaders are most successful when they have supportive relationships from principals (Gordin, 2010). However, it should also be noted that Wenner and Campbell (2017) indicated that there can be a breakdown in collegial relationships from perceived power imbalances among teachers.

While the next section identifies some potential challenges related to teacher
leadership and relationships with colleagues, Wenner and Campbell (2017) identified several potential benefits that come to the peers of teacher leaders. The literature suggests that schools that utilize teachers in leadership roles have feelings of empowerment for all teachers and have an atmosphere that encourages professional growth and school change. These schools often support professional learning for all teachers and create a feeling of professionalism among the teachers. Finally, teachers in these schools often have a sense of commitment regarding what it takes to positively impact student achievement.

**Importance of Administrators in Teacher Leadership’s Success**

The role of the administrator emerged in York-Barr and Duke’s (2004) literature review as being instrumental in the development of teacher leadership. Important in this relationship were high levels of trust between teachers and administrators, formal and informal administrative support of teacher leadership, clarity of what teacher leaders’ administrative responsibilities are, and attention to the administrators-teacher leader relationship.

Wenner and Campbell’s (2017) findings supported this. They referred to support from administration as being “paramount” (p. 153) to the success of teacher leadership. Wenner and Campbell found the research to suggest the importance of building positive relationships between teacher leaders and administrators, encouraging teachers to be leaders, and then giving them autonomy to lead. The literature also suggested the importance of checking-in with those teacher leaders, seeking their opinions, and listening to the struggles that they have with colleagues who interfere with teacher
leadership. Last, Wenner and Campbell identified the importance of administrators understanding the roles of teacher leaders and valuing those roles.

While the literature suggests that principals can no longer be the only source of leadership within the schools (Crowther et al., 2009), it also suggests that the actions of principals, and the relationships teacher leaders build with principals, are an important aspect in the development of teacher leadership (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001). Some researchers have suggested that teacher leadership development and sustainability cannot be separated from strong principal support (Crowther et al., 2009). Principal support for teacher leaders, and for the climate that supports teacher leadership, is central to Smylie and Eckert’s (2018) model for teacher development that was discussed earlier.

Similar to how teacher leadership has experienced historical waves of development, the literature has suggested that principal leadership has been viewed in changing ways. Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001) presented that, in the late 1980s, for example, principals were seen as instructional leaders, managers, and supervisors. These authors contended that during the 1990s, principal leadership moved to more of a shared decision-making role that was limited in its range.

The literature has proposed that we are currently in a phase where the role of the principal includes creating vision for the school, bringing together key elements, empowering teacher leadership, alliance building, and culture building (Crowther et al., 2009). Principals filling these roles allow leadership to more distributed through the school, with teachers being more self-managed. However, the literature also indicates the opposite may be true, as some teachers have experiences with low levels of principal trust.
(Hodges et al., 2013) as well as a lack of professional independence (Ingersoll & Perda, 2009).

**Challenges to Teacher Leadership and Tolls of Teacher Leadership**

While identifying conditions that promote teacher leadership, York-Barr and Duke (2004) and Wenner and Campbell (2017) also discovered conditions that create challenges for teacher leadership. As with the conditions that are favorable to teacher leadership, these challenges can also be organized around the themes of school culture, context, and support, and roles and relationships.

**School Culture, Context, and Support**

While certain school cultures can be beneficial to teacher leadership, school culture can also inhibit teacher leadership. York-Barr and Duke (2004) indicated that lack of clarity regarding the school’s purpose and direction and a school culture of teacher isolation and individualism were detrimental to teacher leadership. Also identified were a hierarchical culture of teachers as followers and a view of teacher leadership as a means of career advancement. Parker’s (2016) literature review suggests that teacher agency can be limited by school structure.

Wenner and Campbell (2017) identified the lack of time for teacher leadership work as a concern of teacher leaders, with one teacher expressing the concern, “How much time is this role going to take from the classroom and home?” (p. 154). The literature suggests that taking time from class to attend meetings is not helpful for students or for the teachers with whom teacher leaders worked. Other climate and
structural factors identified were school cultures that are resistant to change, schools without a unified vision, schools with hierarchical leadership structures, and schools where there is a lack of clear communication.

One school culture factor that is unique to Wenner and Campbell’s (2017) literature review is the personal characteristics of the teacher leaders themselves that inhibit teacher leadership. These include teacher leaders who are unwilling to disrupt traditional hierarchical leadership structures, teacher leaders who don’t feel comfortable “being the boss” (p. 155), and teacher leaders who lack confidence in their abilities.

Baecher’s (2012) qualitative study of 24 graduate students used surveys to identify teacher perceptions of teacher leadership. The results of these surveys suggest a culture among teachers that resists teacher leadership. Kurt’s (2016) survey of 360 secondary teachers in Turkey proposed that there could be a rivalry among leaders. Margolis and Deuel’s (2009) phenomenological look at five teachers raised the possibility of an “egalitarian ethic” (p. 267), or a culture among teachers where there is a resistance to being told what to do. Silva et al. (2000) indicated in their case study that even in a school district that identifies itself as being conducive to teacher professional development, the structure of the school, including its politics, can be a barrier to teacher leadership. In their literature review, Muijs and Harris (2003) identified the importance of professional development and suggested that there need to be “rich and diverse opportunities for professional development” (p. 444) for teacher leaders.

Hunzicker’s (2013) qualitative study asked open-ended questions regarding how teacher leaders learn to exercise teacher leadership of master’s students learning to
exercise informal leadership. One of the themes that emerged was “collegial professional relationships” (p. 547). Hunzicker identified school culture as a means of encouraging, and discouraging, the development of teacher leadership. Scribner and Bradley-Levine’s (2010) qualitative case study of an urban U.S. high school identified a culture where some teachers felt they had leadership opportunities while others did not. They traced this barrier to leadership roles with titles, certain content areas receiving privilege, and gender roles. Finally, Rhodes and Brundrette, in their 2009 qualitative look at primary and secondary schools in England, identified the lack of financial rewards as a possible deterrent to teachers becoming teacher leaders. School culture appears to be a variable to consider when evaluating teacher leadership.

Roles and Relationships

York-Barr and Duke (2004) also identified roles and relationships that pose a challenge to teacher leadership. Egalitarian norms, or the idea that all teachers should be equal, were found to be a challenge to teacher leadership. Similarly, a school culture where some teachers drag down other teachers who appear to be advancing was also found to impede teacher leadership. Also challenging were conditions where there is ambiguity over teacher leadership roles, uncertainty regarding teacher leadership areas of responsibility, and poor communication between teacher leaders and administrators.

Misunderstandings

Jacobs et al. (2016) found role ambiguity to be a source of frustration to teacher leaders. Their 177 teacher participants from across the U.S. indicated in open-ended
questions their perceptions regarding several aspects of teacher leadership. Some teachers in this study felt that their leadership role was never adequately explained or that the responsibilities increased over time. Phelps (2008), in her reflection of her own teaching, identified the belief that some teachers have that leadership remains the realm of the administrators and not the teachers, therefore teachers are unwilling to exercise teacher leadership. If this is true, it would support Hunzicker’s (2013) assertion that teacher beliefs lead to actions. If a teacher does not believe they have the right to leadership, they will be less likely to act as a leader. Uribe-Flórez et al. (2014) discovered differences in how administrators and teachers viewed leadership, and that teachers with a limited view of leadership might not exercise leadership. It appears that these studies indicate that some teacher leadership barriers arise from misunderstandings.

Wenner and Campbell (2017) identified stresses or difficulties faced by teacher leaders. Among these were the challenges posed by undefined teacher leadership roles. Often, teacher leaders feel underused, misused, or, at the other end of the spectrum, “dumped on” (p. 150) with too many responsibilities that pulled them from their primary task of teaching students.

**Unsupportive Peers**

Wenner and Campbell (2017) identified relationship struggles that teacher leaders experienced with their teaching peers. The literature suggests that resentment can form towards teacher leaders due to an upset of traditional egalitarian norms among teachers. A phenomenology that examined the experiences of eight female teachers in an urban U.S. elementary schools indicated that perceptions of power imbalance can lead to a
breakdown of collegial teacher relationships. These included feelings of jealousy exhibited by teacher peers (Podjasek, 2009).

Wenner and Campbell’s (2017) review also identified evidences and effects of unsupportive peers in regard to teacher leadership. One of these is that teacher leaders feel ostracized. Peers may also feel that teacher leaders take on leadership roles for their own personal gain. Peers may also resent teacher leaders, feeling they have an unfair influence over the principal. Others may even work together to thwart the work of teacher leaders.

In their qualitative questioning of 177 elementary and secondary teachers, Jacobs et al. (2016) suggested that teacher resistance arises from a fear of being evaluated by teacher leaders. They also identified teacher resistance to change and teacher fear of change as barriers to the development of teacher leadership. In a profession where everyone is perceived to be equal, another barrier identified in the literature is resentment towards teacher leaders that comes from other teachers. The literature suggests that this resentment is particularly directed towards those teacher leaders who become involved with the classroom teaching of other teachers. Another source of resentment presented by the literature is the recognition and rewards that teacher leaders receive and the perception that teacher leaders have connections with the administration (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001). Muijs and Harris’s (2006) sample of 10 school case studies in England suggested that teachers might feel inadequate to adopt a leadership role due to lack of experience and confidence. They also identified teacher apathy and an unwillingness to take on more responsibilities as additional obstacles. These details emerged as themes
resulting from semi-structured interviews. Similarly, Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001) proposed that teachers’ lack of experience could also be a potential obstacle to teacher leadership.

**Unsupportive Administrators**

Again, the role of administrators stands out in those factors affecting teacher leadership. Wenner and Campbell’s (2017) review identified four themes in regard to unsupportive administrators: school structures have not been put in place to assist teacher leaders, the principal does not give teacher leaders the autonomy they need to do their work, teacher leaders don’t feel valued or recognized for their work, and the faculty as a whole does not support teacher leadership.

Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001) suggested that teachers considering a leadership position should consider the willingness of principals to share leadership with teachers, as well as their commitment to professional development. Silva et al. (2000) also identified administrators as one of the three barriers to teacher leadership. Eargle’s (2013) qualitative look into one rural high school in the southeastern U.S. proposed that these administrators were reluctant to give some of their leadership power to teachers. Eargle contended that teachers were experiencing growth as teacher leaders, but that growth was limited by the leadership preferences of the administrators. Silva et al. (2000) also discovered this administrative unwillingness to let go of power as it emerged as a theme in their teacher interviews. Muijs et al. (2013) indicated in their mixed methods study of 16 London-area schools that administrators of schools that are considered to be at risk, or not doing well under school accountability, are unwilling to relinquish leadership power.
to teacher leaders.

**Effects of Teacher Leadership: Benefits and Tolls**

York-Barr and Duke’s (2004) literature review identified several claims within the literature concerning positive effects of teacher leadership. Unfortunately, they often found little evidence within the literature to support those claims. However, York-Barr and Duke did identify within the literature three areas where teacher leadership had positive effects: effects on teacher leaders, effects on colleagues, and effects on students.

**Effects on Teacher Leaders**

The effects on teacher leaders themselves is where York-Barr and Duke (2004) found the greatest evidence within the literature. Mostly, these effects in the literature were perceived as being positive. For example, as teacher leaders take opportunity to interact and observe other teachers, it improves the instructional practices of the teacher leaders themselves. Teacher leaders also experienced increased meaning in their work. Barth (2001) contends that leadership and decision-making opportunities are the best learning experiences for teachers.

Some negatives identified in York-Barr and Duke’s (2004) review include a difficulty in teachers switching roles from teachers to teacher leaders, as well as stresses that arise in taking on two roles. Lastly, teacher leaders found difficulty in their relationships with colleagues, particularly due to the tradition of egalitarian norms.

While York-Barr and Duke (2004) identified several studies of the effects of teacher leadership on teacher leaders, Wenner and Campbell’s (2017) more recent
literature review suggests that few studies have examined how the process of becoming a teacher leader transforms the teacher leader. However, Chew and Andrews’ (2010) case studies of schools in Australia and Singapore, suggest that teacher leaders experience a sense of purpose, satisfaction, and empowerment. They also contend that principals can foster teacher leadership by providing opportunities to make decisions about curriculum. Wenner and Campbell also identified some of the stresses that come to teacher leaders. These include the overwhelming nature of the responsibilities taken on by teacher leaders, lack of time for teacher leadership work, and climate and cultural factors.

**Effects on Colleagues**

York-Barr and Duke’s (2004) findings suggest that there is a positive perceived impact on the improvement of the teaching practices of the colleagues of teacher leaders. However, the review also revealed negative impacts on the colleagues of teacher leaders. The negatives include lower trust, resentment, and distancing and conflict among teacher leaders and their colleagues. It was suggested that these negative effects can arise from conflict between which teachers are involved in leadership opportunities and those who are not. Their findings imply that school culture can be a difficult obstacle to overcome. The literature indicated that changing relationships between teacher leaders, their peers, and administrators tended to be negative in nature (Wenner & Campbell, 2017).

**Effects on Students**

Of the 41 studies reviewed by York-Barr and Duke (2004), only five directly examined the effects of teacher leadership on higher levels of student learning. Knowing
that York-Barr and Duke found little evidence for teacher leadership’s effects on student learning, Wenner and Campbell (2017) sought for evidence in more recent literature. They found no literature providing evidence of student learning gains as a result of teacher leadership.

**Additional Effects**

Katzenmeyer and Moller’s (2001) book *Awakening the Sleeping Giant: Helping Teachers Develop Leaders* suggests that the benefits of teacher leadership include professional efficacy, the retention of excellent teachers, and overcoming of resistance to change. They also indicated that teacher leaders experience career enhancement through being energized by leadership roles and having the focus being shifted from ineffective teachers to encouraging good teachers to improve. Katzenmeyer and Moller also felt that teacher leaders improve their own teaching performance as they help other teachers to improve. Those who are mentored also have their instructional practice improved. A final benefit suggested by these authors is that those who are mentored receive leadership from teacher leaders that might not be provided by principals.

Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001) offered that the organizational capacity of a school is strengthened through Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) that provide quality professional development and strengthen teacher leadership to facilitate learning within that community. They also indicated that the need to prepare students for high-level thinking requires teachers to develop deep knowledge in their content area.

Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001) posit that any sustainable change in schools necessitates the involvement of school personnel at all levels and that effective principals
will empower teachers. Teachers are specially positioned to make changes as they are located closest to students.

The final rationale given by Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001) for teacher leadership is enhancing teacher professionalism. Outside educational decrees and directives, they suggest, cause teachers to feel not professional. They suggest that teachers themselves do not view themselves as being professionals. Hodges et al. (2013), Parker (2016), and de Saxe et al. (2020) have indicated that standardized testing is one of those outside forces contributing to deprofessionalization.

**Conclusion**

At the conclusion of Wenner and Campbell’s (2017) comprehensive literature review, they emphasized York-Barr and Duke’s (2004) call for more empirical research into teacher leadership with more robust data gathering measures. They also recommended that more teacher leadership studies be conducted that were grounded in leadership theory. Other factors of teacher leadership identified as needing more exploration were the process of becoming a teacher leader, the unique context of individual schools, and the ways that teacher leadership influences increased student learning.

This study seeks to address some of these identified research needs by taking a phenomenological approach to exploring teacher leadership grounded within the theories of distributed and authentic leadership. This study seeks to discover more regarding the process of becoming a teacher leader, including discovering similarities and differences
in the process of becoming a teacher leader; identifying ways that teacher leaders believe that the process has transformed them; and uncovering the perceived benefits and tolls of teacher leadership.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Research Questions

My research questions were as follows.

1. How do teachers who are seen as teacher leaders perceive the similarities and differences they experience in the process of becoming a teacher leader?

2. How do teachers who are seen as teacher leaders believe that the process of becoming a teacher leader has changed them?

3. What do teachers who are seen as teacher leaders view as the benefits or tolls to themselves personally, to the school as a whole, and to other people in the school setting?

A Phenomenological Approach

In qualitative research, the researcher observes and interprets events in their natural settings. Knowledge is created through an understanding of what is observed and interpreted. Within qualitative methodology, phenomenology seeks to understand the world through the experiences of other people—making sense of phenomena through multiple, local experiences. In phenomenological interpretation, the researcher’s purpose is to guide the examination and make it meaningful and the focus is on an individual’s subjective experiences (Webb & Welsh, 2019). “Being and acting in the world” becomes “the basis for genuine understanding” (Østergaard, et al., 2008, p. 98).

My research questions sought to understand the process of teacher leadership through the lived experiences of the teacher leaders themselves, and to honor their interpretations of their experiences as well as my own (Hunzicker, 2012). Because I was
interested in uncovering a rich description of the process of becoming a teacher leader and believe that each teacher leader can provide valuable insights into the process, a phenomenology was an appropriate approach (Webb & Welsh, 2019). The assumption I made in choosing a phenomenological approach was that there is a shared experience in becoming a teacher leader (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I believed that these experiences would provide the data that would answer my research questions (Groenewald, 2004).

**Bracketing**

Husserl’s descriptive phenomenology methodology states that the researcher should suspend all suppositions and preconceived opinions (Reiners, 2012). This withholding of judgement is referred to as epoché, or bracketing (Arvidson, 2016). However, Heidegger’s interpretive phenomenology assumes that the researcher has prior knowledge and understanding regarding the phenomenon, and that experiences cannot be eliminated because that awareness is part of the research (Reiners, 2012). My own experiences with teacher leadership, which I presented in the introduction, helped guide the investigation and provided meaning to the phenomenon (Webb & Welsh, 2019). While I took care to bracket my own teacher leadership experiences and definitions and not impose them on the participants and allow the phenomenon to emerge naturally during each interview, I could not fully put aside my existing teacher leadership knowledge. Instead, I am choosing to state my existing teacher leadership beliefs (Hunzicker, 2012).

- All teachers have the potential to lead, but not all choose to or have the opportunity to do so.
Teacher leadership is a process and does not occur immediately.
There are benefits and tolls to teacher leadership.

**Purposeful Sampling**

Because I did not intend to generalize the results of this study, but instead intended to describe a shared phenomenon and describe specific experiences, I used nonprobability sampling. Since I wanted to discover if teacher leaders share similar experiences to each other in their teacher leadership journey, and if they see similar benefits from these experiences, I needed to generate a purposeful sample (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Interpretive phenomenology suggests that the researcher be cognizant of the influences of the backgrounds of those teachers being studied and I am familiar with these schools and this district. Junior high school teachers were chosen because of my existing experience with teacher leadership in this area.

This study was conducted among junior high teachers from a single school district in a suburban area of a western state in the U.S. There are 13 junior high schools within this district. This study sought to recruit participants from each of the 13 schools. My past experiences helped guide the inquiry (Neubauer et al., 2019). Using multiple schools assessed whether the phenomenon transcends schools. Using this school district provided entrée to teachers because I have an existing relationship with the single district gatekeeper, the Director of Research and Evaluation for the district. Permission for this study was obtained through Utah State University (USU) Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the local school district’s institutional review board. USU’s IRB protocols
were followed.

Once I received permission from the Director of Research and Evaluation, I emailed the junior high school teachers in the district requesting names of teachers within the district they consider to be teachers of influence. This nomination email is included in Appendix A. Administrators were not contacted as this research sought to examine teacher leadership from the teachers’ point-of-view and experience. Bond (2011) contends that teacher leadership literature’s definition of teacher leadership spans a continuum. At one end are those who argue that a teacher must have a formal position to be a teacher leader. At the other end are those who say that a teacher leader is a teacher who teaches well. In contacting the teachers, I did not want to use terms that would restrict teachers’ thinking, so I avoided the term “teacher leaders” and instead spoke of teachers of influence. I asked teachers to identify junior high teachers in their school or in their district who had several of the following characteristics.

- Are respected as a teacher
- Are learning oriented
- Have leadership abilities
- Keep a focus on teaching and learning
- Create positive and trusting relationships
- Encourage parent involvement
- Help other teachers solve problems
- Act as good collaborators
- Model effective teaching practice
- Help create a positive school culture
- Are promoters of change

These characteristics were taken from York-Barr and Duke’s (2004) conceptual framework as well as informal teacher leadership roles identified in other literature (Harrison & Killion, 2007; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001). The recruitment email is
The teacher email responses, providing names of teachers of influence, were recorded in a Qualtrics survey that allowed for anonymity. The survey asked individuals to nominate one or more “teachers of influence,” as well as indicate the school where the nominated teacher taught. The nominating window was open from December 7, 2020, to January 10, 2021. After that date, the Qualtrics survey was closed, and no further nominations were taken. After the Qualtrics survey was closed, the names of the nominees were downloaded into an Excel file and sorted by school. At that point, teachers with multiple nominations were identified. Potential participants were chosen from those who received multiple nominations from their peers. School websites were utilized to identify subjects taught, and care was taken to choose teachers from a wide variety of subjects to help determine participants in the case of a tie. Including a variety of subjects also assisted in assessing how the teacher leadership process might transcend subjects. All school and participant names were kept confidential. Participants were assigned a number which was used in all transcripts and other data.

Groenewald (2004) recommends that a phenomenology include in-depth interviews of 2-10 participants. This study sought to interview at least one teacher from each of the 13 schools, or until saturation was reached. Achieving saturation is important to qualitative research because it indicates “data adequacy” (Morse, 1995, p. 147), which involves collecting information until no new evidence appears. I knew when saturation was obtained when the experiences and observations of the participants became similar regardless of school context (Sohn et al., 2017).
For example, it became evident by the time I interviewed eight participants that when I asked them to define teacher leadership in their own words, they would summarize their experiences as part of their definition. By the time I interviewed six participants, it seemed likely that all had obtained a masters’ degree. Shamir and Eilam (2005) suggest that saturation was reached in their study when no new major categories emerged in their study of leaders’ life stories. Similarly, by the time the 10th teacher was interviewed in this study, it was clear that no new categories were emerging in regard to the experiences as teacher leaders.

I initially contacted the nominated teachers through email. In the email I briefly introduced myself as a fellow teacher and a Ph.D. student conducting a study on teacher influence. This email included a link to a Qualtrics form that included USU’s IRB-approved informed consent (see Appendix C). Potential participants were able to view the details of the study and choose to participate before I made any personal contact. Participants provided their consent on the Qualtrics form which was collected in electronic format.

I initially contacted those teachers with the most nominations from each school. If they declined to participate, or if they did not return contact, I proceeded to the teacher with the next highest number of nominations. In cases of a tie, participants were chosen from a coin toss, a random number generator, or an attempt to balance subjects represented. In one school, no teacher received more than one nomination. In this school, the participant was chosen by a random number generator. Eleven teachers of the desired 13 were interviewed. In one school, the initial teacher contacted chose not to participate.
The second teacher agreed to participate but did respond to two follow-up emails. In the other school, the teacher with the most nominations provided consent, but had to withdraw due to scheduling conflicts. The second teacher contacted also had scheduling conflicts that prevented participation. The third teacher contacted did not respond to either the initial contact email or the follow-up email.

**Data Gathering**

Interviews were the primary source of data for this study. All interviews were conducted through Zoom and were recorded and stored on USU’s password protected Zoom account. A careful transcription of the recording was made by the researcher. The typed transcription included identification numbers for participants, and schools were not identified (Sohn et al., 2017).

Since this study took a phenomenological approach, the purpose of the interviews was to understand the teacher leadership experience from the teachers’ point of view. I needed to be able to understand the way they lived teacher leadership (Østergaard, et al., 2008). In order to do this, I first needed to develop a trusting relationship with the teachers I interviewed (Pitts & Miller-Dau, 2007). This was done through casual conversation at the beginning of the Zoom calls before the interviews were begun.

**Sketch Email**

Once the teachers gave their consent to participate in the study, I sent them an email requesting that they sketch a visual representation of their experience as a teacher of influence. This email explained that the sketch was to be completed by the teacher
privately while I was not present. I explained to them that the quality of the artwork was not important; instead, I wanted them to reflect on the ideas and experiences they have had as a teacher of influence (CohenMiller, 2018). I asked that they send me a picture or scan of their drawing before our Zoom interview. I examined these drawings before the interview to get a feel for each teacher’s individual experience with being a teacher of influence. I printed each sketch prior to each interview.

Gschwandtner (2014) noted that art can help to bridge the gap between the invisible and the visible and allows us to uncover life experiences. Visual arts have the potential to uncover data that might not come through verbal communication alone. There is also the potential for individuals to be more reflective about their experiences through visual arts and for researchers to identify ideas that participants might not directly say. Visual representations can uncover deeper experiences of participants by helping them to share their experiences and feelings more easily, as well as making the interview experience more comfortable for them (CohenMiller, 2018). It can also provide a means for those who are being interviewed to lead the direction of the conversation (Sohn et al., 2017) and a vehicle for the teachers to describe their teacher leader experience in their own way.

**Interview Questions**

The interview questions were guided by the teachers’ visual representation of their experiences, but my interview protocol generally followed the questions in an interview protocol shown in Appendix D. Additional follow-up questions were asked through emails. These emails also requested that the teacher review the transcript and a
personal narrative and asked clarifying questions as needed. The personal narratives were created from the interview transcripts and provide a summary of each interview.

**Data Analysis**

The general process of analysis is illustrated in Figure 4. Analysis began with the initial review of the teachers’ sketches. The next step in the analysis was to listen to the interview recordings several times to understand the overall tone of the interviewed teacher leaders (Groenewald, 2004). This happened automatically during the transcription of the interviews that I did personally. Care was taken to understand the meaning behind phrases used in the interviews, and the specific details provided by each participant (Sohn et al., 2017).

**Figure 4**

*General Process of Analysis*
The reflexive journal notes, audio recordings, and interview transcripts were further reviewed to isolate themes from all of the interviews, in addition to any variation in those themes (Groenewald, 2004). Themes from these interviews were allowed to emerge naturally. I prepared a table, such as the one shown in Table 1, that highlighted the major themes for each participant. The remaining theme tables for each participant are provided in Appendix E.

Table 1

*James's Experience Viewed Through Leadership Categories*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initial event</th>
<th>Being mentored by another teacher his first year. This gave him the desire to reach out and help others.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Formal positions</strong></td>
<td>Department Chair, Grading Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-identified qualities that led to being chosen for formal roles</td>
<td>He is dependable and would “speak up” when necessary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualities I identified through interview</td>
<td>He has a desire to build relationships and share with others. He is motivated by a love of his students, his school, and his colleagues. He showed initiative by initiating discussion and finding allies for grading reforms. He has a desire to help students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Informal positions</strong></td>
<td>Seeks out others to help and shares with other teachers, a catalyst for change, and a life-long learner.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership’s effect on self</td>
<td>He has gained a “school-level” view. This allows him to see outside of his own classroom and support school-wide efforts. It also gives him empathy for his students as he realizes that his is just one class of eight. He has become passionate about grading reform.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership’s effect on students</td>
<td>Being a department chair has provided access to conferences, which have provided tools for him to teach more effectively.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership’s effect on school</td>
<td>He has led the school-wide effort for grading reforms. He sees this as his greatest influence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Driving passion</td>
<td>Grading reform: standards-referenced grading.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of administrators</td>
<td>Chose him to be a department chair, provided professional development opportunities, and supported his grading-reform efforts by bringing in additional professional development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentors</td>
<td>He met with another teacher frequently during his difficult first year of teaching. They talked through classroom management situations and this teacher suggested books to read. James referenced his mentors in his leadership sketch.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
After the general themes were identified, they were emailed to the participants in the form of a summary narrative for review to validate the findings (Groenewald, 2004; Sohn et al., 2017). After feedback on the narrative from participants, I created a table, such as the one shown in Table 2, that summarized the key findings reflected in the narrative. The remaining key findings tables are provided in Appendix F.

Table 2

*Key Concepts From James’s Narrative*

| • He loves teaching. |
| • He loves sharing with his students and with his colleagues. |
| • He learns skills at conferences that he has brought into his classroom to help students. |
| • He has a passion for grading-reform; this came from attending a conference. |
| • He worked with other like-minded teachers to achieve his goals of grading-reform. |
| • He helps his students feel successful and be successful through his grading-reforms. |
| • Desires to build connections with students and teachers. |
| • Benefits of leadership: |
| o Tools from professional development (PD) and conferences benefit students in his class. |
| o Ignited a passion for his grade reform efforts, which he believes have benefited students school-wide. |
| o He gathered allies to help him in his reform efforts. |
| o Has developed a school-level view that helps support school-wide efforts in his classroom and helps him remember that he is just one of many classes his students have in a day. |

I adopted a reflexive stance throughout data gathering and analysis. This was partly done through the practice of memoing. Keeping memos allowed me to be more aware of my own subjectivity and allowed me to have a closer relationship with the data. In memoing, I recorded my decisions from the beginning of the study to the end of the
analysis. This provided an audit trail to help see how decisions were made and conclusions were reached. Creating memos also assisted with finding meaning in the data. It helped me see what was actually happening in the data, identify similarities and differences, explore relationships, and record impressions from the data. Since I explored a phenomenon that I have experience with, memos also provided a way for me to record my own perspective for analysis and review (Birks et al., 2008).

**Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness of data and findings was established in four ways. These are triangulation, field notes, member-checking, and an audit.

**Triangulation**

There are multiple ways to triangulate a qualitative study. This study used multiple theories, multiple methods, and multiple data sources as a means of triangulation.

In this dissertation, I’m triangulating theory by viewing participant data through perspectives of distributed leadership theory, authentic leadership theory, and emergent theory from the descriptions of the phenomenology. This study also used interviews as well as participant-created sketches to provide multiple methods. Visual representations can uncover deeper experiences and make the interview process more comfortable for participants (CohenMiller, 2018). Interviewing multiple teachers from different junior high schools also provided a third mode of triangulation.
**Field Notes**

Research field notes were taken before, during, and after interviewing. These notes were in the form of a reflexive journal. This journal was formatted into three sections: a research trail, field notes, and reflection. The research trail section recorded the day-to-day details of the research, including particulars such as emails, and times and locations of the interviews. In the field notes, I kept a record of details observed during the interviews, such as ideas for follow-up questions, things to be clarified, my thinking during analysis, and any emerging themes. The reflection portion included my thoughts regarding the research and included my emotions, impressions, and insights during the process. I also made note of things such as the interviewees’ body language, nonverbal communication, and any pauses or emotional responses (Sohn et al., 2017).

Since I have experienced the phenomenon that I seek to investigate, a reflexive journal also allowed me to better bracket my experience. It allowed me to better absorb the large amounts of information I received during the interview process. It also allowed me to review the interviews in the light of my new learning and understanding of the teacher leadership process.

**Member-Checking**

After each interview, the transcript and personal narrative summary were provided electronically to the participants to check for accuracy. Each participant was asked if they would like to make any additions or corrections to their interview responses or to the narrative summary. As part of member-checking, I asked each participant to provide me with pseudonyms of their own choosing for both themselves and their school.
I did this to allow them to have more control over their narratives and the way they wished to represent themselves (Allen & Wiles, 2016). All participants responded to my attempts to perform a member-check, and all provided pseudonyms for themselves. While I requested that each participant also choose a pseudonym for their schools, three did not. I created pseudonyms for those schools. Only one participant requested changes be made to their narrative and one other provided clarification.

Audit

The documentation for this study included a research audit trail. Deidentified secure files were kept for each teacher interviewed. These files contained the interview transcription; the field notes taken before, during, and after the interview; any notes, sketches, or artifacts provided by the teacher during the interview; notes made during data analysis; and any additional communication made between the teachers interviewed and me (Groenewald, 2004).

These materials were reviewed by an auditor who examined the research and findings to validate the quality of the research of this study (Carcary, 2009). The auditor for this study holds a Ph.D. in Curriculum and Instruction from Utah State University. His dissertation employed qualitative research methods. In addition, he has published qualitative research in academic journals and textbooks on education and has had one application of qualitative research cited in a major qualitative research textbook. During the audit, all study files, including the teacher files, reflexive journal, memos, and any other artifacts arising from the data analysis were made available to the auditor. His attestation is provided in Appendix H.
CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

As previously discussed, this study used a phenomenological approach to learn more about the process of becoming a teacher leader through the experiences of junior high school teachers. The purpose was to answer the following research questions.

1. How do teachers who are seen as teacher leaders perceive the similarities and differences they experience in the process of becoming a teacher leader?

2. How do teachers who are seen as teacher leaders believe that the process of becoming a teacher leader has changed them?

3. What do teachers who are seen as teacher leaders view as the benefits or tolls to themselves personally, to the school as a whole, and to other people in the school setting?

In this chapter, I provide a narrative of the leadership experience of each teacher leader interviewed. The purpose of these narratives is to illustrate each participant’s experience with teacher leadership, the qualities they possess that led them to become involved with leadership, and the benefits and tolls that have arisen from their involvement with teacher leadership.

Following the narratives, the major themes that emerged from the analysis are provided. These themes are based on the commonalities discovered in the discussions with each teacher. These themes, which will be discussed at the end of the chapter, include: an initial event where the participant first realizes they have influence, participation in both formal and informal leadership roles, a driving passion that ignites the participant’s teacher leadership work, and the importance of administrators. Additionally, themes discovered in the participants’ definitions of teacher leadership will
be discussed. These include the importance of relationship building, helping other teachers to succeed, advocating for and supporting other teachers, and being a force for good in the school.

**Overview of Findings**

After completing the first few interviews, it became apparent that certain similarities were emerging in the experiences of the participants. It was also at this point that I began trying to identify a process that might capture the leadership experience of the participants. It also became clear that most of the participants were department chairs or had been department chairs. I realized that it would be important to identify the qualities that each participant had that led them to be chosen for that leadership position.

I found that it was helpful to analyze what I was learning from each participant by visually representing the process of how each participant experienced becoming a teacher leader. These visual representations are found in this chapter as a figure at the end of each participant’s narrative.

I also found that it was helpful to compare and contrast each participant’s experience as viewed through common categories that emerged through the interviews. These categories were directly related to my research questions: initial leadership position or experience; formal leadership roles; informal leadership roles; self-identified qualities that led to the initial position or experience; and leadership’s effect on self, students, and school. These data are found in Appendix E.

In addition to the categories that emerged from my research questions, I also
observed that each teacher leader possessed a driving passion, and each benefited from the assistance of administrators. I also identified several additional emerging themes that were common among the participants. These themes will be discussed at the end of this chapter.

Narratives

The narratives that follow provide a rich description of each teacher’s experience as a teacher of influence or teacher leader. The narratives, which were member-checked by the teacher, begin with a description of the sketches made by each participant (see Appendix G), include direct citations from the interviews, as well as an illustrative diagram I developed to better understand each teacher’s leadership experience viewed as a process. Figure 5 offers the key to the symbols that are used in each of the participant leadership process illustrations that follow each narrative.

Figure 5

Key to Symbols Used in Participant Leadership Process Illustrations
Janice’s Narrative

For her sketch, Janice decided to use a line graph to illustrate her influence over the course of her career. As part of this graph, she also included a line tracing her confidence over that same time period.

I asked her to tell me about the events of her sketch. She began her explanation.

So I have people tell me that they think I’m influential. Either students or parents or other teachers, and I wanted that so desperately the first few years that I taught. And I had the confidence that I was just going to be amazing. It’s like the more time that has passed, the less confident I feel in myself, but people continue to ask me questions, or put me on leadership teams, or turn to me for advice, and...I don’t know why. I can’t see a reason why I have anything that important to say.

She talked about how she measures that influence:

I guess my measure for influence would be…the words of others. The way that other people ask me to participate in leadership teams, or...nominate me for teacher of the year - those kind of things. So they are like external measurements of what I guess would be influence?… I don’t know for sure. But, on the inside it makes me feel less and less confident because I don’t know if I’m just putting a lot of pressure on myself...like I was nominated for a national award a couple of years ago. And it came down to, to two of us science teachers in [the state], and I lost, and I was actually really grateful because I just thought, if I had won, is that my peak? Is there nowhere else to go but down?

Janice took me through her sketch chronologically, beginning with her first change of schools. She shared with me that she started her career in a different school district than the one she currently teaches in. She moved to be closer to the elementary school her children would be attending. While moving schools brought new opportunities, it also brought difficulties. “I don’t know if it was a blow to my ego…or what,” Janice explained, “but...I just remember the first back-to-school night.” She continued,

I continually had parents and kids coming in my room telling me how
disappointed they were that I was their teacher. That they didn’t get Mr. [Jones] or whoever else was there at the time. So that just kind of hit me really hard and my confidence dropped dramatically in that first career change.

Notwithstanding this experience, at the end of that same school year, Janice recalled,

I had [my principal] asking me if I wanted to be the new [Department Chair], and if I wanted to travel over the summer to a conference. It was just so conflicting to feel like I wasn’t good at my job but to have a boss telling me that I was the right person for leadership.

I asked Janice why she believed her principal chose her for the position of department chair. Her is what she shared with me:

[The principal] has known me since I was 17 because I was friends with his oldest daughter. He knew I was Senior Class President, got a leadership scholarship to [a state university], and that my personality is overall bossy, LOL…. I imagine the overall reason was that he was familiar with me.

In speaking with her, I also saw that she is competent, approachable, and genuinely cares about the students she influences, both their academic achievement and their emotional well-being.

In time, Janice needed to move closer to her children’s school and switched schools once again. She said of this change, “it was the same thing all over again.” She recalled, “The first thing people said to me was how sad they were that they didn’t get a different teacher.” She also felt some negativity from other teachers, who said things like, “Oh, if you came here to be the fun teacher, I guess that won’t be me anymore.” Janice explained to me that this caused her confidence to dive once again.

However, once again, this change of schools brought personal recognition to Janice. “That was the year that I started getting nominated for national teaching awards,
and so I just continued to have these—these moments,” she related to me.

The next career event portrayed in Janice’s sketch occurred last year when she accepted a district-level job as the content specialist in her subject. She laughed as she told me, “…and that’s how I found out how much people really hated me.” Other secondary level teachers in her content area spoke with her about how much they disliked the lessons she shared with them. Janice teaches in a male-dominated subject-area, and she indicated that each of these negative comments came from men. She referred to the experience as “brutal.” However, similar to her previous experiences, this low was paired with a high. She was contacted by a national foundation in her subject area and told that she was a finalist for a $10,000 prize, which she said allowed her to regain “a little bit of confidence.”

I asked her how she felt participating in these leadership activities. She explained that “for a long time I would feel angry and insulted if I wasn’t getting a lot of praise from adults, students, colleagues, parents…. I took it so personally.” That changed when she moved to her third school, Forrest Junior High. She described this for me:

All of a sudden, …something switched in my brain and when I did start hearing the praise that I thought I needed so badly, that was causing me so much anger before, it was like, shame. I felt completely ashamed of myself when people would tell me what a good teacher I was, or…ask me to be on leadership teams, because I thought,…I can’t even put my finger on it, but it feels like…while I’m being completely authentic to myself, and I know I haven’t done anything wrong; I am so concerned about what my colleagues are saying behind my back that it creates this feeling…of being ashamed that I’m good at my job.

In spite of these concerns, Janice has had great experiences teaching her students. She shared this with me,

When I am able to— and it took a few years to figure how to do it— but…when I
can shut off that feeling of being shamed around other adults that I’m working with, and I can really just focus on the kids, oh, my gosh, it’s magical and it’s fun and I have kids who still reach out to me through social media and say, “I know you don’t remember me, but I was in your class 7 years ago, and I just want you to know that I can’t remember a lot of what you taught, but I remember how you made me feel. You made me feel good.” And that’s been awesome. I probably get, oh, half a dozen messages like that every year, and that really helps...

She continued by speaking of her desire of reaching her students by dressing up in different outfits that related to her curriculum:

That was a really deliberate decision to focus back on the kids. Every time I did that it wasn’t – and I was accused all the time of doing it for attention - but it was to just show the kids... “Look how dedicated I am to you that I did this and you’re going to love it, and it’s going to be amazing!” And “Look how excited I am! I’m showing you how excited I am!” And something really did change for the positive when I stared doing that, and it was something I did 100% for the kids and...the relationships were stronger, the learning happened faster, which was incredible, and I was just overall happier. As long as I didn’t worry about what other adults were saying.

I questioned Janice why she felt there was antagonism toward her from other teachers. Here was her explanation:

I think we do something accidental in our profession to teachers where we compare – and I’ve noticed that as I’ve had a chance to kind of work at a closer to an admin level. There’s a tendency...when something needs to be fixed in someone’s classroom to say: “Have you ever seen so-and-so do it?” or, “You need to go ask this person,” or, “Why don’t you go watch this teacher because they’re a master at this,”...and I think the intent is kind? Or to try to be helpful, but I don’t know of any other professions – I mean, can you think? Like, you have a poor banker do you say to the banker, “You really should stop by Wells Fargo and see how they do things”?... I don’t know why we do that to each other. But I think that’s where it all comes from.

I asked Janice how she felt her teacher leadership activities had improved student learning or their experience in her class. She said that she believed that the experiences had because “... as I’ve been offered opportunities to lead or be on teams or go to conferences...I have taken everything and poured it back into a student perspective.” She
gave me an example of this. She said, “…I’ve really been able to...turn it all back to the kids and my goal is not grades anymore but improvement. “You started here, you ended here, and that’s incredible. You’re amazing.”

Janice mentioned that she had focused on this more since moving to Forrest Junior High. I asked her what caused this change in her teaching? She responded,

I think it was an opportunity to attend some conferences after I moved over here to Forrest Junior High. I was asked to be on a behavior leadership team and lead the team, so, that was really overwhelming, but as I did my own research and didn’t focus on my school-wide discipline – which was what the goal was, which is so funny – I just took the information and poured it into the individual, in my classroom. How can I improve these relationships in order to make behavior change? That was really neat, and I loved that. It was cool.

I asked Janice if she saw her influence on students in other ways. She replied:

Yes. Yes, it has. I don’t feel very confident in my influence over time, which is what that graph shows, but I know that I am in positions where I’m making decisions that impact whole student-bodies at this point and so I know I’m making decisions that are influencing students and parents and colleagues and things like that.

One place where Janice is making school-wide decisions is her role in developing weekly homeroom lessons that are used in each classroom and reach 1400 students. She told me about this work. She stated, “We’ve got a theme every month, and then each Monday of the month, each week, we dive into that theme a little deeper.” The purpose of these lessons, she shared with me, is to “Try to give them skills that they can take and use. It’s been really kind of a fun thing.”

Janice currently works at Forrest Junior High as a full-time Instructional Coach. “My job has been to work with individuals. So, especially teachers in their first 3 years,” she explained. She explained how this work allows her to help the teachers in her school
… anything they want to work with – whether it’s looking for better content, working on classroom management, organizing time better, working on Canvas. Anyone who has a goal and wants to work on. It, they contact me…we’ll work through it. Sometimes it takes six weeks, sometimes it takes a class period. That’s kind of what I do is work with individuals.

When asked if she enjoyed this coaching work, Janice responded,

It’s really fun…. I really have missed the kids the last couple years, but…I’ve had so many opportunities to go co-teach. And I probably know 400 kids by name this year just because I’ve gotten to work with kids still….it’s been really fun. I’ve loved it.

Janice indicated the only drawback she sees to her coaching work: “The hardest thing is...I don’t see any kind of impact I’m making on kids...immediately. I kind of lose...that.” Instead, the impact of her work is delayed.

I will hear from kids a couple of months later – “Oh, Miss Wheeler, when are you coming back to our earth science classroom. That was so much fun.” But at the time, they acted like it was the stupidest thing they’ve ever done...so, there’s a delay. There’s definitely a delay in how well things are going or not going. And that’s hard.

I asked Janice how she had seen herself change through her leadership experiences. She spoke of the importance of change. “You know, any time that I changed a position or a place was definitely a key event for me because it pushed me – it did two things – the first thing was it pushed me into a lot of discomfort.” She continued,

But that in turn opened an opportunity to reinvent myself. And, without those, I’m not sure what kind of teacher – if this was my 14th year at the school where I started, I’m not sure I’d be the same person. I can see the people who are still there – who started with me – and they’re jaded and they’re tired, and they’re tired of the community, and I really think the biggest thing that impacted me and any kind of influence I’ve had is the forced opportunities that I gave myself to reinvent and to change.

When asked about mentors, Janice spoke of those department leaders she worked
with when she was asked to be a Department Chair. She explained how this opened her
vision to other teaching and leadership styles. She spoke of this experience, “It was
really, really cool.” She continued,

I never said to [them], “Hey, you guys are totally mentoring me, thanks so much,”
but everyone of [them] gave me a piece of understanding on how we work as a
community and I would have to say that my years at [second school] were [good]
…everybody was so much of a mentor. Truly.

I asked Janice if she would give me her personal definition of teacher leadership.
Her response was, “Building a positive school culture through continued professional
development, mentoring new teachers, and serving on a school leadership team.”

Figure 6 provides a summary of Janice’s narrative. It shows the flow of her
experience as a teacher leader, emphasizing both the contextual influences that led here to
teacher leadership and the influence she believes she’s been able to have.

Emma’s Narrative

Emma’s sketch of her experience with being a teacher of influence showed her
role as a teacher in the very center, with her leadership roles and experiences radiating
out from that. As she described her sketch to me, she explained why she centered her
sketch on her role as teacher. She said, “being...a teacher of influence or a teacher
leader...for me started by being a teacher.” She explained that before she took on any
additional roles, she “… needed to have that background...whatever roles I would take on
after that...I needed to be a teacher first.”

Emma serves as one of two PLC Coaches at Powell Junior High. In fulfilling this
role, she sees her role as teacher as an asset. She explained, “it’s helped me as I’ve taken on these additional roles... I’m still teaching while I’m coaching and that I have that in my pocket …” She continued, “… I know what it’s like - I’m in the trenches with [her
fellow-teachers]. It’s really helped me...develop and...keep trust in any type of leadership role I’ve added …”

Emma’s first experience with a leadership role came her second year of teaching when she was asked to be Department Chair. She had just wrapped up her intern year and found herself the most experienced teacher in her department. The appointment was one of necessity, she explained to me,

It wasn’t because there was any skill in me at all, so...I kind of feel like I was thrown in...to the deep end with no floatation device and not knowing how to swim, and had to figure it out but when that happened. I had a really fantastic administration that...didn’t let me drown. They helped me as...a 23-year-old, figure out how to lead a team of teachers within my department. So otherwise, that would not have been possible, or they would not have placed a 23-year-old in that job...

In this early leadership role, Emma not only served as department head, but as a mentor teacher to another first-year teacher and an intern.

I asked her if she could identify any qualities or attributes that she possesses that would lead her principal to offer her a leadership position. Emma told me, “I think one of the biggest ones is that in really simple terms, I am a rule follower. Meaning, I follow through with things, I get things done on time, I follow school policies and procedures, I am honest.”

Another leadership role that came to her unexpectedly was that of student government advisor. The former advisor was asked to become Powell Junior High’s vice-principal following the death of a vice-principal, and Emma was asked to take the job.

Another event Emma depicted on her sketch was her masters’ degree. While disappointed that the courses she took were not what she expected, she said that the
courses were “really weak” she did gain compassion for her students as she returned to
the role of student herself. She explained that this experience “made me a better teacher
because I understood...getting time for homework’s hard!” She has recently started a
master’s in administration.

For 5 years, Emma was an Instructional Coach at her Powell Junior. She was one
of four coaches, and she had two periods dedicated to assist her fellow teachers,
particularly with improving classroom instruction. She also helped new teachers develop
effective classroom management skills. Much of her work in this capacity was one-on-
one with her colleagues.

Emma is now one of two PLC Coaches in her school. For her, it was a change
from the instructional coaching she had previously been involved with. She explained her
PLC coaching to me, “becoming a PLC coach...was a mind shift of working with the
individual to...moving a team as a unit.” She continued by sharing with me what she tells
her teams, “I want you to move as a team, not just grow as individual teachers.” She
prefers this work to instructional coaching, “… I have so much more joy as a PLC coach.
It’s more like I see immediate growth in students because of the coaching I do.”

I asked her what the difference was for her between the two coaching
assignments. She explained,

Instead of one teacher isolating becoming better, I’m getting a whole team to
improve their practices....And a whole team ends up teaching almost every
student in the building. So...the growth is faster, it’s more...visual – you can see it.
Where the instructional coach was just kind of these little tweaks with one person
at a time.

Emma continued:
I believe in collective teacher efficacy as the highest way to get students to learn...so...I feel like it’s so important in that PLC role to help teachers realize that teaming is that way....I’m not as smart as three brains together, and when I can help teams realize that, and stretch them...the impact on student learning has been really easy to see....we have anecdotal data; we have hard and fact numbers to see the growth of students. But I just believe so much that teaming is the right way to get students to learn. That I...get more joy out of it. And I think...because there’s more joy it makes more effective in my job.

In this coaching work, Emma has a collaborative partner and they coach together so that they can model the collaboration they are trying to teach. “…she and I say all the time, that we have drunk the Kool-Aid of the PLC results cycle. We...believe in it so much.”

In addition to being a PLC Coach at the school-level, Emma is involved with content leadership at the district level. Of all her roles she says that,

… that one was honestly probably the most terrifying....to feel like I had enough skill to help present and create materials for...our October PD (professional development) days...it was really a stretch for me, versus the other things that...were hard, but not as terrifying.

I asked Emma if, over time, the district-level work had become less terrifying for her. She responded,

That’s interesting to think about. I don’t think that they’ve become less terrifying...but I think that’s my personality. I feel really comfortable teaching and interacting in a room full of teenagers, but adults are not...so much my jam....to have coaching in my building where I’m working with adults, it’s at least adults I have a relationship with...and we are communicating over the same students, but with the, the district leadership trying to steer a whole district ship, I’m just kind of talking and teaching and interacting with adults I don’t have that relationship [with]. And I think that when that relationship’s missing, the leadership role is really hard.

I asked Emma how she has felt as she has been involved with leadership activities. She spoke of initially feeling inadequate as a department head or collaboration
team leader (CTL). She continues to fill that position today, and, while feelings of inadequacy are gone, she says that she feels that the experience is actually a little harder.

She explained why,

My job as PLC coach is to train CTLs in our CTL meetings. So, it’s hard to be both roles in that meeting – to be an active learner with my peers who are CTLs, but I’m the one doing the training. So, I would actually say my feelings on having to do both of those at the same time is that it’s been harder than I foresaw to try to be both roles.

Emma next discussed her feelings from her experience as student government advisor. “It was so good to work with kids who have a drive to make their school a place they want to be a part of and want to be in,” she expressed. She continued her explanation:

To work with these students and allow them to become the leaders of the classroom...and to watch them...totally blossom – was incredible to see for the – I don’t know – 5 or 6 years that I did it. I was just so proud of the work that they were able to do, and I...just...stepped back and let them...grow, let them fail even if they needed. But it was...an incredible opportunity.

Emma did not enjoy her time as Instructional Coach. After taking some time to think about her experience, she described it to me this way:

I felt...sometimes the teachers just couldn’t be bothered to stretch or grow....it made me feel like I was just spinning my wheels and...I think that’s comparatively to where, as a PLC coach now, I’m asking teachers to move as a team. They’re more willing to move as a team than make individual changes....because they’re held accountable to their team, but they weren’t willing to hold themselves accountable to the same thing...so instructional coach was really hard for me.

Another roadblock to her work as instructional coach was that, while her administration provided Emma great training opportunities by sending her to three instructional coaching trainings, they did not provide that training to the teachers she was attempting to coach.
One day we didn’t have coaches and the next day we did. But [her colleagues] never learned that I was going through training.... I think my faculty just kind of assumed we were making it up....and...so not training the faculty on why coaching [was being implemented]...it kind of set us up for failure a little bit.

As a PLC Coach, Emma attends the weekly school leadership team meetings at her Powell Junior. When asked about her feelings about being a part of this team, Emma responded hesitantly, “… honestly, I have a love-hate relationship with it.” She elaborated, “I sometimes feel like I’m doing the job of my admin. That I’m asked to things that are not within my scope of employment. But then sometimes it’s business as usual and we’re getting things done and it feels good.”

I asked if she was comfortable talking about some of those things that are not a part of her job description. “Sure,” she responded, “things like going and having a hard conversation with a teacher.” She continued,

I don’t believe that’s my job and I think it actually harms coaching relationships. The admin need to have those [conversations] – they’re the only people with clout…they’re your evaluators. If it’s a hard conversation…myself and my co-PLC coach…believe that we shouldn’t be asked to do those things.

Emma explained that all three administrators in her building are first year administrators, and she realizes they might be relying on her because she has been at Powell Junior High for her entire career. “I’ve been at my school 13 years. I have the institutional knowledge of how things work. I think that we’re relying on us really heavily for this year.”

I asked Emma how she felt that her involvement with teacher leadership had affected her, her students, and her school. She responded that she never has classroom management issues. “…that sounds like the most cocky, horrible thing to say,” she said,
but then explained that:

… the kids come in here, and I think because I now feel so comfortable in my own skin as a teacher and know that I am playing a role within the decision-making of the school...I know what I expect of them and I say it and then they do it.

She expanded her explanation:

I’m getting really great results in my common assessments with my team. My kids...they’re not...just compliance-listening. They’re really engaged in the learning...oh my gosh – my kids are really killing it in assessments, and have done for years, and so I’m so proud of them. But I think it’s just made me more effective as a teacher in not wasting time with perhaps management or procedures because...they’re taken care of...so, I just get to the learning. I don’t have to waste time with the other things.

Emma had already referred to the effect she has on her school through the influence she has on teams and students through her PLC coaching efforts. To this she added,

I think especially this year, because I have all new admin...I don’t know what they would do without my institutional knowledge. It’s not because I’m better than anyone, I just happen to have been here for 13 years. And so...little things like that could fall apart if...I hadn’t been involved in those other roles within that circle [her sketch of her influence]...I wouldn’t have the knowledge to kind of help ensure that [our school] culture stays...what it’s been.

When I asked what changes she has seen in herself due to these leadership opportunities, Emma responded, “I share my thoughts and opinions more.” She elaborated,

I think my first 2 years in CTL meetings, if I said five words in a meeting, I would be shocked. I was just...absorbing and learning from others; and being in those meetings and a part of those decision-making bodies, I started to realize my opinions are helpful...they voice the concerns of my whole department as well, and so I learned...how to advocate for myself as a teacher and for my department and for my students.

I asked Emma about the mentors she may have had through her career. Emma
told me that when she had first started teaching, she had taken over the classroom of a
teacher who had been at Powell Junior High for 33 years. “… to come into her
classroom…was really intimidating,” Emma shared with me, “But she mentored me for
the last 13 years. She just retired a few months ago, so she spent 45 years at” Emma’s
school.

Emma continued to describe this mentor who had moved from teacher to vice-
principal:

What made her so good was that…in 13 years…while she was my vice-
principal…she never missed a Monday meeting. She was in every collaboration.
She was in my classroom observing myself and observing my students probably
once a week, if not more. So, to have a mentor who knew…[me] at such an intense
depth, how I was at my job, and when I needed course correction…I just trusted
her because she actually knew. She was seeing it with her own eyes. She knew
when I needed to course correct, or she knew when I was doing something right
that I should share with others. So, having that mentor…for 13 years…was
invaluable.

Emma also identified the district content specialist for her subject area as a
mentor. Emma serves with her as part of a district committee. She says of this teacher,

… I absolutely know that [she] is my advocate, that she’s my boss, she’s my
friend…she takes on…the…the tasks that she’s given so well that I think I’ve
grown a lot just watching her, let alone working with her….I think she has a great
vision, and it’s helped me hone in that I need to be that good at providing vision
as well.

In concluding our visit together, I asked Emma if she would provide her definition
of teacher leadership. She responded with, “I think teacher leadership is someone who is
comfortable…being a decision-maker for their classrooms, for their building, for their
team and knowing how to advocate for them when needed.”

Figure 7 provides a summary of Emma’s narrative. It shows the flow of her
experience as a teacher leader, emphasizing both the contextual influences that led here to
teacher leadership and the influence she believes she’s been able to have.

**Figure 7**

*Emma’s Leadership Process*
Evan’s Narrative

In this school district, every junior high and high school have two teachers who teach half-time and work half-time as Professional Learning Community (PLC) Coaches. They receive district training in helping teacher content teams improve student achievement through working effectively as a PLC. Evan has been a PLC Coach at his school, Hillside Junior High, for several years. In his two decades of teaching, Evan has taught at the same school, and in that time, he has held many formal teacher leadership positions, including: PLC Coach, Department Chair, Teacher on Special Assignment as a vice-principal, a member of the faculty council, accreditation facilitator, data specialist, and testing coordinator.

It is through the lens of his work as PLC Coach that he viewed his teacher leadership experience. His sketch shows him receiving training at the district-level or through conferences and then sharing that with content teams, individual teachers, and administration at his school, and then returning to the training. He described the process, “as PLC coach, that’s our real job is, me with the team....how are they implementing the results cycle, and...going through getting results? And, helping, tracking the student learning... helping the team...through that process.”

When asked why he chose to represent his leadership this way, Evan explained that he needed more than one picture to represent what he does as a leader. He related it to the work of PLCs:

I did like that it ended up being like a cycle, because that’s kind of...[what] the whole teaching thing is. You never get it right the first time. And so, we’re always reviewing and getting another chance at it – the same as the students. You know, it’s rare that they get it on the first time, so they get another shot at it and improve.
That was the idea with the circle.

In working with teams, Evan picks up good ideas that he then shares with others. He told me, “…rarely is anything my own idea, you know, it’s always, ‘Hey that’s a great idea. How’re we going to implement it here at our school with our team?’”

I asked Evan how he got started with these leadership activities. He told me about being a department chair years ago and being asked to teach half-time and spend the rest of the time as an assistant principal. When I asked him how he got involved with this assignment, he explained that there was a need and that he was asked to do it, “with the kind of the idea that maybe I’d go into administration. But I didn’t love it.” He continued, smiling, “I know I’ve had principals like, ‘You know, you should go into administration.’ So, I think I was the first effort at that. And that cured me of that.”

His struggle was working with teachers that “didn’t get it.” He clarified, “they couldn’t handle the kids, they didn’t like their job...probably the biggest reason I didn’t go into administration was, I felt like I was babysitting teachers, to a certain extent.”

The experience was not without benefits, however. Evan shared this with me: Seeing...how...teachers behaved, and what kids they sent down and why they sent them down [to the office], I was like, ‘I’m never sending a kid to the office.’...that taught me how to better handle...a kid that’s misbehaving in class.... I mean...there’s times, I mean if it’s a really bad situation then, yeah... I’d send the kid out, but it would be, it’d be pretty rare. So, I mean I’ve learned, you know, discipline, behavior-wise....another thing, I think I do really well...with connections and with contacting parents.

He also gained perspective with how he could influence students:

Early on, being the TSA, there’s teachers like, ‘Oh the kids. It’s all the kids. Kids are failing,’ and ‘it’s their fault,’ and, ‘it’s because they don’t have this and this and this.’ I’ve learned over these years, no its not, it’s the teacher has a much bigger role in whether the kid is successful or not. And we can’t control...their parent involvement or a lot of the things in their life, but there’s a lot of things we
can control, and help with…

Evan has been asked by administrators to take on each of these leadership positions. He did not volunteer. “they’ve always come and said: ‘Hey, would you be willing to do this? Would you like to do this? We think you’d be good at it.’ I asked Evan what qualities he felt he had that might have led his principal to ask him to be a department chair. While he indicated that he wasn’t sure, he said that it might be that he is willing to do the work and to follow-through on assignments. He also spoke of his love of learning and his desire to try to figure out how things work. “That might be why I like to be part of the decision-making process at the school,” he told me.

Although he didn’t enjoy his experience with administration, Evan does enjoy the leadership work that he does as a teacher leader.

I’ve always liked being part of the faculty council and helping the principal lead the vision of the school. I’ve been here 20 years, the principals...we’re on our third or fourth principal, so they kind of cycle through, but I like having a say in, ‘OK – this is what the school [is doing], this is the direction the school’s going to go in.’

He elaborated,

I mean, I’ve always enjoyed it....I don’t want to just, ‘Oh, this is what we’re doing.’ I’m like, if I disagreed with what we’re doing, I’d want to have a part in saying, ‘Why are we doing that?’ and, ‘I don’t think we should do it that way.’ And so that’s why I felt it’s important to be willing to...be on the faculty council, be a department chair, that kind of thing....overall, I’ve really enjoyed it.

Later in our interview, Evan explained further:

I’ve been really lucky with the...principals I’ve worked with and the responsibilities they’ve given me. And I don’t know, I guess, why I earned it, or deserved it, or whatever, it’s just been – I’ve been really lucky with...the people I’ve worked with. I just love my job.

While he coaches teacher teams, Evan said that he also learns from those teams.
He explained:

I’m finally at a point where I’ve been here longer than most people, so I don’t feel like, oh they’ve been doing it longer, so I can always say I’ve been doing it longer, but that doesn’t mean I’m...doing everything the best....so being able to get good ideas, and even...the new teachers that come in...with technology, like with Canvas, for instance...they’re really good at Canvas. I learned from them, and then I could take some of that knowledge to the other teams and say, ‘Oh yeah, this is how Canvas works. This is some cool things you can do with Canvas or Mastery Connect or Nearpod.’

I asked if he had encountered any negative experiences in his teacher leadership efforts. He spoke again of the experience he had as a half-time vice-principal. He also mentioned the difficulty of working with teachers who do not want his help as a coach.

There’s some teachers that I’m like, they’ve lost a little bit of motivation, or they don’t want to – it doesn’t seem like they want to improve as much as, especially younger teachers...really want to improve. So that’s...probably the hardest part is working with...really veteran teachers that are kind of stuck in their ways.

I asked Evan how he felt his leadership activities had affected his students, his teaching, and his school. He responded with, “my first reaction on the students is I wonder if they’ve suffered a little bit? Like if I had devoted myself to just teaching...maybe focused more on the students?” But then he stated, “that was my first reaction, but then I was thinking...what makes my teaching better is knowing just kind of how the school runs, and...why we’re doing things a certain way.” He again spoke of the PLC process and his work as a PLC Coach:

Lately especially. I mean, really with PLC coaching, it’s been the best for students and teaching, because this idea of, ‘this is what we want the kids to know, this is how we’re going to teach them, and this is how we’re going to know if we did it.’ That...thing’s been really made more clear.... I think being a PLC coach has [had the most effect on my teaching]. Being the department chair, or some of the other stuff, I don’t know that it made me a better teacher, or was really that much better for the students. But PLC coach for sure, because it’s...focused on student learning like never before, and if I’m going to try to
teach other teachers how to focus on student learning then I need to really up my game.

Later in our interview together, Evan was hesitant to give credit to his leadership work as being of benefit to improving his teaching, but it seems that his leadership position allows him to positively influence teams throughout his school.

Lately now it’s actually...I know what I’m teaching better and I’m working better with a team.... Oh, man, they’re so in sync and I’m teaching way better because of that. And that’s not anything to do with leadership.... I mean, not with my leadership, but just the district and the focus on collaboration.... A good part of that has been, I’ve been on two good teams, so that I can take, ‘Hey, this is what a good team does, this is how it looks,’ to other teams, you know, and say ‘This is what we do here. This is how it works and how it’s impacting student learning.’

He also suggested that working closely with his administration has been a benefit to his students.

I like being with the principal. Our principal currently is a big ‘making connections with the students’ kind of guy. And so, I feel like having more time with him has made me a better teacher because I get to see the importance of those connections...I’m a way better teacher now because I try to implement those types of things that I’m teaching to others. So early on I didn’t, I don’t think I sensed that as much as I do these last, especially the last 3 years.

In addition to implementing these things that he has learned in his own classroom, Evan’s position as PLC Coach allows him to influence teams throughout his school, as well.

While recognizing the influence his leadership experiences has had on his teaching and his students, Evan was reluctant to credit himself with having influence on the school as a whole.

I don’t know. I...kind of get the sense that anybody could have done it. Whoever they would have had – I mean, I feel like I’ve made the school a better place but not because it’s me. I mean, I go to the meetings, I try to - I put in my input – but, I can’t pinpoint anything and say: ‘Oh, because of, I did this.’

When asked about mentors, Evan responded, “every principal...has been really
good to work with and taught me something different about leadership....same with the assistant principals I’ve worked with.” He went on to credit other teacher leaders with guiding him in finding a balance “teaching in the classroom plus leading other teachers.” He indicated there were several others at the school and district levels who had influenced him.

Evan provided me with his definition of teacher leadership. He stated that a teacher leader is “someone that helps a team – other teachers – be the best they can be. So...teacher leadership is helping other teachers improve student learning – maximize their potential as teachers.”

Figure 8 provides a summary of Evan’s narrative. It shows the flow of his experience as a teacher leader, emphasizing both the contextual influences that led him to teacher leadership and the influence he believes he’s been able to have.

**Tori’s Narrative**

Tori chose to represent her experience with teacher leadership by placing relationships in the center of her sketch. All of her other experiences are shown as puzzle pieces that fit together around relationships. She explained this to me, “what I put in the middle was relationships because I believe strongly that there’s not any influence or any leadership without building that relationship first.” She sees building relationships as reciprocal. “… Helping the teachers or doing whatever also builds your relationship.”

Regarding her leadership activities, she said, “I put all my other experiences as puzzle blocks because all of those fit together to make the relationship and also to influence any type of change or leadership.” Tori explained her leadership activities to
Evan’s Leadership Process

Figure 8

me. She began with her experience of being chosen to be the Department Chair in a brand-new school, Mountain Middle School. “That put me on the leadership team, and...I feel that that gave me a stewardship of the school,” she explained. “I was in charge of
what was happening at our school,” Tori continued, “and what our culture was going to be...so I felt like I had direct input into how we were going to function as a school.” This experience affected Tori’s feelings towards her school. She shared this with me,

For me as a teacher that helped me...“buy in,” I guess, to everything, and I also wanted to learn the best practices and what was the best way to do it because this was what my school was going to be. I was a part of that leadership team directing that...and I’ve been part of that leadership team for the last 17 years, and I’ve been able to see how things have changed as we learn better ways of doing things from best practices...and research.

Her work on the leadership team has also influenced her teaching:

So, it’s helped the school as a whole, but also, I’ve been able to take those ideas that I’ve learned and apply them directly into my classroom....for example, using formative assessments instead of just summative assessments...to direct how you...teach and what you’re going to go through next. How much time do I need to spend on this concept? Do the kids get it? And that type of thing. That wasn’t even in my vocabulary when I first started teaching ...., but now it’s something that is [an] integral part of my teaching, of course, for my students as well. And that came about because of the leadership team opportunities I had …

Tori next spoke of her desire to always learn and innovate. “I firmly believe that...if you’re not learning...if you’re just doing the status quo then you’re actually falling behind,” she told me. She elaborated,

There’s so much new research in education and new approaches...and looking at things collaboratively and through the PLC process that if you’re not changing those things, and modifying things, and tweaking things in your teaching, then you’re actually falling behind and you’re doing a disservice to your students....and so, I’m always trying to learn and innovate.

Tori related how she had done this recently. She spoke of her experience adapting to the challenges of teaching during the pandemic. She said,

I’ve told people that...I haven’t learned as much as...I have, this last summer...because I realize that I couldn’t do online teaching in the springtime when it was thrown upon us...And so, at that point, I did a ton of research and I learned about the effective ways of how [to] teach online, and...all of the
technology parts behind it. That’s the innovating part. Now I feel like, “Yeah, I
could do online teaching. I can do these different programs, and if it’s a new
program, I can figure it out.”

Tori went on to share with me her thoughts of being a new teacher mentor for the
past 17 years. Just as she was chosen to be a Department Chair when Mountain Middle
School opened, she was also asked to be in charge of mentoring new teachers and helping
them become accustomed to the culture of the school. “I go into their classrooms, I watch
them teach, I help them with classroom management issues. I’m just there to help them
be successful,” she told me.

Because she has done this for so many years, she explained, “most of the teachers
that work at [her school] have gone through...my mentor training.” She continued her
explanation,

So, I have that connection and that relationship built up with a lot of the teachers
at the school because I helped them that first year. And so...I’m able to continue
helping them. They still come to me and say, “Hey, what about this? Hey, have
you done this?” So, I’m able to continue helping them that way.

I asked Tori if she could identify the qualities or attributes that she had that led
her principal to choose her as department chair. She believes that it was organization
skills, her relationship with teachers, prior leadership experience, prior professional
development with leadership, and her willingness to help.

Tori sees personal benefits of working with these new teachers, “In terms of my
own teaching...after you’ve taught for a while you kind of get stagnant....you kind of
lose...the, joy sometimes.” She continued,

Working with those new teachers help[s] to re-energize me every year....‘cause
lots of the new teachers are just from college, and they have wonderful ideas and
enthusiasm, and...that’s great...build off of. So that helped me be a better teacher
for my students.

The next aspect of leadership Tori shared with me is reflective listening and speaking. “… this is kind of something…a skill, I guess – that I’ve…established and built up…especially in the last maybe four or 5 years,” she told me. “… a huge part of leading is reflective listening and speaking,” she continued. Tori has been a Department Chair in her school, she currently works as a content collaboration team leader in the district, and she has recently been made her school’s Instructional Coach. Tori told me how reflective listening and speaking have helped her in these leadership roles,

I think that’s been a really helpful in my leadership abilities with my teams because it’s not just me thinking about, “Oh, this is what I want to do. This is what I want to say next.” It’s actually rephrasing back to them…what they said, and that also leads to more conversations.

Tori next shared with me her experiences with professional development. She described professional development as being “so ingrained in what we do.” This culture of professional development came from two principals who made professional development a priority. This has impacted the way Tori thinks about her work. She told me how professional development has:

… been something that’s been ingrained in me that you go and you learn the best practices - you learn what other people are doing. You have those conversations at the conferences with your colleagues which helps you work through things together as a group and you come together with what you want to do....so, I think professional development is...fundamental to any type of change or leadership....if you have a team member that’s...having issues with grading and you have different philosophies on grading, well, [examine the] professional development about grading. What’s out there about grading?...and then go through that and then you can have a common vocabulary and come together in a common form.

Tori next spoke of being approachable, friendly, and caring. She explained, “… if you’re trying to be a team lead, or a coach, or have any type of influence with your
classes...with your students, or with your teachers, you have to be approachable or it’s not going to work.” She explained that this includes being reflective and recognizing the times when she is wrong. She gave me a recent example of this. “… with my students today, I had an issue with – I know this is a shocker – junior high school kids talking and being disrespectful,” she began, “I just got to the point where I didn’t deal with the situation well. I just got frustrated and I said, ‘You need to move. Now!’” She told me that as she reflected about the experience and thought of one young man in particular, she said to herself, “‘Yeah, I didn’t deal with that the best way...that didn’t build our relationship at all....’” She explained what she planned to do next, “I’ve already made a plan as to what I’m going to do next class period with that student....that’s all about being approachable and vulnerable.”

Tori shared with me that being approachable helps her with classroom management. She explained it this way,

In terms of...big discipline issues with my students, I don’t have them because I do make myself very approachable to the students and their parents....and usually, my students are some that are pains in other classes but they’re not in mine, simply because of the relationship, that and the approachability, that I’m able to build with them.

The next aspect of teacher influence that Tori shared with me was the importance of being willing to do the hard work and to keep commitments. “… if I tell a teacher at the school that this is what I will do...I make sure that that’s what I do,” she told me, “…it’s the same thing with your...students. You want to make sure you follow through.” She explained how this helps her with her leadership work, “… it just starts building that trust....the more that I say that I will do, and I do, then the more they trust me to come and
I asked Tori what event started her with teacher leadership. She replied that she asked to be a student council advisor at a previous school her second year of teaching. She shared with me that this gave her opportunities to work with administration and allowed them to see her strengths. She suggested that this event led to her becoming a new teacher mentor, a student council advisor, and a part of the leadership team at Mountain Middle School.

I asked Tori what qualities she had that led her principal to choose her to be student council advisor. She said that it was her ability to be organized, organization, her rapport with the students and with her fellow teachers, and her willingness to work hard and to follow-through.

While speaking about these experiences with leadership, Tori told me that she loves being a team lead. I asked her why that is. “…because I feel like I help my...teammates,” she said. She sees her organization talents as a strength to her team. She also shared with me: “…I’ve learned a lot...through my years of teaching, and...I like to share that....and learn with the team as well.” Tori also enjoys working with adults as an Instructional Coach.

Tori did briefly mention some frustrations that come from her leadership work. “…sometimes there’s a lot of obligations,” she told me, as well as other difficulties. She spoke of these, “…I had some issues with one of my teams this year and it was really emotional because you put so much of yourself into the team and then when something doesn’t work and there’s personality conflict.” “But overall,” she summarized, “I would
say it was positive.”

Tori also sees benefits for her students that come from her leadership efforts. She said, “it helps me be a better teacher to my students ‘cause of everything I’m learning.” I asked her if she could share how these events have helped her teaching and her students.

“I guess I’m more student-centered than teacher-centered,” she told me. She elaborated:

When I first started teaching, I was much more teacher-centered in the classroom. Teaching, lecturing...assignment, that type thing. And now I’m much more student-centered in terms of the activities that they do and the learning that happens. It’s not so...prescribed and directed by me....I think that’s a harder way to teach...and it takes a lot of practice and a lot of learning which is what I’ve done in all these different other capacities....so, I think it’s helped my students that way....I’ve also done a lot more with my students in terms of peer-assessments, self-assessments, knowing where you’re going, how you’re going to get there...So, I’ve done a lot with those, which I hadn’t even heard of...6, 7 years ago, I didn’t ever do anything like that.

Tori did identify some negative aspects of her leadership work in regard to her students. She shared with me, “…for my students it’s been overall very positive. Of course, one negative with my students is, because I am involved in so many things, I do miss my class and I have a substitute.” She concluded, “...some years...can be more intensive than other years.... I know you can have them do Canvas and things like that but it’s just not the same.”

She shared with me what she perceived as the effects that her leadership work has had on her school. “I think I’ve helped...my school,” she explained. “…it’s hard to just say what my impact on the school is, but...I’ve worked with almost every teacher here at this school as the new teacher coordinator.” She continued,

I’ve worked with them in teaching...so I feel like I’ve had that type of positive relationship with them. I feel like I could go to every teacher in the school and...ask them for help or ask them for anything and they’d be more than willing
to help me...I think that I’ve had more of an impact on the [her content] team because I worked on...[it] for so long.

Early on in the interview, Tori used the term *stewardship* in describing the way she felt about Mountain Middle School. I asked her if she would tell me more about this stewardship. “… my former principal …was very much...[an] activist of having every teacher be on some type of...a council or a program or a team that was designed to help the school,” she began. “…he wanted every teacher to know that this was their school, ‘it’s my school,’” she emphasized. Tori further explained:

> Even though it’s not my class, or it’s not necessarily my student in my class, it’s my school....I take ownership of what happens here. If there’s…a change of the tardy policy that’s something that I and every other teacher needs to be part of because it’s our school....we started a PBIS program not too long ago, and...our school made that decision. It wasn’t just the admin [that] made that decision. Everything we do, even going on now to our third administrator, we still have a strong belief that it’s our school, and we work together to make decisions at our school.

This feeling of stewardship, which that first administrator fostered among his faculty, has persisted through two more principals. She told me about this first principal, “our first administrator, he was at our school for...11 years, or something like that. So, he was here for a long time and he kind of instilled that [in the faculty].” This stewardship culture was continued by the “…long timers...[that] are still here.” Tori spoke of the next principal. She told me,

> Our second principal really...saw that …and...he championed that and he fostered it. Like when we...went through a whole revisiting our mission statement and our vision statement and all of that...[he] was very deliberate...he’s like, “… we need to include every person in the decision,”...and we had time to think about it. It took us like a year.

When the second principal left and the third administrator came, Tori explained,
He’s like, “I don’t know about that.” And everyone’s like, “No, no! That’s our mission statement. You don’t change [that].”...because everyone...had that buy-in....our third administrator – it’s his first year. He’s still...trying to figure things out. But we have a very strong leadership team in terms of our department heads, and our coaches that help direct the school....I mean – it’s our school.

I asked Tori if she had any mentors. She identified her first principal, the one who first asked her to be a student council advisor, brought her to Mountain Middle School and appointed her to several leadership positions. She said of him, “… he was a mentor to me in terms of...how to be a leader.” She continued:

He had me be a student council advisor, first off. And...just helped me. He’d give me tips of trades (sic) of how to do things better and more effectively. He also gave me opportunities...to do different activities, different leadership positions or [be] on different teams....[he] was also very complimentary about my skills, so he helped to build me up as a brand-new teacher from college not knowing anything.

Tori also spoke of other teachers who have influenced her with their approach to teaching and helped her coach more effectively.

In concluding our interview, I asked Tori if she would share her own definition of teacher leadership. Here is what she shared with me:

A teacher leader is someone who is respected in the school by others ...A teacher leader is someone who is willing and available to help whenever needed....and a teacher leader is...someone I’d go to for advice....Someone who’s a champion for their school and their staff ...I think that fits really well....A teacher leader is someone who is a champion and an advocate for her school and teachers.

Figure 9 provides a summary of Tori’s narrative. It shows the flow of her experience as a teacher leader, emphasizing both the contextual influences that led here to teacher leadership and the influence she believes she’s been able to have.

**Annie’s Narrative**

Annie’s sketch shows herself in the center with several arms each reaching out to
do a different task, with the tasks written in the space around her. She referred to the busyness caused by her activities as “kind of...like chaos.” She saw that she has “… noticed over the years that it seems like the same few teachers start taking on more and more roles. Cause it seems like once you’re a “yes” person, you’re always kind of like the go-to person for different things.” She stated that she feels “really busy,” but she also said that “… I feel like a lot of the things I’ve taken on have really helped our school a lot.”
One of the activities that she is particularly proud of is a content-area club that she started at her school, Stony Brook Middle School. She said of this club,

[It]...is really important to me. I think it’s just such an awesome program....it helps students...develop their [content-area] skills and they go to competitions where they compete against other students in the...regions, and then...the state....it’s a super fun program...and I just think it’s great because it shows our students are awesome and we actually have the biggest club now in the whole state from middle level....so, I think it’s been a really positive impact with our students, not as with just the competitions but a lot of it has to do with the social aspects. So, we have weekly meetings where the kids go to get together and they socialize...which is just good for the kids to be able to have a place where they can come together and have a social aspect but also learning some new skills.

This club was Annie’s first experience that she could recall where she realized that she could be a teacher with influence. I asked her how she got involved with starting the club. She told me about a student who approach her during Annie’s first week of teaching at Stony Brook, asking why the school did not have this particular club. Annie told her student,

“Oh my gosh. I don’t know if that’s something I can take on right now. Maybe I can get on to it next year.”...the look on her face was just totally crushed.... So, I was like, “No. If you really want [the content-area] club here.... I will go through all the paperwork...we got it approved and we started the club and right away it was just a huge success.

Annie’s student convinced her friends to join. “We ended up that first year with 35 members, which was awesome, and then the last couple of years we’ve fluctuated between about 50 and 60 members. So that’s a huge club....We’re the biggest in the state.”

When I asked Annie what traits or qualities she has that led her to start this club, she told me that she had a desire to build relationships with her students. She also identified the attributes of being a team-leader, she is ambitious, and she is a motivator.
She also mentioned starting and running the school store, which is part of Stony Brook’s positive behavior intervention system (PBIS). She spoke of how one of her administrators “came to me and she wanted to know if I was interested in taking that on, and I think that is a real positive aspect of our school now.”

Annie had approached a previous administrator several years before about starting a school store. “…he was very against it’ she told me, “[he] didn’t want to deal with the paperwork.” The store has become successful. “…it just became a bigger thing than I think we had even planned and I think it’s just awesome,” Annie told me. “I’m loving that it’s just so successful and the kids really just seem to love the...[store]. Last week we had 350 orders which was our biggest week since [the COVID] quarantine.”

Annie has been heavily involved with content-area boards at the state-level. She was president of one, and the financial chair of another. This year she is running workshops for one of the organizations. She shared with me her reasons for participating at the state level, “…I like being involved. I like being with people who get to make decisions for the whole state.” She continued,

I get really actively involved in state boards because.... You can’t complain if you don’t like the curriculum or if you don’t like the standards if you aren’t a part of making them in the first place, so I...really enjoy doing stuff like that.

In addition to these responsibilities, Annie is the collaboration team lead for a group of teachers from multiple schools in her district that teach the same curriculum. One project this group completed this year was to help their students be more successful in online learning. I asked her how she was chosen for this position. She told me that she wasn’t sure, but that the district content representative asked her if she would do it, and
she told him she would.

I asked Annie if she felt like her leadership activities, like supervising the club, had affected the way she teaches or the students in her classroom. She responded, “100%
I think it does because I think anytime you are running something like that it helps because you are making relationships with your students.” She continued her thoughts,

Because I’ve gone on field trips with them, I’ve gone...to different competitions with them. I see them every week in a more casual environment than the classroom...it really helps because then those students, they respect you more, they like you more, they want to behave for you more, and...it makes teaching a lot easier when you’re running a program like that.... I think it really helped my teaching style because I don’t think that I have the behavior management issues...that some other teachers might have with the same students...sometimes I encourage some of those students who might be known as...a more naughty student to join [the content-area club] because then it helps build relationships and it gets them to have a trusted adult where they have more somebody who they can come to, and...I just think that it helps them be a better student overall.

Annie explained to me if these activities she had been involved with have changed her feelings toward her school. “I think so. I feel like I’m more appreciated,” was her reply. She spoke of her experience with the starting the club that she supervises:

I did get some push back...when I started the club. There was a lot of paperwork going back-and-forth...I feel like...once...[the administration] realized what the club actually was, and they realized how awesome it’s been for our students, and how...we’re known as like the best school in the state for [this club] – I think they like having that on...their “resume” or on their list of...awesome accomplishments.... We have all of these different things that I’ve helped bring to this school. I think it makes the school look better which in turn, I think, makes it so that the admin has appreciated me a little bit more than they did when I first got here, when I was kind of...having some push back...But now it’s like the admin 100% supports me and they’re really excited about all these different things.

Annie spoke of balancing these teacher leadership activities with being a wife and mother. “…obviously sometimes I’m more busy than I would like with school stuff,” she
shared with me, “but I’m also a very involved mom.” She continued,

I want opportunities for my students because I want these opportunities for my own children. So, I make sure that I’m at every single dance recital. I am at every single soccer game. I have never missed anything like that. So, I prioritize my family over my school stuff...and then I just kind of fit the school stuff in with my family schedule ‘cause my family comes first. 100%.

I asked Annie if she had encountered negative experiences participating in teacher leadership. “Sometimes I’ve taken on too much,” she admitted. She gave me an example,

Last January...we had the big conference...and at the same time I had a...workshop I was running and it seems like there was one other really big thing that was going on with my school life...so, I just felt like really overwhelmed and really stressed and at the same time I was moving.... I was just really overwhelmed... I feel like this year I’ve been a little bit better with only taking on tasks that I know is not going to interfere with my family life.

Another negative that Annie identified are colleagues who she said, “…will approach me to do something for them that isn’t really my job.” They approach her because of her specific skills in design. She elaborated, “…I feel like they think it’s my job and so they’re not as appreciative.” She told me she has responded,

“Yeah, I can do that for you, but that’s going to be put on my schedule, but I can’t do that until Wednesday.’ Or, ‘I can’t do that until next Friday.” And they’ll be like, “Well, I need this right away.”...well, that’s not even in my job description....it has nothing to do with my job...I don’t mind doing stuff like that. I actually really enjoy it. But occasionally I’ll be approached by teachers and I feel like...they don’t understand that that’s not really my job - I’m just doing it out of the kindness of my heart.

I asked Annie about mentors that she has had. She spoke of her cooperating teacher when she was a student teacher. Annie called her “amazing” and said that “she opened up her entire curriculum to me and...shared everything with me and...made it so anytime I needed a lesson plan I could just go to her and she would...100% help me out.” She spoke of another teacher she has worked with on state boards. Of her she said, “…
she has just always been influential to me about my teaching style in general. She’s very project based. Very hands-on – has lots of fun lessons and so I always kind of wanted to model my teaching after her.”

Another mentor Annie spoke of is a former professor who made a boring topic compelling. “… she made it so fun,” Annie explained to me, “Like she made it…an enjoyable experience to be in her classroom.” Annie also looks to a current vice-principal as a mentor. She said of this administrator, she

…has just been amazing. She is so supportive of all the little dumb things that I want to do. She is always just 100% like, “Yes, let’s do that.” I never get any push back from her, and maybe sometimes I should.

Lastly, Annie spoke of a colleague at her school who she views as a mentor:

She is always just so supportive. I like her teaching style. We have very drastically different teaching styles and…she has taught me to respect that different teaching styles work for different teachers and different students…. We’ll teach the exact same thing in a different way, and I think we both have great results, so she’s just been a huge, positive influence on me.

I asked Annie if she would share her definition of teacher leadership with me. Here is what she had to say:

I think teacher leadership is all about wanting the best for teachers. Wanting to find ways that you can help other teachers be more successful in their own classroom….leadership is not being in charge, necessarily – it’s more like, are you a big part of the support system? Are you a big part of making sure that the whole works and the whole functions?...as a teacher of influence, I feel like I’ve really tried my best to help other teachers be more competent in their own classroom….I think the teacher of influence is all about helping other teachers be the most successful they can be.

Figure 10 provides a summary of Annie’s narrative. It shows the flow of her experience as a teacher leader, emphasizing both the contextual influences that led here to teacher leadership and the influence she believes she’s been able to have.
Figure 10

Annie’s Leadership Process
Amber’s Narrative

Amber explained to me that she has been teaching for 15 years, and in that time, she has seen her influence expand from being primarily with her students to now reaching colleagues and her school as a whole. In her sketch, she placed herself in the center of the page with her head linked to her colleagues; her legs to her school; her hands to her own children, to her schooling, her professional work, and to her mentors; and her heart linked to her students.

In our interview together she addressed each of these, and she started with her heart and her students.

For my students...a lot of it comes from my heart....that’s kind of why I put the line there. Like...how much I care about my students because...I really love them and...they also influence me. It’s kind of a reciprocal thing...some students I reach in their hearts, too....some students, we just have a connection....the kids that I get letters from years down the road, or, you know, people who come back and say things about, you know, what I’ve done that...made a difference for them.... I feel like there’s...varying levels of influence with my students....what I’m aiming for is to be a good...example, or...a force for good in their lives in some way...because they...root themselves down (indicates with her hands into her heart)...into my heart and...I care about what happens to them.

Since she had mentioned that this relationship with her students was reciprocal, I asked Amber if she would share with me how they have influenced her. “My students changed the way that I think about the world,” she responded. She elaborated:

So...I’m planning lessons and things trying to teach them specific concepts or ides or help them be better humans in some way...but I also learn a lot of things from them and...from my interactions with them.... I’ve learned a lot about how to be more empathetic and...more real, maybe.... I’m your teacher and I’m in charge but we’re both just human beings and being able to connect with each other...on a better level...or a more real level is something that...constant interaction with students has helped me develop. And so...I’m always trying to think of them, but they are also teaching me how to...be a better human.
From her heart and her students, she moved to her head and her colleagues. She explained that these were “ideas and...discussions and kind of philosophical things.” She spoke of a neighboring teacher: “we spend a lot of time working through things together and...sharing ideas, and that is a big part of my...career and...the things that I do are connected with her, and...the ways in which we influence one another.” She explained that she is also connected to groups within her school, Desert Dunes Junior High. She serves on the school leadership team, and she has been a Department Chair. In these roles she is able to give input and ideas about the school and to her colleagues.

I asked Amber how she came to be a department chair. “I really just stumbled into being department chair,” she told me. She went on to say:

The previous chair did it for 5 years and needed a break, and I was the only one who wasn’t going through major life transitions at the moment, so I inherited the position. I’ve kept it, though, and I think it’s partly because I can handle it. Not that other teachers in my department can’t, but some of them are constantly overwhelmed and can’t really deal with something else on their plate. I’m also pretty organized, which helps.

She also influences her colleagues informally. “A couple weeks ago they brought new teachers around to a few different classes just to observe,” Amber explained. This gave her the opportunity of “…talking to some of the brand-new teachers in the building about the ways that I do things, stuff that I’ve figured out that works.... I feel like I have some influence there.” In the morning before our interview, Amber had been meeting with other teachers brainstorming and discussing the best ways to teach a concept during a pandemic year. She spoke of her expanding influence:

That’s something that has definitely developed more the last...7 or 8 years...that’s been an area where I feel like I have influence. Where I didn’t really as a new teacher. I was...absorbing the influence from other people...and then when I got
more experience, I was able to kind of influence it the other way and help that way.

Amber next spoke of her work with Desert Dunes Junior High. She connected this work to her legs because it involves “running around doing stuff.” She is currently the journalism advisor and for several years she had also been the student council advisor. Collectively, these students create the yearbook, school newspaper, and plan the school activities. This provided Amber opportunities to influence not only students who were examples to others but the culture of the school. “I had a lot of influence over...those sorts of things in the school building,” she explained, “Just ‘cause my fingers were in the pie ‘cause I was trying to help kids....and I hope that it made things OK, or better.”

She explained that this role granted her freedom to adjust things in the school she felt needed to be done. “…if I saw something that maybe wasn’t...what I was over, but was like ‘Hey, let’s try this thing.’ That I felt maybe a little more freedom to, kind of, do things that needed to be done.” She explained that she does not feel this freedom this year, but she was unsure whether it was because she was no longer over student council or if it was because it has been, in her words, “a crazy pandemic year.”

Amber included her own two stepchildren when considering the reach of her influence. While they live out of her school’s boundaries, they attended the school where she teaches. She had her stepson in a class this year and both he and his sister spent mornings and afternoons in her classroom working on homework. She feels that she has had a lot of influence on their education.

The last portion of her sketch included all of the external things that have influenced Amber. She spoke highly of her masters’ experience. She referred to it as
being “magnificent” because “there were...so many discussions and so many ways in which everybody there kind of influences each other.” She continued, “I took a lot away from that, but it also...has changed how I can influence other people.” She also referenced her involvement with the national council of her subject area and going to its conferences, where she sees a former high school teacher of hers who remains a large influence in her life and has “changed how I do everything else.”

I asked Amber how she has felt about all of these experiences that she has had with influence. She replied that it has mostly been a positive experience for her. She went on to say:

I really like being involved in having a say...in things that we’re doing.... I don’t know that I’m always right, (laughs) or that my opinions are always the best ones, but I really like – I mean – I think everyone likes being consulted or asked for their opinion, right? But...I like having some kind of...influence...on...the culture of our school, or the way that we run things, or...various programs, or things that we’re doing, I...definitely enjoy that. And so, it’s mostly just been a positive experience.

When asked how these experiences have influenced her as a teacher, Amber replied that they have made her more innovative. These experiences have caused her to “think outside the box a little bit and come up with new ways to do things that might improve things or...deciding...which things are already working...and a little bit more discerning about those kinds of things.” This has come from:

Working with students and working with colleagues, and...all the stuff around our school building...that’s helped me a lot better figure out...where change is needed, where change is not needed, and maybe some different ways...to [make that change].

Formal leadership positions have also opened up PD opportunities that amber would not have had access to otherwise. This includes conferences and trainings at both
national and district levels. She indicated that,

> The idea is to take that learning back to our departments, but it’s never as strong when it’s second-hand. I’ve also had the opportunity for professional development through the school leadership team. I really appreciate the chances I’ve had, but I sometimes worry that it’s not equitable—all teachers should have those same opportunities.

Amber indicated that these experiences have also helped her work with colleagues more effectively. “I also have found better ways to work with some colleagues...and it...really helps when I kind of get feedback about certain things,” she explained, “it’s helped me a lot...to understand different people’s needs or...the styles they use to function.”

In addition to being the Department Chair, Amber is currently a part of her school’s leadership team, which meets monthly to discuss the vision and values of the school. I asked her what brought her to this position. She told me,

> Our principal just asked me – we just kind of formed it last year – he just asked me...to join it. He was just kind of looking for people who...were pretty involved with the school, or...people who...would be good for that.

When I asked Amber if she could identify the event that started her desire to have influence, she recounted that 5 or 6 years into her teaching she started to “receive feedback from students that I had been an influence in their lives....students who had...graduated from high school at that point.” She continued, “… I was receiving... comments from the students or former students...that I had made a difference in their lives.” “Oh, that’s, that’s what I want to be,” she thought, “… that’s the kind of teacher I want to be is the kind of teacher who’s helping these kids.”

Amber recalled an experience with a particular student from several years ago:
In ninth grade...she had a really hard time with depression and anxiety and it was, it was pretty rough...we were really close, you know, she would come in and chat with me and things like that and her mom sent me an email, me and another teacher, and she said that she’d asked [her daughter] about...like she was having a hard time getting up out of bed in the morning. She just couldn’t even...get to school and she’s like, ‘Ok. I need you to tell me...five good things that would be worth getting out of bed for.’ And she said that me and this other teacher were two of the five reasons that she could get out of bed every morning, and...that was pretty significant to me...to be a student’s reason...to get out of bed when she was super depressed...that meant a lot to me...that I could have that kind of an influence on...another human being...became...a really important thing for me...and made me want to be that kind of person for other kids who might need me...that relationship definitely...made a difference in me...she changed me...she...showed me that...that I could have that kind of an influence on somebody...it made me want to make sure that my influence on students is positive.... That I’m never...leaving them with something...ugly to remember. That...I’m leaving them with something that can change their lives for the better.

When I asked Amber about mentors she has had, she focused on those who have helped her view things in a different way or have influenced her teaching. She mentioned a former principal who helped her see and do things differently. She spoke of her former teacher, who she now sees at conferences, “he definitely is somebody that, that changes the way that I look at things.” She mentioned her high school choir teacher who “was one of those...legendary teachers.” A “magnificent woman” whom “thousands and thousands of people’s lives were changed by;” a teacher who Amber keeps in contact with and who changed her as a teacher and who she thinks of often when she is teaching.

She went on to mention professors from her graduate school experience. Amber recalled how one “changed everything about my teaching” because she was “able to be innovative and creative and...change things.” Another professor used drama and movement as a way of teaching, and “definitely had a huge influence...both on how I teach and on just how I look at the world or how I look at art.”
When asked what her definition of teacher leadership would be, Amber told me that a teacher leader is “somebody who...connects with others...and is willing to...spark change or...to make improvement...and...give input...or help or assistance.” Someone able to “…improve culture and learning…and...shape culture.”

Figure 11 provides a summary of Amber’s narrative. It shows the flow of her experience as a teacher leader, emphasizing both the contextual influences that led here to teacher leadership and the influence she believes she’s been able to have.

**James’s Narrative**

In the center of his sketch, James drew himself as a heart with legs and arms. His arms are shown outstretched in an action of sharing. He is standing on the shoulders of people he respects. In his interview, he referred to the phrase, “Standing on the shoulders of giants” as his reason for representing himself on the shoulders of others. Among the “giants” he mentioned were his wife and children, his parents, influential professors, colleagues, members of his masters’ cohort, and mentors. Above him in his sketch is a representation of the standards-referenced grading scale that he and three or four colleagues were influential in implementing at his school.

James began his explanation of his experience with teacher influence by talking about the heart and outstretched arms.

The first thing I started with is just a heart because I love...teaching....It’s something...that I feel passionate about. I love it. I, I love being able to work with the students....I’ve got an amazing school community and...throughout the

1 All sketches, except for one, are provided in Appendix G. The one exception was not included because it contained highly identifiable information. It was not included to protect the participant’s confidentiality.
Figure 11

Amber's Leadership Process

The ability to handle the pressures of the position and being organized

- Took initiative to make needed school changes
- Influenced student leaders who influenced the school
- Access to PD opportunities that improve her teaching

- Exchanges ideas with colleagues
- Influences the culture of her school
- Works with colleagues more effectively
- More innovative in her teaching

Desire to help her students

- Desire to build strong relationships with students
- Desire to help her students achieve
- Learns from her students as they learn from her

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years...students here have inspired me. I love working with my...colleagues. So...I love what I do, most of the time.

James explained his outstretched arms as a “gesture of sharing.” He explained that as he went through the process of thinking about his influence, he asked himself what he loved about teaching. He realized that one of the things he loves is to share.

One of the things I love is sharing things. And so...if I’ve had any influence, it would be because I’ve taken stuff that other people have shared with me and shared it with other people.” He went on to explain more about this sharing, saying, “I’ve gotten so many great ideas from different conferences and workshops and...observing people...in the district...other...teachers, and I’ve basically just taken those and tried to use them and share them with other people.

When I asked him about things that he has shared, he responded with, “I like sharing pretty much anything that I’m excited about.” He described going to conferences and learning a new skill and then immediately wanting to share that skill with his students. He also recalled a time when he shared an assignment with other teachers from his content area in a district collaboration. After sharing that experience, he stated:

I just like to share stuff.... I talked to one teacher one time that said they used to work in a district where every...teacher in the district had their thing that they did, but they would not share how to do that thing. It was kind of their thing that made them unique and special. And...I just, I think that would be an awful way to live. An awful place to work because, I don’t know. Everything I’ve got I’ve pretty much borrowed from somebody else, so, I want to be able to pass that on.

This desire to share is at the core of what James sees as one of his initial experiences with influencing others. He described to me how this desire began:

I don’t know if it’s the thing that got me started, but maybe something that helped me see how valuable it is to have somebody help you and share with you – my first year...was really rough. I came into a program where the teacher before me was really well-liked, and...the students felt like the way she did things was the way to do everything. And...my top group, they pretty much had the attitude of, “This is our classroom and we’re going to tell you how things are done here.” So, it was a really rough first year and I had...a friend...he was a couple years ahead of
me – had been here a few years – and every day at lunch I would just say...[to him], “What do you do? What would you do if this happened? If a kid does this, how do you handle that?” And he always helped me. He gave me some recommendations of things to read, and – I don’t know. I don’t know if that’s when I started sharing things with others ‘cause I really didn’t have a ton to share when I first started, but, he inspired me to want to help other people or share any good ideas.

James’s experience with this mentor led him to seek out opportunities to help younger and newer teachers. This work was not a result of a formal leadership position, but instead an informal desire to help his colleagues. “I always want to say, ‘Hey! Here’s an idea that helped me a lot, maybe it can help you, too.’”

This desire to share influenced James’s experience with influencing his school, Lincoln Junior High, to adopt standards-referenced grading. About 7 years ago, James went to an assessment conference with the department chairs and some administrators from his school. The final speaker was Thomas Guskey, who spoke about grading. While initially skeptical, James found that Guskey’s presentation resonated with his own thinking.

We actually had to leave...I think, fifteen to twenty minutes early out of the presentation, so we had all of our bags there and we were sitting there waiting to hear what he would say, and, the things that he said made so much sense. And it was really exciting to think about, hey, grading can be about student feedback. It can be about, um, helping students be motivated to learn. It can be about helping students know where they’re at and where they want to be. And so, we just, we actually, as we were walking out the door our...assistant principal had to like, kind of drag us out and be like, ‘Come on guys! We got to go catch the plane. We got to get home.’

When he returned home, James started sharing his thoughts about the conference with other teachers. “We just talked about it and had some meetings about it and just voiced our...feelings about it. And then we did go to another of those PLC conferences
and had some more discussion during that conference.” This led James and three or four of his colleagues to act and work for grading reforms at Lincoln Junior High.

We all got excited about it but I, I definitely, along with like maybe three or four of us, five, five of us were, we were really pushing hard for it. Because we felt like – first off, we wanted the chance to be able to do it ourselves. And once we started doing it, and, and experiencing it, then we felt like, ‘This is really good.’ If I feel like I get really excited about something I’ll go and talk to people, so after the conference was over me and a couple of the teachers we just started saying ‘We’ve got to do something about this....We need to try this out.’

After seeing the work that James and his colleagues were doing, his school administration supported them by inviting Guskey to speak to their whole faculty. James explained that this was “a turning point” in his efforts. Lincoln Junior High has adopted standards-referenced grading and James continues to serve on the grading committee to refine his school’s efforts.

I asked James how he felt his grading-reform efforts were influencing his students. He answered that he wants his students to know that his main goal for them is that they learn. For James, grading is about providing feedback to students and helping them to be motivated to learn. He emphasized his belief in second chances and that he wants to take from their fears about grading expressed in statements like, as cited by James, them the fear of “I can’t make mistakes. I have to be perfect now. I have to ace this test.” His experiences with this have led him to advocate for his beliefs with other teachers. “I just have had some really neat experiences allowing kids second chances. And allowing kids to make [up missing assignments].”

James has been a department head for 10 years. He shared with me that he was likely initially chosen for this position because he had more teaching experience than
some in his department, and that others were too busy to accept the position. However, he also shared with me that he is dependable and that his administrators know that he would “speak up” when necessary. I asked him if he felt that this formal leadership position influenced his teaching, his students, or his school. He replied that it gave him a “school-level” perspective.

I think it helps me be able to see outside of just my classroom and be able to see the kids – you know, these are students with eight class periods....It’s also helped me see some of the things that are school-wide that we’re trying to work on and be able to support that in my classroom.

His position as department chair has also provided access to conferences, which he indicated gave him tools to help him be more successful as a teacher and help his students have “good experiences in the classroom.”

He also feels that he has influence with other department chairs as he meets with them. He jokingly explained that this is because he is a “loud mouth,” but went on to explain that “if there’s something that I feel strongly about I feel I should say something.”

He sees his grading reform efforts as the greatest influence he has had on his school.

We concluded our interview together with him sharing his definition of teacher leadership. He spoke of themes that surfaced throughout our interview; love and passion for teaching, building connections with students and colleagues, and sharing with others.

If I think of teachers who have influenced me it’s basically people who...love what they do. They’re passionate about it. They, they have worked hard to try to...do the best that they can to try to connect with students and to teach in a positive way. And then they have shared that with me....So, I think, I think sharing things and also, like, asking for help from others, working together. That’s probably the best way to help and influence others is just by...creating those relationships through sharing and love and help and caring and things like that.

Figure 12 provides a summary of James’s narrative. It shows the flow of his
experience as a teacher leader, emphasizing both the contextual influences that led him to teacher leadership and the influence he believes he’s been able to have.

**Figure 12**

*James’s Leadership Process*

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**Steve’s Narrative**

A major theme of my interview with Steve was his desire to help his students feel successful. This was apparent in his sketch that he shared with me before our interview. At the top, he shows a confused student and a happy teacher who shows the student how to use the machines in his shop. The result is that the student is now happy and feels successful. He explained this to me:

I’ve seen some...confused...students that are not knowing what they’re doing...in the shop...and that’s where I...come in. Because that’s what I love to do is to teach people how to use things and...to do things with their hands and, and learn that they can create great, wonderful, amazing things using those machines....and think...“I can do things.”
He explained that helping his students become successful with the machines came from his own experience of gaining expertise with machines.

The scenario on the bottom of the sketch shows a student as a couch potato, sadly sitting in front of a TV. Steve is the coach who helps him find success and happiness on the track. He explained to me that as a coach:

...You’re teaching them...life skills as far as how to run, but also, “You know what? You’re going to struggle through things and it’s going to be hard, but you need to, you know, not pick yourself up by your bootstraps but sometimes you’ve got to do things that are hard. And you’ve got to accomplish them, and, and it pays off when you struggle and you take first or second or third, or, or maybe even just try. And you don’t even, you don’t even finish the race but you at least tried and you accomplished something,”

Steve values building relationships with his students, and he sees the way he teaches his subject as a way to help them to not only be successful in his class, but to help them be successful in their lives.

I’ve had students that have struggled in the past and had parents that have not been the best influences on their lives...as a teacher you learn that you don’t just teach your specific subject...often you’re teaching students how to deal with social and environmental issues around them.

He shared with me his desire to break down the walls that students sometimes put up that prevent them from learning. “If you can kind of break those walls down a little bit, sometimes you’re able to teach your subject better than others because [the students are] more than willing to listen to you.” Steve believes that these barriers that students can put up is detrimental to their learning. “If you have a student that’s kind of closed off because of situations going on at home, they won’t listen to history. They won’t listen to math,” he explained. “They won’t listen to anything because they’re worried about mom or dad or whatever the situation at home.”
Steve explained to me how he helps those students:

Something that I’ve had to learn is… I have to feel my kids out as far as, are they in a safe place to be able to learn? And if they’re not, then I can recognize that…and sometimes I maybe am not 100% patient with them – and I realize that, you know, they’re my… students that I’ve sent down to the front office time and time again, or just a few times, or I’m having trouble with them or they’re not turning in assignments. Well, sometimes I have to take the time to find out why they’re not doing those things. Is there something else and what is that?…That’s probably the biggest thing that I’ve kind of learned is to look at those students.

Steve’s experience with teacher leadership began when he was asked to be the department chair of a newly opened school, Carter Middle School, the year after his student teaching experience. He recalled his student teaching experience: “It was difficult there,” he explained, “but I learned and I…was able to develop skills and abilities.” He explained that he did a good job at that school. His cooperating teacher knew the principal who was preparing to open Carter Middle School and spoke well of him. That principal approached Steve and said, “Hey…you’re a pretty good teacher. Can we talk?” Steve shared the results of that discussion with me: “…he came over and visited me one day and then we got an actual official…interview, and he offered me the job before the school was built.”

I asked Steve what qualities he thought that this principal saw in him when he asked him to serve as department chair. He responded, “I think I was a good leader. I was able to make and keep good relationships with others, people believed I would stand up for their thoughts.”

Steve spoke of the first event when he realized that he had influence as a teacher. He related how he was on the leadership team as they opened Carter Middle School his first-year teaching. “We met before school started as a Leadership Team and began to
plan a few things. I sat in those meetings overwhelmed, thinking, I don’t know what I am doing making these decisions for others.”

Since then, Steve has gone on to open two more schools, where he also served as department chair. He currently works half time as a teacher and half time as a district content specialist, where he has helped to establish six new programs at six new schools. “I’ve kind of been a teacher as far as in students, but then also [of] teachers as far as facilities and teachers with being the content specialist of…” his subject area.

Except for his student teaching experience, Steve has not taught without having some kind of formal leadership position. I asked him how he thought that these leadership experiences have affected his teaching. He shared with me an experience he had during the first few years of his teaching experience. He was hesitant in his explanation because he didn’t want to seem boastful, but he recounted how several teachers in his subject area in the district were not teaching well. He recognized this and wanted to do something about it. He explained:

From the beginning, I was different from them. And there was about six of us in the district that graduated...in about a 3-year period...and we all pretty much had kind of the new mindset of changing things and doing things a little bit different. And, maybe I was just the loudest one of us six, but we kind of started a new change and...I just kind of didn’t look back.

Steve was approached by district administrators who encouraged him to apply to be a district content area specialist. Even though he was busy with coaching, family, and serving in the community, he applied and was chosen for the position. As he predicted, the position has brought him additional work. When I asked him why he chooses to continue to serve as a leader, after thinking for a moment he responded, “…The biggest
reason why I keep doing it is, probably, I enjoy it.” He continued:

I don’t think it’s the personal like satisfaction that I’m controlling other people, ‘cause I’m not that way, but I think...Well, as of late, there’s a few areas in, I guess in [his subject area] that are kind of struggling with, maybe trying to figure out what the right direction is, and some of them I don’t totally agree with. And so that’s why I’ve stayed in the past 2 years – because of that...so maybe I’ll stick around to help kind of, at least kind of protect my teachers that...I worked with for so many years and...help kind of, maybe try to change the way that it’s being implemented so hopefully it will better, it will better the students and make it better for the teachers, as well. So that’s kind of why I’ve stayed around, but I think this probably will be my last year though, being a content specialist. Just because I think there’s enough other people out there that are willing to work and, and maybe...I’ve realized that maybe I don’t have all of the best ideas. That there’s other people that have some of the best ideas, or better ideas than me, and, and I’m getting tired.

Being a content specialist has also shaped the way Steve influences other teachers. As a half time teacher and a half time content area specialist the teachers he works with see him as one of them and he has their trust. “I still teach and so I have those experiences where teachers kind of still view me as an ally with being a teacher. And so...they’ll confide in me.” This allows Steve to help unify and strengthen the work they do as teachers in his content area district wide. He explained:

I can go to them and say, “Hey. You know what? This curriculum that we’re being asked to do or teach is...really difficult and I’m having a hard time as a teacher teaching it, as well, but I think we need to jump on board and this is how I’m accomplishing it and this is what I’m doing to be able to fulfill it.” And so forth. And so they’re willing to understand and listen to me. Where, sometimes if it’s a district full-time person they’re looked at more as...a coat. And, “You don’t know what you’re doing anymore because you’re not teaching in the classroom anymore. So, don’t tell me what to do because you’re not a real teacher anymore.” You know?

This same relationship also helps Steve build bridges between administrators and teachers. He described this to me:

There’s...people at the district...that are kind of over me that will come in and they
will do something or say something...and the teachers will get all mad and they’re
ticked off and they’re...frustrated and then they’ll come to me and say, “Hey.”
Either the district person will come to me and say, “Hey...I need you to help me
fix this.” Because they know that I have the, a better relationship with [the
teachers]...Or the teacher will come to me and say, “Hey. What in the heck are
they doing? Because they just did this or they just said this....Why are they doing
this? What’s going on?” So then I can kind of go in and smooth things over and
kind of help – try to help them see on both sides.

Steve explained that his work as a district content specialist has helped shape his
own teaching. Part of being a content specialist allows him to visit classrooms of other
teachers throughout the district.

I’ve had a different career. It’s been fun. I’ve learned a lot. It’s been good....I’ve
been able to see a lot of different ways that teachers teach....not just my own craft,
but a few different ways of other people’s – the way they teach. And it’s been the
good and the bad, as well...I think it helps you be a better teacher to teach other
teachers how to do it because sometimes you learn, maybe not the best way, but
then also sometimes you learn that...your way maybe is not the best, and you can
still change your craft, as well....I’ll change the way that I do it because I see other
people do it differently than I do it.

Steve has seen some negative effects on his classroom, as well. While he teaches
in the classroom every-other day, the demands of his district content specialist
assignment do not limit themselves to the days he is not in his classroom. On the days he
is with his students, he explained:

I’m not only a teacher. I’m still the content specialist...I have people calling me,
emailing me...“Hey, can you take care of this?” or whatever, and so I’ve got to
have that on my mind and it’s not only my students on my mind.

Our interview together concluded with the question of what Steve considered the
definition of teacher leadership. Here is how he responded:

This is more maybe...religious than maybe you’d like, but...the greatest among
you is going to be the one that’s your servant.... I don’t know why I’m getting
choked up, but...I think the biggest reason why I am pretty, pretty well respected
with my...teachers in the district [who he works with] is ‘cause I’m not afraid to
go talk with them. I’ve had teachers break down to me and say, “Hey....my dad is in the hospital with heart...failure, and...I can’t keep doing this, and...my wife is this situation” or...“my kid tried to commit suicide last weekend”...I’ve had a bunch of different stuff where most of the time I’m talking with the teacher it’s about the curriculum, but also, they all know that they can just open up and...I have a few of them, as well, that I do the exact same thing with...and I’ll talk with him about stuff...and they just know that I’m a normal human being and I’m not this great and all-powerful district person. That I’m just a friend of theirs. …And as I go back to my administrations, that’s probably the ones that I respect more than any of them are those that, their door’s open always, and I could go in and say, “Hey. I’m having a hard time with this.” And...them not being judgmental, and not being...accusatory...but just: “Well, tell me why. Tell me what’s going on.”...That’s probably the biggest thing [in] leadership is...if you want to be a leader, then people need to know that you care....If they don’t know that, that you care about them and you want them to succeed, no matter what it is, that you’re not out to get them...then they won’t do anything for you. But if they do, then, they’ll make the changes that they need to.

Figure 13 provides a summary of Steve’s narrative. It shows the flow of his experience as a teacher leader, emphasizing both the contextual influences that led him to teacher leadership and the influence he believes he’s been able to have.

**Renée’s Narrative**

Renée’s sketch illustrates herself as a gatekeeper, standing between her teachers and new initiatives, prep. changes (the classes a teacher is teaching), and mean parents. A thought bubble appears over her head asking, “Is this the best for students AND not burn out my teachers?” Our interview began with her explanation of her role as gatekeeper: “Really I feel like...for me...this is definitely...my responsibility as a teacher for my other teachers here.” She explained to me why she felt this way. For 2 years she worked at her school, Mountainside Junior High, as an Instructional Coach, helping new teachers, and for over 10 years she has served as Department Chair. Renée made it clear that she always wants to do what is best for students, but, as she told me, “I also want to make
sure it’s okay for teachers as well. Because I’ve experienced the burnout. I’ve experienced...a lot of changes.”

She explained to me that she has experienced, “‘Let’s try this. Let’s try this.’ And it’s always like, ‘what’s best for kids?’ But they never talk about what’s best for teachers.” She detailed her concerns:

They never talk about what’s best for teachers....and so, really my big thing is...making sure that...yeah, it’s good for kids, but is it sustainable for my teachers. Is it going to be okay for them? Is it going to affect their mental health? Is it going
to be too much and are we expecting teachers to do too much? Because, you know, as you’ve seen over the last 20 years...it’s not just teaching anymore, it’s also all the different – I need to be a child psychologist. I need to be all these different things. I need to take care of the emotional. You know, all these different things and I’m like, ‘I just want to teach [my subject]...that’s what I signed up for, and my job description keeps changing.

She explained that she agrees that we need to change, “that’s part of education. Like we need to change but also make sure that we’re doing the correct change. And that we’re actually not harming teachers in the process.” She continued, “I feel like there’s so many times where they just go, ‘well it’s best for kids.’ Well, that’s great, but if you burn out teachers in the process, that’s not what’s best for kids.”

Renée is on Mountainside Junior’s leadership team. She expressed that this provides her the opportunity to protect her fellow teachers. She shared with me:

Whenever they have new things come in, I really am kind of like the Devil’s advocate and I’ll be like, “Why are we doing this and how is this going to help? And let’s go through all the different angles.” To the point where it’s kind of like they know that I’m going to be questioning everything because, whereas other teachers are like, “This sounds great! Let’s do it!” I’m like, ‘No. No. No. No. I’m not onboard yet because I need to know how it’s going to affect the teachers. What are the expectations? What is the long-term plan here and, and what really is happening at this point? And, and also, how do we present this to teachers to not overwhelm them?’ Even if I’m fully onboard and I think it’s a great plan, a lot of times the way they present things is also overwhelming to teachers because they presented it incorrectly.

Renée shared that, “my teachers know that...I’m always there for them, like going to bat. Like even like with the mean parents.” She gave me an example of how she does this, “I have teachers come to me all the time like, ‘I just got this email.’ They’ll forward me an email from a parent and say, ‘How do I respond? How do I deal with this?’ She continued,

A lot of times I will actually compose the response and then send it back to them
and say, “This is what I would say.” Or they’ll send me the response and I’ll edit it and say, “These are the suggestions I would make, you know, because you want to make sure...it’s not misinterpreted.”

I asked Renée if teachers come to her for help because of her formal leadership position as Department Head or as a fellow-teacher. She said, “I think it starts off as...a formal thing. And...then it’s developed into kind of a – I’m just the go-to person.” She feels that this is because “I’ve been through so much and have a lot of experience and...they just know that I will take care of them....I’m not going to brush them off but I’m going to see it through the end.”

She shared with me a recent experience where she felt she had protected her teachers from what she saw as unreasonable changes to the classes they taught. Renée recalled, “I had an administrator that wanted to really change things up and I’m like, ‘Okay. I understand. I see where you’re coming from. I see you want to make smaller teams, but at the same time, you haven’t taught for a long time and you don’t realize how hard it is to change a prep.’” Renée indicated that he responded, “Oh no, it’s not that big of a deal. You just jump in and the team supports you.” She replied, “Um, it kind of is. Like, nope, nope, nope. And nope, we’re not doing that this year. This is where everyone wants to be at. They’re great there.” She continued:

I see your point, but...it’s not going to be a favorable outcome...my teachers are miserable though, if they don’t want to be there, then it’s not effective...and they feel like they’ve worked so hard this year where they’re at and they want to enjoy the fruits of their labor after...working so hard this year to build an online curriculum and all those different things, and then to say, ‘Well, you know, we’re going to change you next year and you get to start over again.’ And I said, ‘This is not the year to make any drastic changes.’

The first experience that Renée had with formal teacher leadership was
Department Chair, a position she has held for 15 years. I asked her what she believed to be the reasons that she was asked by her administration to take that position. She recalled, “I was already someone who was taking an active role in leading the department.” She explained that she and another teacher in her department had teamed up as a PLC when the PLC process was just beginning in her district. She told me that this other teacher “and I had taken the initiative to do that and started bringing other teachers onboard.”

Renée continued her explanation:

We’ve been on the same page every day since then. And...the other teams, other people started to see power in that and started bringing them in. So, I was already kind of leading that 8th grade team, and even the (subject) team, and getting everyone together collaborating.

So, Renée explained, when the former Department Head left Mountainside Junior, I was just kind of the…obvious choice [to be department chair] because I had already kind of worked in that position and...I was willing to do it...and...I was naturally already like someone people were coming to...and helping with...the PLC.

Renée’s current principal has tried to develop more leaders within her school. Renée has mirrored this as she leads her own department.

I have tried to...delegate.... I’ve got another teacher that goes to my Steering Committee Meetings on the District level for me. You know, trying to help other people get involved so I’m not doing everything. I’ve tried definitely to spread all that responsibility out a little bit more than in the past...and it’s been helpful to have more people know what’s going on versus me being the only one and, and, ‘OK, here’s Renée again saying what we need to do. You know, it’s nice to be like, “Well, Todd this time is going to tell us what to do. Or...Jane’s going to tell us what’s important.” And it’s just nice to, you know, to have a little bit more support that way.

Renée is currently part of Mountainside Junior’s leadership team and in the past, she was her school’s Instructional Coach. I asked her how she was chosen for these
positions. She told me that she was recommended for the leadership team. Renée feels that she may have been chosen to be an instructional coach because of her masters’ degree in instructional design and that, at the time, she was working on her administrative endorsement. Regardless, Renée felt that it was a natural fit. “They were seeing the need for more onboarding for teachers. For the new teachers. And...they put me in charge of that.”

Renée has also been involved at the district and state levels in her content-area. I asked her how she became involved in leadership at those levels. She received an email early on in her career seeking people to teach classes at the state level. She recalled thinking,

“Oh, that sounds like fun. That would be a great way to get involved at the state level, to know who that is.” Because I’m always like, I know it’s all about the connections. Like, who do I know? If I know someone up there than I have a better idea of what’s going on and I could advocate better for my school...so I’ve always kind of thrown myself into those kind of things just so I could be a voice of reason. You know, like, so first of all I’m informed.

In regard to her work at the district-level, she indicated that she knew the district content specialist in her area and that, “He trusted my opinion. He knew I was competent...and so he picked me for that committee.”

I asked Renée about informal leadership roles that she has been involved with. She described to me how she looks after the new teachers in her building, introducing herself and learning more about them, and asking them how they are doing and if they need anything. She elaborated:

Just trying to find a way to serve or something....I’m already out there and can see they’re busy. “Let me just help you do that.” And, and I think just kind of forming that family here. Like, we’ve got each other’s backs....I think that’s been a really
great way...to help other teachers and to be an informal leader, as well.

I asked Renée how she felt as she has been involved in these experiences of influence. She began by explaining that she learned to be cautious and that this caution led to her role as gatekeeper:

When I came here (her current school)... was super just like, “Yeah! Let’s try this! Let’s do this. Let’s, you know, what’s the worst thing that could happen? Let’s try it. Let’s just jump in with both feet.” And...as I did that over and over again, and I saw my own burnt (sic) out...I saw like, “Oh my Gosh.... I need to take a different approach to this because...enthusiasm is great, and we want to be moving forward, but the same time...could you be a little more cautious?”

Because there is always a cost with something new. And...so that’s the big thing that I have changed over the years is just that, whenever something is presented to me new, I’m way more cautious about it and I want to do way more research into it and talk to other people who have already done it and get their experience and get their advice, versus just, ‘Well, let’s just try it and see what happens.’ Because I’ve seen the...negative of...being involved with those new initiatives....So that’s been my big experience...with all these different things. Just, what is the cost on teachers? What are we doing to teachers? And...I get really tired of the arrogance...and...I’m not going to give them any resources or any money or anything like that....And so that’s where I get very frustrated...is this top-down approach of, ‘You have to this, this.’ And that’s where I see myself as a, like, “No. No, we’re not going to do that, because it’s not OK for teachers.”

I asked Renée if she would share with me how her involvement in teacher leadership, both formal and informal, has affected her students, her teaching, her school, and herself. She began by explaining that it had broadened her perspective to see things from the administration’s point-of-view. She described this for me:

It helps me see that...sometimes we get so stuck in...our classroom and it’s only our perspective. But also seeing...the administrative’s (sic) perspective of what they have to go through as far as...discipline, or dealing with the parents and stuff. And so I’m always wanting to keep that in mind, like...both sides of that coin....yes, as a teacher this is my role but also how can I help...my students in
other ways because I know there’s more going on than just my class.... I always kind of have that in the back of my mind because...I think also my admin... endorsement...really helped me see that other side there...so, when I’m dealing with students, I’m always trying to think of that admin perspective, as well... “how will I deal with this …? How is this going to affect the admin? If I do this, is this going to escalate? Do I then have to go to the administration or can I handle this here more effectively, and, and, deal with this?”...it also helps me...think like, “How am I communicating with parents? How am I making sure that I’m being clear enough that it doesn’t have to go to that next level ...?”

She also explained how leadership experiences have helped her be more reflective as a teacher, “I’m always reevaluating. Every time I go to a meeting, I learn something new.” She described a recent professional development meeting she attended about response to intervention (RTI). She shared her thought process with me:

The first thing [the presenter] was talking about is...our essential standards and...he’s talking about how you can’t teach all the essential standards, or all the standards that are in the core...so, the first thing I’m doing is...I’m pulling up our core...while he’s talking, going, “OK, what am I teaching? What could I cut out?”...I’m automatically going to my teachers and saying... “How is this going to affect my students? Can I do what he’s saying I can do and still not harm my students knowledge-wise or content-wise?”

Renée feels that she contributes to Mountainside Junior High as someone who can help mediate differences. “I am that voice of reason that shows up at these meetings,” she told me. She described a recent incident in a committee meeting where two of her colleagues were unable to agree on an issue with RTI. “You’re both right, and let me explain why,” she told them, and she went on to help them see the other’s point-of-view. She continued saying she helped them

… to see both perspectives, because some people get so caught on, “My perspective’s the right one. My answer’s the right one.” And, me trying to go, “No, you’re both correct and let me explain why and let me bring it together...but we have to decide now what’s best for everyone and if this is going to work and...how do we within the structure of the school....I was seeing...both [sides]...trying to...bring them together.
Renée has, at times, mediated conflict between teachers and her administration. She shared with me an event that happened 2 years ago that was “ripping the faculty apart.” Her administration was advancing a flex-time proposal for her school that was angering her faculty. Renée recalled,

I had so many teachers coming to me and complaining...and upset, and trying to talk it through with me...because they knew I was part of that process [of making a decision about the flex time] and so they wanted me to hear...their concerns.

After these concerns were raised, her administration changed direction on their proposal. Renée shared that, for her, the experience “… was very exhausting...hearing everyone’s concerns about it. Either pros or cons, and their feelings...it gets stressful at times and you kind of feel a little bit more of the weight.” In spite of that weight, Renée told me “I’m happy to do it at the same time.” She is careful to watch what burdens she is taking on. “…there’s sometimes when you have to like step back and say, “OK. I’m overwhelmed right now” she explained. There are times when she thinks, “I have to take a break from this for a minute. I don’t want to talk about it. I’ll talk about it tomorrow,” making sure that she’s “not doing too much” or “taking on too much burden.”

But she was quick to say that she enjoys the leadership opportunities. “I feel like it’s been such a positive thing for me.... I think it’s been positive for the school...I’ve helped to make sure that we’ve maintained the integrity of teaching...I’m willing to do that.” I asked her what it was that she liked about the leadership roles. She shared with me that,

I love knowing what’s going on.... I don’t want to be surprised...I don’t want like all of a sudden be in something and [hear], “We’re implementing this new thing,” and be like, “What?” And not having my own two cents put into it...
I asked Renée who she considered to be her mentors. She identified her subject’s content specialists at the district-level. She said she considered the mentors because,

…they were really the ones that...saw something in me early on...and brought me into a leadership role on the district level.... They were the ones that got me involved and...encouraged me to do things and...they wanted my input. They appreciated my input.

She also appreciated how they expanded her view by giving her a district-level perspective. She explained:

That was really great to understand...what [leadership] looked like...on the district level. What they were going through. And then also understanding that, yeah, things look like this at [Renée’s school] but they’re going to look different at [a] different school and...having an understanding that we need to be aware...[of] different demographics, and different personalities, and different teachers...and how do we do the best we can for everyone with all these variations going on there.

Another mentor Renée shared with me was a former principal. “…he was just amazing,” she told me, “and...what was really great about him is that he had, at least he appeared to have...full confidence in me. Like he just like turned the department over to me.” She said that he recognized that she was the expert in her subject and told her, “You tell me what you need.” She continued,

I mean I led the department...like I was in charge of the department. I decided schedules. I decided how to do the accelerated program....How to do class changes. I mean all the different things...they put me in charge of [it] early on because, first of all they were like, “She’s competent. She can do it.” And, and they trusted my opinion over theirs because they weren’t in the trenches and I really appreciated that.

Renée described how this helped develop her leadership capacity:

I had to sit back and say, “Wow. I really need to think about this, then. Because I’m the one making the decision. And I need to really research this and talk to my department and get their input.” And...I really involved my department. I’d say, “Hey. We’ve got this issue. You know. I could solve it and go to an answer,
but...I feel as a department we need to solve this issue and take a proposal to the principal. Because...it’s...not just me....” And I think that’s also where I have a lot of respect from my...teachers because I don’t just make decisions without their input. And I’m...very open with them. I’ll tell them exactly what’s going on. I don’t sugar coat it. I’m like, “This is the Issue. This is what we’ve got to deal with. This is what’s happening. These are the different views, the different viewpoints. What are going to do?”...They’re not my students they’re my colleagues...they need to be part of this decision. And I trust them too, you know, so I’m going to give them all of the information.

I asked Renée what qualities she thought the district subject leaders saw in her. “I think they saw a passion to improve,” she told me. She elaborated, “I think that was my big thing was I just wanted to do the best I could...to learn everything I could to be the best...teacher, to be the best leader…” Renée continued, “…I was willing to work hard… and I was willing to do all those meetings back in the day.”

Renée recognizes the skills that she developed through leadership, and she now feels that it is time that she passes on leadership opportunities to the next generation of teachers. “I’ve been [taking leadership roles] for years and years and years and, at some point, it’s nice and to step to the side and let some younger people now take that role.”

As we concluded our interview, I asked Renée if she would share her definition of teacher leadership. Here is what she told me:

Teacher leadership is...a teacher that...is always striving to do what’s best for the students and the teachers....and they do it in a way to serve....it’s a serving position. It’s not a top-down position...it’s leading by, first of all, example. It’s leading by love and by service and compassion. It’s...also a training position, as well. I’m also there as a mentor for them, helping them understand how to deal with new things that come up....it’s all of those things.

Figure 14 provides a summary of Renée’s narrative. It shows the flow of her experience as a teacher leader, emphasizing both the contextual influences that led here to teacher leadership and the influence she believes she’s been able to have.
Figure 14

Renée’s Leadership Process

- Masters’ degree in instructional design and administration
- Chosen as Department Chair
- Already taking an active role in department leadership, and showing initiative in PLC work
- Showed passion to improve and to learn all she could to be the best teacher and leader she could be
- Implemented what she learns from PD in her classes and shares it with others
- Involves other teachers in department leadership
- School content teacher
- School-wide view
- Instructional Coach
- District-wide view
- District content area steering committee
- Feeds the emotional weight of teacher concerns
- Mediates between teachers and administrators
- Serves teachers
- Benefits students by protecting the well-being of teachers
- Principal and District Administration Support
Naomi’s Narrative

In her sketch, Naomi divided what she sees as her influence into three categories: education, students, and leadership positions. She represented these as a Venn diagram with student learning, student love of her subject, and student success in class and beyond.

Naomi started by sharing her education with me. She said that she was starting there because, “…a huge influence on me as a teacher is all the things I have learned.” In addition to her bachelor’s degree, she received an English Language Learners (ELL) endorsement as well as a masters’ degree. After moving to her current school, Clearview Junior High, she obtained a gifted and talented endorsement. Last summer she began an educational technology endorsement to help her as she moved to an online presence because of COVID.

In addition to these, Naomi told me that she attends summer professional development opportunities and regional and national conferences in her content-area. She indicated that she recently signed up to take a course on growth mindset. “So, every time I think, ‘Oh, I’m done,’” she told me, “there’s always more…and that’s fun. There’s always new things to learn.”

After discussing her education, Naomi shared with me the formal leadership positions she has held. She has been a Department Chair, a mentor to student teachers and to new teachers, a member of her school’s steering committee (leadership committee), and a member of the PBIS committee. “…we’ve done a lot of good things I think for our school that way,” she told me.
She also spoke of the importance of school culture or atmosphere. She said, “That’s been important to me. To just to help the atmosphere of the school I think is so important.” She elaborated, “…I’ve taught where the atmosphere was non-academic or where nobody seemed to care about the school…so, centering on our school and how important our school is, that’s been important to me.” Later she told me, “When you’re in a nice school, where academics are important…it shows. It shows in how the kids behave and how they excel, and what I’m able to teach them.”

Naomi spoke of specific things she has done to shape Clearview Junior High’s culture. She told me that while “…serving on the PBIS Committee…we went to Georgia …to the Ron Clark academy.” She continued, “That was really fun ‘cause he’s an interesting teacher. And that’s a really fun school. So, we brought back a lot of good ideas from there.” While not yet successful in her attempts, Naomi has been working to influence her school to discontinue traditional parent-teacher conferences and adopt student-led conferences like she helped establish at Hilltop Junior High, her former school. She told me about her efforts:

I’ve been trying to influence my school to do away with parent-teacher conferences…I really like the student-led conferences that we designed [at a previous school]…I don’t think everyone felt that way. But I really felt that that was something beneficial to, to put my efforts in, and would like to try having something like that again for this school.

“I’ve been taking little steps. Little steps with trying to have an influence on our school,” Naomi told me. Her school has just gotten a new principal, and Naomi is optimistic that he will listen to her ideas. She shared with me two successes she has experienced influencing Clearview Junior High. The first was the help she provided as
her school initiated a new remediation program. She explained, “…they implemented [a remediation time] after I came here and I [offered] a lot of help with that since we ran a really good flex program [at Hilltop Junior High]…so that was important to me.”

A second success was her efforts to implement a ninth-grade awards night. She shared the experience with me:

When I first came [to Clearview Junior High], they’re like, “No, we don’t do that. We were told you can’t have a 9th grade graduation.” “Like that’s not a graduation, it’s an awards night. [she explained]” So we got a new principal, and so I just immediately was like, “[O]kay, let me give you some ideas, some hints,” and he’s like, “Let’s do it.” So that was something I’ve done that I’m really proud of starting here, and…I feel like I’m taking on things one thing at a time to…help improve…things that might be helpful for the kids. That’s always what it is. What I think would be best for kids”

Naomi shared with me that she has also presented at a state conference and has assisted several times with writing questions for the state’s end-of-year test. She said of this experience, “That’s been fun. And that’s really helped me see what goes into making good questions. That was really cool that I was able to help share with my department as we made questions.”

She also has a passion for being data driven. Naomi explained how she was influenced at Hilltop Junior High by an administrator who was focused on making data-driven decisions. She said of him,

He was Mr. Data and…it was always like, “Well, if, if that’s what the data says then we better give it a try.” Or…”We better do it again because we don’t have enough data to say if it failed or not.” So, I mean everything was, was done based on if we knew for sure it was working…So, I still see the value in that…

Being data-driven led to Naomi and her department having “…lots of schools come and observe us on Monday [PLC] meetings …” and presenting at a Solution Tree
PLC conference as a model collaborative team. She told me about her experience there.

She said,

> It was just us, my department, modeling how we hold a PLC meeting. And so, I thought that was pretty cool that we were the model.... I liked to think that I helped my department here at this school with how we go through and hold our meetings that we’re following those good PLC models that we’ve learned.

Naomi next shared with me the main circle of her influence: her students. “…that’s what the whole point is, helping students,” their learning and their love of her subject, she told me. She listed off some of the things she has done in this sphere of influence. She organized an after-school content-area club. For 2 years she has coached teams of students who compete in a national contest in her subject-area. She told me that contests like this are important because, “…that’s the place where kids have fun doing …” her subject, “…and I think the kids need those things.” For 2 years in a row her students have taken second in state.

Naomi told me of how she entered a contest herself when she first came to Clearview Junior High. She won $20,000 worth of technology for her students. She also applies for several grants and has had two accepted. She told me, “I try to tell...my department about these things. I’m like, ‘let’s do this.’” She believes that this is good for her students, as well. “I think that’s really fun and exciting. It’s a way to get the kids invested,” she told me. One grant required her students to “…help collect data and...analyze data for my project…” she explained.

Naomi feels that she has influence in her community, as well. She explained to me how she reaches out to local elementary schools and builds relationships:
I talk to the 6th grade teachers every year before we have the testing for the accelerated (subject) classes that I teach, because I want them to make sure they talk to all of their kids that really should be taking the test. I don’t want to miss anybody. So...when February comes around...the parents all know, too…it’s fun getting to know them and their families as they come through, especially the accelerated program. I think that’s made me someone in the community that they know, because they want their kids in my class...and that, that makes me happy that they want me to keep doing that.

I asked Naomi if she would tell me about the first experience she had where she felt like she had influence. Several years ago, she needed technology tools for her classroom. She wrote letters to local businesses and visited them asking, “Will you donate to our school - your community school?” A local software company donated the $1500 Naomi needed to buy the tools. She recalled, “…that was the first time I was like, wow, I actually can do something that has this positive impact...directly on my students and my school.”

I asked Naomi if she could identify the personality traits or qualities that she had that led her to reach out to those businesses. After thinking for a few moments, she replied,

I guess I’m just very persistent.... And I think when I know – when I believe something is right and needs to be a certain way then I will...look to find ways to make it happen...a lot of it is just...me wanting to be the best teacher I can be for my kids. And then give them what they need. So, if that’s what I feel they need, then that’s what I’m going to make sure to do.

I followed this up by asking her what qualities she felt her principal saw in her when he asked her to be the department chair. She shared, “to be honest, at that time I think I felt that they gave it to me because they thought it was my turn...they were giving people turns.” She continued to describe the experience:

I really didn’t feel that they thought I was the most qualified for it. I actually kind
of struggled holding that position. I mean, there were a lot of things I thought I was doing really well. And I...made sure...every teacher had the site licenses to all the software that they needed, and I was doing those things. But then I, I don’t know. I think they..., I didn’t get the feeling from them that they appreciated what I was doing. And, and that was part of the reason why I left [Hilltop Junior High]...and I haven’t been department chair here at all, so I don’t know that that was really the best experience or that was me being a [I believe she was going to say leader, but only started the word].

She laughed as she told me, “…and you don’t have, have to use any of that because...I don’t know if it’s good that it hasn’t all been all positive and great and me being like this soaring leader, but that’s my experience.”

My next question to Naomi was how she felt all of these experiences she has had have influenced her students, her teaching, and her school; whether they be positive or negative. “…I think in general it’s been really positive,” she replied. She indicated that she had taught for 25 years now and there are more things she has done but had not included those in her sketch. She continued, “I don’t have a lot of awards and accolades and things (compared to others), so I don’t know...if I’ve had as much influence and if I’ve had as positive an impact as I think that I have.” But then she stated,

‘Cause...I think I have. I think I’ve done a lot and I think that I’ve benefited the majority – I mean I’d love to say all, but you don’t ever – I don’t know, it’s not all. But I would love to think that I benefited the majority of my students every year and had a positive impact because of these things that I’ve done.

I asked her what changes she had perceived in herself as she has had these experiences. Here is what she had to say:

I think I just have more confidence...I’ve always been willing to try new things in the classroom and do things, but now I feel like instead of just, “Oh that’s interesting, I’m going to try it.” I think I know more so I know ahead of time what’s going to work or how I change things to make it work. Before I’m just randomly trying activities and things that sound fun. So, I think that’s, that’s the mark of...a good teacher is not just doing things because, “Hey. There was some
(subject) teacher that had a fun thing on YouTube and I’m going to try it.”

She concluded, “…knowing a purpose and being able to put it in something that will fit for me. I think that’s happened through the years.”

I asked Naomi if there were any mentors that had influenced her during her career. She replied that yes, she had, and that some of her best mentors were not even in her subject-area. She spoke of a teacher she met during her first year:

he was just the best at brainstorming with me. And letting me talk and vent but then helping me walk through what I was trying to do. So, as I was becoming better at things like classroom management, and student behavior and those types of things...she was just such a good listener and a good mentor that way that we still keep in touch.

Next, she spoke of the mentor who was assigned to her during her first year of teaching. She said, “She was really good, and we didn’t always get along, but I knew she was an excellent teacher and she taught me a lot.” Naomi and this mentor met again later in their careers at Clearview Junior High. “I got to come back and, and be with her again,” Naomi recalled, “…she gave me the guidance that I needed with the accelerated program before she retired and left it to me. So, she was a great mentor to me.”

She then spoke of two previous principals:

I had two really good principals that were good mentors that were excellent at – they could just sit in your classroom for 15 minutes and give you a lots of good feedback. And I haven’t had that for a while from a principal, so I didn’t realize how awesome that was. What a gift to have from a principal.

At the conclusion of our interview, I asked Naomi if she would be willing to share her definition of teacher leadership. Here is her response:

That’s a tough one, because when you first asked me to talk about being a teacher leader I was like, “Am I a teacher leader? I’m not even sure.” So, how I would define a teacher leader? I think a teacher leader is someone whose in-class
experience is very important…but content knowledge isn’t everything. Believing that every student in the school is your student too. And so, working with the other teachers and the community is essential. In being a teacher leader you’re continually looking for ways to improve in all those areas. Having a positive influence on your students, your school, and your community, I think that makes a teacher leader.

Figure 15 provides a summary of Naomi’s narrative. It shows the flow of her experience as a teacher leader, emphasizing both the contextual influences that led here to teacher leadership and the influence she believes she’s been able to have.

Carter’s Narrative

Carter’s sketch was somewhat different than the others in that it consisted of a single image with no accompanying words or pictures. The image was a compass, and as we began our interview together, I saw that Carter had a similar depiction of a compass on the wall behind his desk. I commented on this, and Carter explained that his sketch had been copied from that compass and that it represented several aspects of his career.

First, it represents all of the schools where he has been able to work in his career. He began teaching over a decade ago when he took a job teaching in a private lockdown facility. After teaching there for 2 years he moved to a public junior high. He recently helped open a new junior high in the same district. He also coaches at the local high school.

Second, Carter explained that the compass represents all of the different directions that he has taken during his career and that he is always adjusting his curriculum. He further explained that the compass also represents “all the different teachers I’ve met with and who have helped me improve my curriculum and how I teach and how I interact with students and how I work with students.”
Figure 15

Naomi's Leadership Process
Finally, to Carter the compass shows the “impact...like perhaps the impact I’ve had on other teachers and directing them towards something else, whether they want to do admin or leadership or [work at a university].” He summarized it this way:

So, some of them want to go that direction, and me, I’m hap, like I want to be in the classroom. That’s where I enjoy being, or on a field coaching. So...[it] kind of just represents that. Just the different directions and – everyone’s going to go a different direction in this career – things they really like or enjoy, whether it’s curriculum, or it’s coaching, or it’s doing admin, or...becoming a PLC (professional learning community) coach or ILC (innovative learning coach), so just kind of the different directions you can go within...our career.

Carter would return to these themes as our interview continued.

I asked him about some of the events in his life that had given him experiences with teachers of influence. He shared with me three teachers who influenced him growing up. The first is a fictional teacher, Mr. Turner, from the television show “Boy Meets World.” Carter explained that this character taught him that he could “be kind of a hip teacher and still get things done.” The second teacher of influence was Carter’s eleventh grade history teacher. Carter said of this teacher, “for some reason, he and I just clicked really well, and I started seeing the value of education more and eventually finding my way to becoming a teacher after my career plans were not anything to do with education.”

The last teacher Carter spoke of was his sixth-grade teacher. In Carter’s reflection, he was a challenging student. “I got kicked out of class. I was a naughty kid.” When his grade-school teacher told him that she knew he hated her and that he hated school, he responded with, “I don’t hate school, I just hate you.” He explained to me that it:

…was more of like, “You’re a teacher, and you have these rules, and you’re mean and you yell, so.” Karma bit me back – bit me back, and put me in a classroom where I get to experience that with students, too.
Carter sought her out a year later and apologized, and he thanked her for her influence and helping him to see the value of education. Looking back, Carter credits this teacher and her influence for the way she helped him to see the value of education.

In summarizing the influence of these teachers, Carter spoke of how they influenced his career choices. He explained, “I wanted to be military, or I wanted to be a firefighter – not, not in the school, so. But [I] love being in the school. I love teaching. I love kids and other adults in the profession.”

I asked Carter how he felt he was a teacher of influence. He spoke of his interactions with students and his efforts to connect with them and build relationships. He told me about his efforts: “I usually have a lot of the quote, tough kids, in my classes and I connect with them. I establish rapport with them really quickly and don’t really – I rarely have behavior problems in my classes with them.” He explained that, while he might struggle with these students in the same ways that other teachers might struggle, he finds ways to “connect with those more difficult kids and...have more wins” with them. He continued:

I have a different way in responding to those kids...it could be that or just kind of being willing to do, cliche as it is, whatever it takes to help the school and the school culture be a better school and a better school culture. Making it a safer more...inviting or engaging place for kids and for, hopefully, the adults in the building, as well.

I asked Carter how he builds those relationships with these students. He told me that from the first day of school he works to get to know them, and to have them come to know him. He also credits his personal experience with ADHD. He explained this to me as he smiled, “I get them, I understand where they’re at.” He also shared with me that he
tries to never remove a difficult student from his class. Even with those students who have introduced themselves as, “I’m the kid that you send to the office all the time,” Carter responds with, “I don’t send kids to the office, brother...I am the office.” He explained his reasons for this:

If we can have really good, positive relationships with kids we’re going to get so much more out of them then sending them to the principal. It’s just, I feel like it will create a hostility towards me and the student...a violation of some kind of trust between us.

He continued:

For me it’s just...I can resolve this. There’s something going on with you outside of my class. It might have been a previous class period. Let’s talk that through briefly. Let’s finish our lesson. Be with me for the next ten minutes. Let’s go in the hall. Let’s pow wow and let’s get checked back in. Let’s reset. And so, these resets with them, building that relationship, they trust me more. They will produce more for me and my class.

Since Carter had mentioned helping to make his school a safer, more inviting and engaging place for students and adults, I asked him what he had done to help build this culture. He spoke of reinforcing and supporting school culture, its mission and its values:

For me, when a school has a mission or they have vision, or they have values that drive them, or they have goals they are working toward...I feel a sense of ownership to ensure that we are meeting those, ‘cause typically, those have been made by parents and admin and teachers and secretaries. A lot of people’s voices have gone into making those and it’s gonna be what’s best for kids, best for community, best for society, to produce these awesome humans. So, I want to ensure I’m doing my part and ensuring...that there’s buy in from, whether it’s teachers around me who might respect me, or students who respect me. This is what we’re all about. Let’s...fulfill what this mission is or these dispositions that we’re aiming for. So, I feel like it facilitates a positive culture. An inviting environment in schools and...hopefully kids caring more. Wanting to take more ownership in their learning.

I wanted to know where this desire came from. In addition to teaching at Adams Junior High, Carter is a coach at a nearby high school. Several years ago, he took over a
program where the athletes were not performing well. They were at the bottom of the state, and they had become accustomed to losing badly to other teams. Carter seized this opportunity to transform things. “I had to change the culture.” He shared with me how he accomplished this by aligning his team’s mission, vision, values, and goals with the goals with those of the high school. He did this by, “gradually just cranking the culture each year and turning up the heat a little bit more to get these boys to care and take ownership ...to take pride in what you produce.” This experience with his sports team has carried over to his academic work.

I feel like these missions and...the cultures and schools play a big role in hopefully getting kids to...just care...and take pride. And every teacher, in my experience, every teacher wants that. They want kids to just care a little bit. And I feel like if, as my influence, as I connect with kids, if I can have that passion and they’re caring about it, then that will spill over across the rest of their – hopefully the rest of their classes.

Carter has a disdain for formal leadership positions. He does not want them. Instead, he prefers “being in the back seat...supporting whoever’s driving the vehicle.” His opinion is that “you can be a leader in any capacity.” While he does not enjoy being in formal leadership positions, he has been a department chair for several years and at two different schools. When Carter was first chosen to be department chair, the principal hadn’t even discussed it with him but instead announced the decision to the department at the end of the year. Carter thinks this happened because he had recently completed a masters’ program in administration and that this principal was trying to be helpful in providing him a leadership position. He also felt that since his masters’ program exposed him to multiple schools, teams, teachers, and ways of doing things his principal wanted to use that experience to help guide a team that was relatively inexperienced.
After consulting with another teacher in his department, who Carter also considers to be a teacher of influence, Carter has decided to share the leadership experience and load with the other teachers in his department. Department meetings move weekly from room-to-room with each teacher taking their turn at preparing the agenda and leading the team’s discussion. “There’s this collective ownership in our department like, that we all just, we all feel like we have [a] say in things that are going on.”

So, while happy to “step up to the plate” when needed, Carter enjoys leading as a follower. He said,

I really enjoy being in that back seat and just, “Ok, how would you lead it, and how would you do things in our team?” And I want to support that and catch a vision of what you’re trying to do and where I can hopefully help make it awesome and bring to fruition what you’re wanting to do.

In taking this approach, Carter is reflecting his school’s culture. He explained to me, “The culture at our school too is building leadership everywhere, and that’s kind of the principal, kind of how he sets it up is building leadership capacity across everywhere.”

For example, while Carter teaches the most sections of his content, a less-experienced teacher serves as their collaborative team lead. “I love that I’m not the team lead,” Carter shared with me. He spoke of his team lead, saying he loves, “seeing how he runs a meeting with us when we meet and how he would like to do things with backwards design, and what assessments he would like to give...it’s awesome.” This leadership sharing within Carter’s department has allowed him to grow as a teacher.

I like being that support and just, and not being stuck in my way because I’ve been doing it for many more years. I...like taking a step back and learning from these newer teachers, or less experienced teachers, while at the same time learning
from teachers that have been doing it for 20, 30 years....I think there’s just a, there’s great value to learn and, from anybody and everybody. I can learn something from anybody. I guess that’s my mindset in any meeting I’m in.

When I asked Carter about how his leadership experiences have affected his students and his teaching, he believes that it helps them to have their minds open to learning from everyone around them, “even the kid that makes weird comments in class.”

To “be open and willing to learn from everybody and be willing and open to learning anything.” He told me that he also teaches his students to do this by seeing him “doing it in action. Like they see me living what I preach, and I’m hoping that’s spilling on to them, as well.”

I asked Carter when he first realized that he had influence in the classroom. He shared an experience when he was first starting his career and had accepted a job teaching in a private youth lock-down facility. His class consisted of 14 teenage girls who had come from gangs in another state and had violent tendencies and anger management issues. This group of girls had successfully run out previous teachers, one of whom had been seriously physically assaulted, and planned to do the same to him.

Carter recounted how he stood up to their attempted intimidation, and in doing so, earned their respect. “And so that influence with those fourteen girls spreads through the rest of the school,” he explained. “I never had another problem.” This caused Carter to realize that, with

my confidence as a teacher...I can do anything in a classroom.... I can be successful in this classroom, and I can have, I can earn that respect from students and there will be buy in from them to learn something. Not all the things I teach, but they can learn something...I think that, for me that was that moment of realizing...I can influence. I can...have an impact in a school culture or in a school.
When I asked Carter about mentors that he has had, he echoed his earlier statement about his mind-set of learning from anyone and everyone.

Pretty much every teacher I’ve met has been a mentor to me. Whether They’re brand-new, or if they don’t like me, or they’re threatened by me...to me they’re all mentors. ‘Cause...I just consciously choose to be intentional about learning from all the teachers around me. In any department. It doesn’t matter. They’re all doing something great and valuable that I can hopefully build into what I do.

My final question to Carter was to ask what his definition of teacher leadership was. He responded:

Any leadership is always going to be, for me, servant leadership. Finding ways to serve people that you’re working around. So, something I usually do in the winters on Fridays I give everyone hot chocolate in my department. I have my TAs (students who are teacher assistants) make it, take them the hot chocolate or a small treat that they like. Just serving people around me to improve their life. And so, servant leadership is always at the root of anything I do.

Figure 16 provides a summary of Carter’s narrative. It shows the flow of his experience as a teacher leader, emphasizing both the contextual influences that led him to teacher leadership and the influence he believes he’s been able to have.

**Similarities and Differences in the Process of Becoming a Leader**

While these 11 teachers represent 11 different schools and 6 different subject areas, there were several ways in which their leadership experiences were similar. The first of these was what I have titled an initial event.

**Initial Event**

As I went through the process of graphically representing each teacher’s leadership journey, or leadership process, it became apparent that each teacher had an initial event that caused them to realize that they had influence. For James, it was being
unofficially mentored by another teacher during his first year of teaching. He found this to be so helpful to him that he now reaches out unofficially to other new teachers with a desire to help them.

For Steve, the initial event was being chosen to be the department chair of a new school opening in his first year after his student-teaching experience. This placed him in a formal position that led to further leadership opportunities. Emma was also chosen to be a department chair and official teacher mentor the first year after her internship. While she indicated that this was out of necessity and that she had very little experience, she is still department chair 13 years later. Being asked to be department chair was also Renée’s initial event. She was given a formal title to leadership actions that she was already
taking, such as leading her grade-level team in PLC collaboration.

Janice also identified being asked to be a department chair as her initial experience recognizing her influence. This position came at a time when she was questioning the power of her influence as a teacher and her confidence was low.

Carter’s initial event was successfully dealing with student physical intimidation. He gained confidence and the realization that he had a great impact on the culture of his classroom and the school.

While Evan did not enjoy his time as a teacher with an administrative assignment, this initial event gave him insights that have shaped his career. He handles classroom management issues differently and communicates more effectively with parents. He also gained a greater appreciation for the impact he can have on students.

For Amber, her initial event was the result of an email from a grateful mom, sharing that she was one of the five things of worth that helped her depressed daughter get out of bed in the morning. She realized her own power of influence and cemented her desire to give each of her students a positive experience in her class.

Tori realized her influence when she worked as a student council advisor. She indicated that her work there caught the attention of her principal who asked her to be a department chair and serve on the leadership team of a newly opened school. This has led to a deeply rooted sense of stewardship for that school and those students.

Annie realized the strength of her influence when she started an after-school content-area club at the request of a student. This club is now the largest club of its type among junior highs in her state and involves dozens of students.
Naomi’s initial event was the result of her desire to provide her students with the tools she believed they needed to be successful. Through her work raising donations from a local company, she realized the direct influence that she could have on her students.

**Formal Positions**

Another similarity among these teachers were the types of formal positions they have held. Steve, Evan, Renée, Emma, and Janice all identified being a department chair as their initial event where they recognized they had influence. Tori indicated that her initial experience was as the student council advisor. All of the participants, except for Annie, have been or currently are a department chair. The literature identifies positions such as department chair or student council advisor as formal leadership roles as they are named positions and the leaders for those positions are chosen by administrators (Baecher, 2012). At first glance, these roles seem to indicate that this district is still experiencing the first wave of leadership spoke of by Silva et al. (2000), or leadership that is administrative in nature. However, the role of department chair in this district involves instructional leadership as well as the teacher leader remaining in their classrooms doing the day-to-day work of teachers. This suggests that the teachers in this study represent the third wave of teacher leadership spoken of by Shah (2017).

Other formal positions identified in the experiences of these teachers include athletic coach, district content-area specialist, member of the faculty council or school leadership team, accreditation facilitator, data specialist, testing coordinator, PLC coach, teacher mentor, state content teacher, instructional coach, committee chair, district content collaboration leader, and state-level work.
Each of these teachers is involved with at least one formal leadership role and many are involved with several roles. While care was taken to not influence nominations towards those holding formal positions by asking for teachers of influence instead of teacher leaders, it is clear that these teachers are viewed by their peers as teacher leaders at least partly due to the formal roles they hold. This would be consistent with the range of what teachers consider to be teacher leaders as suggested by Bond’s (2001) synthesis of literature.

**Informal Roles**

Another similarity within this group of teachers is their involvement in informal leadership positions. These are those leadership roles where authority comes from teacher respect, or when the teacher fosters a positive school culture (Bond, 2011), encourages parental involvement, helps other teachers, collaborates with their colleagues (York-Barr & Duke, 2004), is a catalyst for change, or is a life-long learner (Harrison & Killion, 2007). James, Carter, Amber, and Naomi each identified an informal leadership activity as their initial leadership event. James continues to informally reach out to new teachers because of the influence an informal mentor had on him. Carter still seeks to shape the culture of both his department and his school. Amber has made her students’ emotional experience in her classroom central to her goals as a teacher. Naomi continues to seek grant opportunities as a way of better meeting the needs of her students.

While the others had more formal roles as their initial leadership events, all 11 of these teachers are involved in leadership with informal roles. Each of them is a catalyst for change within their schools.
In addition to being a catalyst for change, they each lead informally in other ways. James continues to share best practices with new teachers. Steve develops relationships with other teachers in his school, sharing details of their lives with each other and supporting each other. He also seeks to help his students feel successful, so that their success with him will translate into success in school and in life. Carter prefers to support other teachers in their leadership efforts, eschewing titled leadership roles for himself. Evan is a life-long learner who applies his PLC training to improve his school. Amber’s administrators respect her teaching so much that they bring by new teachers to observe her teaching. She also informally collaborates with other teachers, influencing each other’s practice. She also seeks to develop strong relationships with her students. Renée checks in on and serves new teachers. She has appointed herself as “gatekeeper” to protect teachers, who, in turn, see her as a mentor. She is able to mediate conflict because of these relationships. Emma is currently working on an administrative endorsement which will be her second graduate degree. Janice dresses up in clothes related to her curriculum to intentionally spark student-interest, and she adapts all of the PD she receives to serve the emotional needs of her students. Tori is always expanding her knowledge by reviewing the literature to inform best practices. She also seeks to strengthen her relationships with her colleagues by reflectively speaking and listening. Annie’s work with her content-area club is a source of pride to her and an example of an informal role. Last, Annie reaches out to the parents of her community seeking students who would benefit from her accelerated class. She also runs an after-school club and seeks out grants to benefit her students. She seeks incremental changes in her school by
Driving Passion

Another similarity I identified in the experiences of these 11 teacher leaders is that each has an obvious driving passion that fuels their work as a teacher. For James, his driving passion is the grading reforms he and like-minded teachers have made in his school. These reforms, ignited by his interest in a closing address at a conference and fed by his willingness to seek out and enlist the support of teachers and administration, has changed the culture of his school. His desire is to help students see grading as an opportunity to improve themselves and their learning.

Steve’s passion is to ensure that his students feel successful in his content area or in the sports he coaches. He feels that many of his students come from difficult home lives and his desire is that the success they feel with him will help them be more interested in their other classes and, ultimately, be more successful in their future.

For Carter, building strong relationships with his students is his driving passion. He prides himself with being able to make positive connections with even the most difficult students, and he works to help them to take ownership of their own learning.

Evan is driven by his work as a PLC coach. He sees the PLC cycle as not only a way to improve student learning but as a transformative force in his own teaching. He wants this change for all of the trams in his school.

Amber’s driving passion is to establish strong relationships with her students so that each one has a positive experience in her class. She illustrated this in her sketch by connecting her heart with theirs and she sees that relationship as being mutually
beneficial.

Renée is highly driven by her desire to protect her fellow teachers in any way she can, from angry parents or poorly thought-out initiatives. She believes that students will benefit best if teachers are protected from being overwhelmed and burned out. This passion has helped develop trusting relationships between her and her colleagues.

Like Evan, Emma is also a PLC coach, and her driving passion is also the PLC process. She finds a great amount of joy in the coaching she does, and she feels that this makes her more effective in her job.

Janice has a strong passion for the mental, emotional, and academic well-being of her students. She takes any learning or PD she receives and tries to apply it back to helping her students mentally, emotionally, and academically. Additionally, she leads her school’s efforts in promoting student mental and emotional wellness through her weekly homeroom curriculum centered on building relationships.

Tori is driven by her strong feelings of stewardship for her school. These feelings of stewardship shape the way she sees her role in helping to maintain the culture of her school. This stewardship also causes her to see all of the students at her school as her students.

Annie’s after school club is her driving passion. She loves that it gives her the opportunity to build relationships with her students in a different way than she can in the classroom. She believes that the club gives her students a unique opportunity and she sees the club as a source of pride for the entire school.

Naomi is driven by her desire to make incremental improvements to her school.
She does this through writing grants, being data-driven, and organizing an afternoon club. She also seeks to persuade her principal to implement programs that she sees as being beneficial.

**Importance of Administrators**

The positive influence of principals and other administrators was another similarity that emerged from these interviews. This confirms what York-Barr and Duke (2004) and Wenner and Campbell (2017) identified in their extensive literature reviews regarding the influence of principals. York-Barr and Duke indicated that administrative support is instrumental in the development of teacher leaders, and Wenner and Campbell described administrative support as “paramount” (p. 153) to teacher leadership’s success.

As discussed in Chapter II, Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001) propose that actions principals take, and the relationships between teacher leaders and principals, are a significant part of the development of teacher leadership. Crowther et al. (2009) contend that strong principal support must exist for the development and preservation of teacher leadership to occur.

Here is how it appears that administrator support benefitted each of the teacher leaders from this study. James’s work with standards-referenced grading began when he attended a conference as a department chair. He was appointed department chair by his principal, and his administration provided access to the conference for all department chairs. After showing his interest in grading reform, and building momentum for change by finding like-minded teachers, his administration supported his efforts for change by bringing in the expert who inspired his efforts to speak to the whole faculty. James
referred to this as “a turning point” in his reform efforts.

Steve’s leadership experiences began when a principal who was opening a brand-new school appointed him to be department chair. Later, district-level administrators encouraged him to apply for his current position of district content-area specialist, a position that has allowed him to expand his influence in his efforts to improve his content’s curriculum and teaching.

While Carter dislikes being labeled with a formal leadership title, it was a well-meaning principal who appointed him as department chair. Carter had worked to obtain his administrative endorsement, and his principal gave him the opportunity to be department chair to strengthen his leadership abilities. More recently, Carter’s current principal has sought to increase the leadership capacity throughout his school. This has encouraged Carter to share the leadership responsibilities within his department.

Throughout his career, Evan has had administrators encouraging him to go into administration. In addition to appointing him department head, they sought him out to become a half-time assistant principal. He has also been given several other leadership opportunities which have provided him access professional development and other trainings, a voice in the direction of the school, a greater understanding of different aspects of how schools function, and encouragement to develop stronger teacher-student relationships.

For Amber, her principal brought her onto the school leadership team because she was already highly involved with her school. Being on this team allows her to have a voice in the direction of the school. Amber was also chosen to be a department chair by
her principal. She also spoke highly of a former principal who mentored her in a way that helped her to see and do things differently. Currently, her administrators encourage new teachers to observe her classes.

Renée has been supported by administrators at both the school and district-level. They encouraged her to accept leadership positions. They also sought and trusted her opinion and provided opportunities for professional growth. For example, one principal gave her almost complete autonomy and responsibility for how her department would be run. This pushed Renée to think differently and to involve all members of her department in the decision-making process.

Emma explained that she was chosen to be a department chair out of necessity. She told me that there was no way she would have been successful as a new teacher thrust into that position were it not for a supportive administration. Emma was also closely mentored by a vice-principal who she came to trust without reservation. This close relationship allowed Emma to grow as a teacher, and as a leader, and to share best practices with other teachers.

For Janice, her initial principal support came at a time when she was losing confidence as a teacher. He assured her that she was the right person to lead her department and provide professional development opportunities. More recently, her current principal has placed her in a position where she is able to influence every student through her instructional coaching and her homeroom curriculum.

Tori’s principal chose her to be a department chair and a new teacher mentor when he brought her with him to open a new school. He deliberately cultivated a sense of
stewardship of the school among these initial teacher leaders, including Tori, that persists in her school to today, through two succeeding administrations. That first principal also provided professional development opportunities that shaped Tori’s thinking and teaching. He also served as a mentor to Tori, providing leadership opportunities and building her up as a new teacher.

Annie had approached a previous administrator about starting a school store with no success. More recently, a vice-principal came to her asking her to start a school store to support the school’s PBIS efforts. Annie feels that this store is a positive part of her school, and she feels supported and appreciated by her current administration.

Naomi had a principal who was data-driven and helped her appreciate the importance of using data to make decisions. She also spoke of two other principals who she respected as mentors. She felt that they provided good feedback that she viewed as a gift to her teaching.

Definitions of Teacher Leadership

As mentioned earlier, some of the differences found in the experiences of these 11 teachers are related to their initial events, whether they were formal or informal in nature. Another difference is what each teacher in this study defined leadership to be. Bond (2011) contends that teacher leadership literature cannot agree on one definition. The lack of a unified definition among these 11 teachers is understandable, and perhaps even to be expected, since every teacher gave me a definition based on their personal experience with leadership. However, even among the differences in definitions, there are some similarities in the themes found in the definitions given by these 11 teachers.
James defined teacher leadership this way:

If I think of teachers who have influenced me it’s basically people who...love what they do. They’re passionate about it. They, they have worked hard to try to...do the best that they can to try to connect with students and to teach in a positive way. And then they have shared that with me....So, I think, I think sharing things and also like, asking for help from others. Working together. That’s probably the best way to help and influence others is just by...creating those relationships through sharing and love and help and caring and things like that.

Steve also emphasized relationships in his definition:

This is more maybe...religious than maybe you’d like, but...the greatest among you is going to be the one that’s your servant....I don’t know why I’m getting choked up, but...I think the biggest reason why I am pretty, pretty well respected with my...teachers in the district [who he works with] is ‘cause I’m not afraid to go talk with them. I’ve had teachers break down to me and say, “Hey...my dad is in the hospital with heart...failure, and...I can’t keep doing this, and...my wife is this situation” or...“my kid tried to commit suicide last weekend”...I’ve had a bunch of different stuff where most of the time I’m talking with the teacher it’s about the curriculum, but also, they all know that they can just open up and...I have a few of them, as well, that I do the exact same thing with...and I’ll talk with him about stuff...and they just know that I’m a normal human being and I’m not this great and all-powerful district person. That I’m just a friend of theirs.... And as I go back to my administrations, that’s probably the ones that I respect more than any of them are those that, their door’s open always, and I could go in and say, “Hey. I’m having a hard time with this.” And...them not being judgmental, and not being...accusatory...but just: “Well, tell me why. Tell me what’s going on.”...That’s probably the biggest thing [in] leadership is...if you want to be a leader, then people need to know that you care.... If they don’t know that, that you care about them and you want them to succeed, no matter what it is, that you’re not out to get them...then they won’t do anything for you. But if they do, then, they’ll make the changes that they need to.

Carter also used the word “servant” in his definition:

Any leadership is always going to be, for me, servant leadership. Finding ways to serve people that you’re working around. So, something I usually do in the winters on Fridays I give everyone hot chocolate in my department. I have my Tas (students who are teacher assistants) make it, take them the hot chocolate or a small treat that they like. Just serving people around me to improve their life. And so, servant leadership is always at the root of anything I do.

Evan’s definition reflected his work with PLCs. He said that a teacher leader is
“someone that helps a team – other teachers – be the best they can be. So...teacher leadership is helping other teachers improve student learning – maximize their potential as teachers.”

As James and Steve had done, Amber also emphasized relationships and culture in her definition. She said a teacher leader is “somebody who...connects with others...and is willing to...spark change or...to make improvement...and...give input...or help or assistance.” Someone able to “…improve culture and learning…and...shape culture.”

Renée provided this definition for teacher leadership, also referencing service, as both Carter and Steve had:

Teacher leadership is...a teacher that...is always striving to do what’s best for the students and the teachers....and they do it in a way to serve....it’s a serving position. It’s not a top-down position...it’s leading by, first of all, example. It’s leading by love and by service and compassion. It’s...also a training position, as well. I’m also there as a mentor for them, helping them understand how to deal with new things that come up....it’s all of those things.

Similar to Renée, Emma also spoke of standing up for teachers, she said: “I think teacher leadership is someone who is comfortable...being a decision-maker for their classrooms, for their building, for their team and knowing how to advocate for them when needed.”

As Amber had done, Janice also spoke of culture in her definition. Teacher leadership for Janice is, “Building a positive school culture through continued professional development, mentoring new teachers, and serving on a school leadership team.”

Like Renée and Emma, Tori included advocating for teachers as part of her definition when she said:
A teacher leader is someone who is respected in the school by others …A teacher leader is someone who is willing and available to help whenever needed….and a teacher leader is…someone I’d go to for advice….Someone who’s a champion for their school and their staff …I think that fits really well….A teacher leader is someone who is a champion and an advocate for her school and teachers.

Similarly, Annie spoke of supporting her fellow teachers in her definition of teacher leadership:

I think teacher leadership is all about wanting the best for teachers. Wanting to find ways that you can help other teachers be more successful in their own classroom….leadership is not being in charge, necessarily – it’s more like, are you a big part of the support system? Are you a big part of making sure that the whole works and the whole functions?...as a teacher of influence, I feel like I’ve really tried my best to help other teachers be more competent in their own classroom.... I think the teacher of influence is all about helping other teachers be the most successful they can be.

Naomi’s definition stands out because of her hesitation as to whether she could be labeled as a teacher leader. When I asked for her definition, she replied:

That’s a tough one, because when you first asked me to talk about being a teacher leader I was like, “Am I a teacher leader? I’m not even sure.” So, how I would define a teacher leader? I think a teacher leader is someone whose in-class experience is very important…but content knowledge isn’t everything. Believing that every student in the school is your student too. And so, working with the other teachers and the community is essential. In being a teacher leader you’re continually looking for ways to improve in all those areas. Having a positive influence on your students, your school, and your community, I think that makes a teacher leader.

From the responses of these teachers, the following themes of teacher leadership emerged. Teacher leaders: understand the importance of building and maintaining strong relationships, they help their fellow teachers to succeed, they advocate for and support their fellow teachers, and they are a positive force in their school.

For these teachers, it seems that a unified definition is not necessary for them to effectively lead, as their definition of leadership seems based on their own perceptions of
what leadership is. In a sense, they are leaders in their minds because they are doing what they believe a leader does. Even Janice and Naomi, who have perhaps at times questioned their own effectiveness, provided a strong and clear definition of leadership that reflects their actions as leaders.

**Qualities or Characteristics That Led to Being Chosen for Formal Leadership**

In the course of our interviews, I was able to ask each of these 11 teachers, with the exception of James, what they believed the qualities were that led to their principals appointing them to formal leadership positions. These are the words and phrases they used. It is interesting to note the similarities in the responses. Among these qualities, prior leadership experience or leadership skills, building relationships with others, and a willingness to do leadership work are common characteristics.

Janice:

- Leadership skills
- Content-area knowledge
- Known to the principal

Emma:

- A rule-follower
- Follows-through on assignments
- Gets things done on time
- Honest

Evan:

- Likes being part of the decision-making process
- Willing to do leadership work and follow-through
- Love of learning and understanding how things work
Tori:

- Organizational skills
- Relationships with other teachers
- Prior leadership experience
- Prior leadership professional development
- A willingness to help

Annie:

- Desire to build teacher-student relationships
- Team leaders
- Ambitious
- A motivator

Amber:

- Able to handle leadership pressures
- Organized

James:

- Dependable
- Speaks up when necessary

Steve:

- Good leader
- Makes and keeps relationships
- Stands up for teacher beliefs

Renée

- Already involved with leadership activities
- Competent
- Willing to work
- A passion to learn and improve

Naomi:

- Persistence
- A drive to accomplish things that she believes are right
- Wanting to be the best teacher she can be
- Giving her students what they need to be successful
Carter:

- Previous leadership experience
- Builds relationships
- Confidence in the classroom
- Masters’ degrees in instructional design and administration

**Changes That Have Come to the Teacher Leaders**

My second research question sought to learn more regarding the changes teacher leaders perceive have come to themselves in their process of becoming a teacher leader. In some ways, these changes are difficult to separate from the benefits that have come to these teacher leaders as the changes themselves have been beneficial. I will discuss the benefits of teacher leadership in the next section.

One of James’s changes came to his point-of-view. Being a department chair for 10 years has given him, in his words, a “school-level” perspective. He described this perspective this way:

I think it helps me be able to see outside of just my classroom and be able to see the kids – you know, these are students with eight class periods....It’s also helped me see some of the things that are school-wide that we’re trying to work on and be able to support that in my classroom.

One of Steve’s changes is his increase in confidence in his leadership abilities. He spoke of his first experience on a school leadership team: “We met before school started as a Leadership Team and began to plan a few things. I sat in those meetings overwhelmed, thinking, I don’t know what I am doing making these decisions for others.” Now, Steve has become a confident teacher of teachers throughout his district, and he advocates for his teachers as well as the reforms that he has made to his content-
area district-wide.

Carter’s change came as he realized his own power in setting the culture of his classroom. He now strives to influence culture by supporting his schools’ mission, vision, values, and goals. He also has the confidence to strive to connect with each of his students, especially “…with those more difficult kids and...have more wins” with them.

Evan has had several formal leadership roles throughout his career, but the biggest change for him seems to have come fairly recently as a result of his work as PLC coach. Here is how he described it:

I think being a PLC coach has [had the most effect on my teaching]. Being the department chair, or some of the other stuff, I don’t know that it made me a better teacher or was really that much better for the students. But PLC coach for sure, because it’s...focused on student learning like never before, and if I’m going to try to teach other teachers how to focus on student learning then I need to really up my game.

Amber has noticed the changes in her influence in the past several years as she has gained more confidence in her role as a leader. She said this of her expanding influence:

That’s something that has definitely developed more the last...seven or eight years...that’s been an area where I feel like I have influence. Where I didn’t really as a new teacher. I was...absorbing the influence from other people...and then when I got more experience, I was able to kind of influence it the other way and help that way.

One of the ways Renée has changed is in her desire to delegate more of the leadership responsibilities in her department to other teachers. She has also become more cautious through the years in her response to new initiatives. She said:

There is always a cost with something new. And...so that’s the big thing that I have changed over the years is just that, whenever something is presented to me new, I’m way more cautious about it and I want to do way more research into it
and talk to other people who have already done it and get their experience and get their advice, versus just, ‘Well, let’s just try it and see what happens.’

Emma identified the changes that have come to her through her leadership experiences. She explained that she is much more willing to share her thoughts and opinions. She said:

I think my first 2 years in CTL meetings, if I said five words in a meeting, I would be shocked. I was just...absorbing and learning from others; and being in those meetings and a part of those decision-making bodies, I started to realize my opinions are helpful...they voice the concerns of my whole department as well, and so I learned...how to advocate for myself as a teacher and for my department and for my students.

For Janice, one of her changes came as she began to reject the public accolades she was receiving, and thought would make her happy but weren’t. Her success brought her feelings of shame because she felt that she was being judged by her colleagues. Instead, she decided to focus exclusively on her students. She explained it this way:

When I am able to – and it took a few years to figure how to do it – but...when I can shut off that feeling of being shamed around other adults that I’m working with, and I can really just focus on the kids, oh, my gosh, it’s magical and it’s fun and I have kids who still reach out to me through social media and say, “I know you don’t remember me, but I was in your class 7 years ago, and I just want you to know that I can’t remember a lot of what you taught, but I remember how you made me feel. You made me feel good.” And that’s been awesome.

A change that Tori sees in herself as a teacher leader is in her methods of instruction. Tori stated:

When I first started teaching, I was much more teacher-centered in the classroom. Teaching, lecturing...assignment, that type thing. And now I’m much more student-centered in terms of the activities that they do and the learning that happens.

Annie mentioned a recent change as a result of her leadership activities. With her afterschool club, her work with numerous state-level boards, and a busy home life, Annie
realized that she needed to cut back on her leadership work and find greater balance. She described it this way:

I just felt like really overwhelmed and really stressed and at the same time I was moving.... I was just really overwhelmed.... I feel like this year I’ve been a little bit better with only taking on tasks that I know is not going to interfere with my family life.

Naomi identified a change in her confidence as she has been a teacher leader:

I think I just have more confidence...I’ve always been willing to try new things in the classroom and do things, but now I feel like instead of just, “Oh that’s interesting, I’m going to try it.” I think I know more so I know ahead of time what’s going to work or how I change things to make it work. Before I’m just randomly trying activities and things that sound fun. So, I think that’s, that’s the mark of...a good teacher is not just doing things because, “Hey. There was some (subject) teacher that had a fun thing on YouTube and I’m going to try it.”

**Perceived Teacher Leadership’s Benefits to the Leader, Their School, Others in the School, and Students**

Both York-Barr and Duke’s (2004) and Wenner and Campbell’s (2017) literature reviews suggest several benefits that come from teacher leadership, as does Katzenmeyer and Moller’s (2001) book *Awakening the Sleeping Giant: Helping Teachers Develop Leaders*. These benefits include opportunities to observe other teachers, instructional expertise that influence the leader’s class and colleague’s classes, increased retention, greater understanding of the big picture of schools, and increased learning (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Other benefits identified are teacher leaders improve their teaching performance as they help others to improve, professional efficacy, overcoming resistance to change, career enhancement through being energized by leadership roles, improved mentoring skills, those who are mentored have their instructional skills improved, the
organizational capacity of the school is strengthened through PLCs, sustainable change, and enhanced feelings of professionalism (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001). Additional benefits include feelings of empowerment for all teachers, an atmosphere of professional growth and school change, feelings of professionalism, and a sense of commitment about positively impacting students (Wenner & Campbell, 2017).

The final research question for this study sought to identify what these teacher leaders perceive to be the benefits of teacher leadership to themselves, their school, and others in the school setting. Benefits to student learning was not researched in this study because it is difficult to connect student outcomes directly to teacher leadership, however, both York-Barr and Duke (2004) as well as Smylie and Eckert (2018) propose models of teacher development that suggest that teacher leadership could ultimately benefit student learning. The teachers in this study suggested ways that their students might benefit from their leadership work. This section will categorize the findings of this study as they relate to the proposed benefits listed above. I have combined several of the benefits together.

Opportunities to Observe Other Teachers, Improved Mentoring Skills, and Improving Other Teachers’ Skills Through Mentoring

Each teacher who participated in this study expressed a desire to help other teachers, and nine of the 11 seek to share with others. Nine of the 11 also indicate that they get ideas from others and seven of them regularly work with new teachers. Five of these teachers specifically mentioned having a love for their colleagues.

James’s initial leadership event came as a result of being unofficially mentored. Carter seeks to assist his principal’s goal of improving leadership capacity throughout the
school by sharing leadership responsibilities and supporting his fellow-teachers in their leadership efforts. Evan enjoys working with teacher teams as a PLC coach. He takes things that he learns from professional development trainings and from effective teams and shares it with the teacher teams he works with. Amber has become an informal mentor to new teachers as her administrators bring them by to observe her teaching. Renée has been both a formal and informal mentor. Currently, she checks in on other teachers to see how she can assist them. She also helps them as they communicate with parents and develop their classroom management techniques. Emma was closely mentored for 13 years by a vice-principal, and she found it beneficial to her as both teacher and department chair. Although the effects might be delayed, Janice feels that she is able to positively impact every student at her school through her instructional coaching work. Tori has been the new teacher mentor at her school long enough that she has mentored most of the teachers in her building. She has developed reflective listening and speaking skills to better serve these teachers, as well as striving to be caring, friendly, and approachable. Naomi has sought to mentor her department unofficially as she has encouraged them to become more involved with the use of data and grant writing. Her department at a previous school modeled being an effective PLC at a national conference.

**Professional Efficacy, Enhanced Feelings of Professionalism, Feelings of Empowerment, and Increased Retention and Career Enhancement by Being Energized by Leadership Roles**

Six of the teachers who participated explained that they enjoy the leadership work they are involved with. Three of the teachers indicated that they like to have a say. James
enjoys sharing things that he has learned with other teachers. Steve enjoys his leadership work because he believes that he is improving things for his students and for the teachers he works with. Carter’s leadership experiences have brought him greater confidence as a teacher. He is particularly proud of his ability to work with difficult students. Evan appreciates that his leadership position allows him a voice in how his school is led.

Amber enjoys her leadership work, and she takes the initiative to make changes she feels are necessary for the school. Renée is motivated by her self-appointed role as gatekeeper and protector of her fellow-teachers. She loves knowing what is going on and having a say and she feels that she has helped maintain the integrity of teaching in her school. Emma feels that her leadership experiences have given her confidence in her ability to advocate for herself and her fellow teachers. She feels more comfortable with herself and the knowledge that she is part of the decision-making process. She also feels joy in her assignment as a PLC coach and she believes that that joy makes her better at her job. Janice believes that she would not be as an effective teacher as she is if she hadn’t been forced to reinvent herself frequently due to school and assignment changes.

As she has worked to mentor new teachers, Tori has stayed current with teaching practices and is re-energized each year. Annie feels that her after-school club and the school store are an asset to her school. Naomi seems dedicated to consistent professional development. Naomi related that her desire to keep current in her professional development is “fun.” She also used the word fun to describe her involvement with writing questions at the state level. She is also optimistic about influencing a new principal to implement improvements that she feels should be made to her school.
Greater Understanding of the Big Picture of Schools

Each of the 11 teachers believe they are having a positive impact on the culture of their schools. Nine of the 11 are or have been a member of a faculty council or a school leadership team. Five of the 11 teachers stated specifically that they have acquired an expanded view as a result of their leadership activities.

James indicated that his “school-level” view that comes from his leadership work gives him increased empathy and understanding for his students as he realizes that his is just one of eight they have on their schedules. Steve’s work at the district-level, and the trusting relationships he has developed, allow him to build bridges between administrators and teachers. Evan’s experiences with several aspects of school leadership, as well as his understanding of the district’s vision for PLCs, put him in a position where his view is enhanced. Renée’s perspective has increased through her work at both the district and state level. Her administrative endorsement has also helped her to see things from a principal’s point-of-view, which allows her to mediate between administrators and teachers. Emma has spent almost her entire career in a school-level leadership position. Because of this, she has extensive institutional knowledge. She also feels that she has helped maintain the culture of her school. Tori has been on her school’s leadership team since it opened, and this has developed a strong sense of stewardship in her. Annie serves on several state boards in her subject-area that work in coordination with local universities to help educate teachers. This provides Annie a state-level view of her content-area. For Naomi, her big picture understanding of schools has led her to try to make several changes to her current school, such as: implementing student-led
conferences, improving PBIS, student remediation, a ninth-grade awards night, and improved use of data in their PLCs. She is seeking to influence her school’s atmosphere. She has also been involved with writing tests at the state-level which helps her department as they prepare their own assessments.

**Increased Learning, Instructional Expertise that Benefits Their Class and the Classes of Others and an Atmosphere of Professional Growth and Sustainable School Change**

Each of the 11 teachers have earned a masters’ degree and nine of the 11 spoke specifically about the importance of professional development or conferences. Six of them believe they have become more innovative in their teaching. James indicated that being a department chair has brought access to conferences, which ultimately led to the grading reforms he initiated.

As part of his district-level work, Steve observes other teachers. He is then able to take the best instructional practices from these teachers to benefit the students in his own classroom. He also stays in leadership to protect the reforms he and others have made in his content-area in the district.

Carter’s leadership experience and administrative endorsement allow him to effectively share leadership responsibilities with others in his department. As mentioned earlier, Evan is able to bring best practices from his PLC coaching and trainings to other teams within his school as well as to his own classroom. He indicated that he feels the need to be as effective a teacher as he can if he is going to coach others.

Amber had a great experience earning her masters’ degree. She believes that she
has become more innovative in her teaching and more discerning regarding what changes she needs to make. She enjoys being a positive influence on the culture of her school.

Renée’s driving passion is sustainable school change. She seeks to benefit students by protecting her teachers from being overwhelmed with unsustainable school initiatives.

Like Evan, Emma receives professional development in her role as PLC coach. This training, and what she learns from teams she coaches, allow her to benefit all the teams of her school.

In addition to professional development and conferences, Janice seeks out research to help her in her work with creating a relationship-building curriculum for the school. She indicated that she takes all of this learning and tries to apply it back to her classroom and her students.

Tori’s leadership experiences have provided professional opportunities and she has also committed herself to turn to educational research to inform best practice, and she takes this learning and applies it into her classroom. She believes that her leadership activities have made her a better teacher. Her sense of stewardship for the culture of her school is so strong that she and others have maintained the culture of her school through three administrations.

Annie’s work at the state-level is partly so she can have an influence on the standards that are created for her subject-area. One of the three areas Naomi focused on during our interview together was her education, and she believes that there is always more to learn. Most recently, she started a technology endorsement to help her as she
sought to improve her online presence due to COVID. She also regularly attends summer professional development. Naomi is committed to making incremental progress in influencing her school.

**Organizational Capacity of Schools Strengthened Through PLCs and a Sense of Commitment About Positively Impacting Students**

Each teacher interviewed for this study expressed a desire for students to succeed. Five of the teachers spoke specifically of the importance of PLCs and two of the teachers work part-time in their schools as PLC coaches. Steve’s driving passion is to ensure that students succeed in his class so they will have the confidence and the drive to succeed in their other classes. Carter strives to involve others in leadership and to build school culture by supporting his schools’ mission, vision, values, and goals. Evan is strongly committed to the PLC process and seeks to improve the PLC work in his school through his coaching. Amber perceives increased empathy for her students as a result of her efforts to build relationships with them. She also collaborates with other teachers in her efforts to improve her teaching. Renée was an early proponent of PLC efforts in her school, collaborating with a fellow teacher in her subject area. Like Evan, Emma is strongly committed to the PLC process and to her role as a PLC coach. She believes that the PLC process has made her own students more academically successful. Janice also mentioned the effectiveness of the PLC process. She has also made a focused attempt to channel her teaching efforts on helping students make and see progress. Tori is committed to doing her own research in order to improve her teaching practice. Annie strongly believes that her work with her after-school club and the school store have a
positive effect on both her own students, and students throughout the school due to the store’s relationship with her school’s PBIS efforts. Naomi came from a school that was a model for the PLC process, and she has struggled to get her PLC at Clearview Junior High to focus on data like her PLC at Hilltop Junior had. She has also tried to get them invested in the grant writing that she enjoys. She sees her students as her primary focus of influence, and she believes that she is making incremental progress within her school on their behalf.

**Perceived Effects on Students**

James believes that his leadership has affected his students through his grading reform efforts as well as instructional knowledge he has gained through conferences. Steve believes that his work to empower students helps them overcome life challenges and help them be more successful in school and in their future. Carter strives to help his students become responsible for their own learning and to be able to learn something from everyone. Evan believes that the PLC work he does with his content-area team benefits his students. He is also able to bring in best practices from the other teams he coaches. Amber sees her effect on students as being reciprocal and coming from her heart to theirs. Amber has been able to influence students who are seen as leaders in her school. Renée is reflective as a teacher. Whenever she learns something from a professional development, she seeks to implement that learning in her classroom. Emma sees the benefits of her PLC work on student learning. In addition to anecdotal evidence, she maintains that her students are very successful on their assessments partly as a result of her PLC efforts. Janice has made a deliberate decision to focus exclusively on her
students and not on what her fellow teachers may think of her. She believes that this has strengthened her relationships with her students. She also believes that the decisions she makes as an instructional coach have a direct effect on each student in her school. Tori stated that she believes that her leadership experiences have made her a better teacher. She seeks out best practices and applies what she learns to her classroom. Annie believes that the after-school club that she supervises is beneficial to students. She also believes that the relationships she builds with students there leads to improved teaching in the classroom. Naomi identified helping students as the strongest part of her influence as a teacher. She believes that her after-school club is beneficial to them, and she also feels that their participation in the grants she is involved with help them feel more invested.

**Tolls**

While these participants mostly shared positive aspects of teacher leadership, there were some tolls expressed. For example, while Steve enjoys his leadership work and feels that he makes a difference, he is growing tired and feels that it is time to let other teachers step into his role. He also feels that his district-level work occasionally takes time and thought away from his students.

Evan struggled during his time as a part-time vice-principal with those teachers who didn’t understand their purpose as a teacher or had grown tired with their job. More recently, he faces opposition as a PLC coach from veteran teachers who are unwilling to change.

Renée feels stressed and exhausted at times from mediating between teachers and administrators. She is careful about what burdens she is willing to take on so that she
does not become overwhelmed.

As with Evan, Emma has experienced some resistance from teachers who do not want to be coached. She saw this particularly when she was an instructional coach. Emma has also been asked to do more administrative jobs that would generally fall under the responsibilities of a principal.

Janice has struggled throughout her career with an internal conflict regarding whether or not she has influence, even though she has been nationally recognized for her teaching and has held formal leadership positions. More than any other teacher, Janice has faced direct opposition from colleagues. It was particularly difficult when she was one of the district content-area specialists for her subject.

Tori stated that sometimes her leadership work requires her to leave her classroom to a substitute teacher. She also has experienced an emotional cost as she works with teams that are not functioning as well as they could.

At times, Annie has taken on too many responsibilities. This year, she has found a better balance. She also indicated that she has noticed that it is generally the same teachers that end up shouldering the bulk of leadership responsibilities. Annie has also encountered teachers who ask her to do things for them that are related to her skills and talents, but not to her job responsibilities. Unfortunately, there are some who feel that these things are her responsibility. She said that she generally doesn’t mind doing these things, unless the teachers become irritated about how soon she can get them done. Annie’s experience with an unsupportive vice-principal and her attempts to establish a school store suggests the presence of some deprofessionalization as illustrated by
Ingersoll and Perda (2009).

Naomi felt unappreciated as department chair, and this was one of the reasons she left Hilltop Junior High. She also seems to equate good leadership with having good leadership experiences. Because of that negative experience she questions whether or not she has been a good leader. It also seems that she feels that accolades and leadership go together, which also cause her to question her leadership.

**Teacher Leadership Knowledge, Skills, and Dispositions**

In addition to discussing how the results address my three research questions, I believe it is valuable to see how the results compare with the existing literature on teacher leadership. I have already spoken to formal and informal roles, as well as the definition of teacher leadership, I will now examine the results of the study in light of the literature on teacher leadership knowledge, skills, and dispositions.

As mentioned in the literature review, Baecher’s (2012) study of ways to train and support teacher leaders suggested that teacher leaders gain knowledge through apprenticeship (learning from other leaders), participation (learning by doing and observing), and/or self-help (recognizing a need). Each of the teacher leaders in this study gained leadership knowledge through one or more of these courses.

**Apprenticeship**

One of the questions I posed to each of the 11 participants was if they had any mentors as they looked back over their career. Without hesitation, each one was able to share at least one person who had influenced them and who they had learned from.
James mentioned a fellow-teacher, that while relatively new to the profession himself, mentored James through that first difficult year of teaching. James would ask him questions about what to do in certain teaching situations and the two of them would talk things through. This other teacher also recommended books for James to read. James also referenced mentors in his leadership sketch, indicating that he was “standing on the shoulder of giants” who had influenced him.

Steve spoke of a former professor that he has come to know on a personal level. He sees this man frequently at conferences and has come to view him as a father figure. He also mentioned district subject-area leaders that he works with.

Carter’s principal appointed him department chair with the intent of providing him leadership experiences that would benefit him as a future principal. Carter has been most recently influenced by a principal who has encouraged him to increase the leadership capacity of his department by sharing leadership responsibilities.

Evan told me that he has learned something different about leadership from every principal and assistant principal that he has worked with. He expressed to me that he feels lucky to have worked with the principals that he has and for the leadership opportunities they have given him.

Amber still keeps in contact with two of her high school teachers who had an impact on her. The first is now a professor who she sees often at conferences. She told me that his influence has helped shape her thinking. The second is a former choir teacher who Amber thinks of frequently as she teaches and who influences her teaching.
The first mentors Renée shared with me were two district content-area specialists who recognized leadership abilities early in her career and who encouraged her to accept district-level leadership roles. These roles gave her experience, as well as helping her understand how leadership works at a district-level.

Emma was heavily mentored by a vice-principal who was in her classroom and her department meetings almost every week for 13 years. Emma told me that she trusted this administrator and was willing to make correction in her teaching because of that relationship. Emma also mentioned the district content-area leader who has taught her how to focus on a clear vision as a leader.

Janice looks to a former principal who recognized her leadership abilities as one of her mentors. He brought her into a leadership position that exposed her to other teaching styles, as well as professional development opportunities.

Tori was greatly influenced by a principal who brought her into a leadership team and cultivated within her a strong sense of stewardship for her school. He also provided professional development opportunities and built her confidence as a teacher.

Annie spoke of the influence her cooperating teacher had on her when she was a student teacher. This teacher opened her curriculum to Annie and helped her feel fully supported.

Naomi also spoke of her cooperating teacher as an early mentor. She also looked to two former principals as mentors who directly influenced her teaching by observing her classroom and sharing their thoughts.
Participation

Several teachers alluded to learning through observing others. Steve indicated that he has learned by observing former administrators. He told me that from some he has learned what to do as a leader, and from some he has learned what not to do, based on observing their leadership.

Carter strives to be intentional in his learning. He stated to me that he considers every teacher to be his mentor because he is able to learn from nearly every teacher he encounters.

Evan mentioned learning from other teacher leaders who helped him find better balance in his leadership and teaching responsibilities. Annie also mentioned a fellow-teacher who has helped her to appreciate a variety of teaching styles. Annie also looks to a colleague at the state-level as an influence on her as a teacher. She has modeled her curriculum on what this teacher does in her classroom.

Renée speaks highly of a former principal who gave her a significant amount of freedom and responsibility as a department chair. He explained to her that he didn’t understand her subject area as well as she did and that he wanted her to make decisions for her department. She shared with me how this caused a lot of professional growth in her and led her to involve her department in decision-making.

Janice shared with me that she looked to the leadership team at her second school as mentors to her. These were other department chairs who had different teaching styles from her, but people who she learned from through observation. She told me they taught her how to be part of a community.
While Tori was directly mentored by an influential principal, she has also learned by observing her colleagues. She specifically mentioned two teachers as well as a PLC coach at her school who has helped her to become a better coach. She also indicated that she has learned from observing entire teams of teachers that she works with.

Naomi had a colleague outside of her subject area who she turned to early in her career for help. This teacher helped her brainstorm ideas and find solutions to her problems. She assisted Naomi with classroom management issues and gave her a listening ear for her frustrations.

**Self-help**

Some teachers saw a need in their school and helped fill that need. While James was mentored by a fellow-teacher, he also recognized a need in his school that led him to leadership activity. After becoming excited about the potential for reforming the grading process at his school, he sought out others who held similar views and together they built momentum for change.

Steve also recognized a need for reform early on in his career, in this instance, the reform was needed in curriculum. He sought out other like-minded teachers and together they made changes that he is currently working to maintain.

Renée has felt the need to become a gatekeeper who protects her teachers from unsustainable initiatives that would burn them out and harm students. She explained to me that teachers trust her because they know she wants what is best for them.
Relationship-Building Skills

Muijs and Harris (2006), Munroe and Driskill (2014), and Silva et al. (2000) speak of the importance of teacher leaders possessing interpersonal skills and nurturing relationships. These skills were apparent in this group of 11 teachers and evidence surfaced throughout these interviews.

As mentioned earlier, all 11 teachers in this study have a desire for students to succeed and all 11 want to help teachers. As previously discussed, five of the teachers mentioned that they have a love for their fellow teachers and five also mentioned building relationships with other teachers. Five teachers also have the opportunity to work with students outside of class in extracurricular activities. Four teachers specifically mentioned being influenced by their students and three spoke of having a love for their students. Another three indicated that their positive relationships with their students allow them to work with difficult students, and three mentioned that their fellow-teachers trust them. This seems to indicate the importance of relationship building among these teachers.

James builds relationships through his desire to share with other teachers. He also wants his students to always feel that they can improve in his class.

Steve believes that caring, trusting relationships are at the core of being a leader. He is able to build bridges between teachers and teachers and between teachers and administrators because of the trust he has established.

Carter seeks to build relationships with his students to help them realize they can learn from everyone and that they should take ownership for their learning. He likes being a leader from a supporting role, and he has the mindset that he can learn from
Amber strives to ensure that every student leaves her classroom with a positive experience. She believes that her relationships with her students is reciprocal. She helps them learn content and they help her to be more empathetic to their learning needs.

Renée strives to build relationships by serving her fellow teachers. Emma explains the struggles she experiences in her district-level work as a result of not having a relationship with those teachers. She enjoyed the less-structured environment of advising student council because she was able to help those students become successful as leaders.

Janice has worked to develop relationships with her students where they can sense her dedication to them and to their learning. She is also concerned about the mental, emotional, and academic well-being of her students.

Tori believes that anyone who wants to be an effective teacher or leader must first develop strong relationships. She has mentored most of the teachers at her school and she feels that she could go to any one of them for help. Additionally, she has sought to develop skills to enhance her leadership abilities, such as reflective speaking and listening, and trying to be caring, friendly, and approachable.

Annie appreciates the informal relationships that she is able to develop through working with students in an afternoon club. She indicated that these relationships help her to be more effective in the classroom because she has fewer classroom management issues. She suggests that even students who might struggle in other classes often do well in her class because of these relationships.

Naomi spoke of the importance of building relationships within her school
community. Each year she reaches out to parents and sixth-grade teachers seeking students to be part of her accelerated class. Naomi said that she enjoys getting to know the families and she feels that it is good that the community knows her and desire to have their children in her class.
CHAPTER V
DISCUSSION

As I mentioned in Chapter I, this study grew out of my own experiences as a teacher of influence or as a teacher leader. The intent of this study was to gain a greater understanding of the experience of becoming and being a teacher leader at a personal level. The research questions addressed by this study were:

1. How do teachers who are seen as teacher leaders perceive the similarities and differences they experience in the process of becoming a teacher leader?
2. How do teachers who are seen as teacher leaders believe that the process of becoming a teacher leader has changed them?
3. What do teachers who are seen as teacher leaders view as the benefits or tolls to themselves personally, to the school as a whole, and to other people in the school setting?

The rest of this chapter will synthesize the findings from these 11 participants as they relate to these research questions as well as the literature reviewed in Chapter II. I will also discuss how this study adds to our understanding of teacher leadership and offer suggestions for future research.

Guiding Theories of Teacher Leadership

In their review of teacher leadership studies, York-Barr and Duke (2004) identified four theories of teacher leadership: participative leadership, leadership as an organizational quality, distributed leadership, and parallel leadership. Another theory frequently cited is authentic leadership (Greenier & Whitehead, 2016; Shamir & Eilam, 2005). This study was grounded in both distributed leadership and authentic leadership...
Distributed Leadership

Muijs and Harris (2006) identified the following as roles that teacher leaders in distributed leadership would likely be filling: shared decision-making, collaboration, active participation, professional learning, and activism. The teachers in this study showed strong evidence of filling each of these roles.

It is clear from these interviews that each of these 11 teachers actively participate in their schools, and it is likely this active participation that influenced their colleagues to nominate them as teachers of influence. This reflects the formal roles that these teachers take in their schools as each of them is involved in at least one formal leadership role. In regard to shared decision making, 10 of the 11 have been, or currently are department chairs, and 9 of them spoke specifically of serving on school leadership teams alongside administrators. These leadership teams are where many decisions are made for their schools. This indicates involvement in both decision-making and active participation.

Similarly, all 11 of these teachers are involved in informal leadership within their schools. Often, these informal positions centered around interactions between these teacher leaders and their colleagues. For example, nine of the teachers spoke specifically about getting ideas from other teachers. Additionally, five spoke specifically about the importance of PLCs, and are therefore likely to be involved with collaboration as that is the core concept of professional learning communities.

Professional learning, another indicator of distributed leadership, was also evident among these teachers. Each of the 11 has earned a masters’ degree, and nine spoke
specifically of the importance of professional development and/or conferences in their careers. Six of the 11 also indicated they feel that being involved in teacher leadership has made them more innovative as teachers, which also suggests their recognition of professional learning.

Each of these 11 teachers also has an identifiable passion, and each believes they impact school culture, which suggests activism. Based on Muijs and Harris’ (2006) five characteristics of distributed leadership, it appears that these 11 teacher leaders provide strong evidence for distributed leadership as an appropriate guiding theory for teacher leadership.

**Authentic Leadership**

It also seems that the evidence provided by this group of teacher leaders also indicates the presence of authentic leadership. Northouse (2010) provides these five characteristics for authentic leadership: the leader knows their purpose, they have a strong sense about the right thing to do, they act on their values and are disciplined, they are fervent about what they do, and they develop relationships of trust with those they lead. Shamir and Eilam (2005) suggest that authentic leaders have these characteristics: the role of leader is central to who they are, their beliefs are well-defined and consistent, their goals represent their values, and their behavior represents their self-concepts.

I would suggest that each of these 11 teachers have a strong sense of purpose, a sense about the right thing to do, and act on those purposes and values. For example, each of the 11 teachers expressed a desire for students to succeed and to help other teachers. Each also believe they are shaping their school culture, which suggests they are acting
purposefully. Six spoke of the importance of building relationships with their students. For three of these teachers, the importance of those relationships was further emphasized as they mentioned meeting former students who had approached them and reported the positive influence these teachers had been in their lives.

There is also evidence suggesting that these teachers have developed trusting relationships with colleagues as 10 of them specifically mentioned sharing with other teachers and nine mentioned getting ideas from other teachers. This is further strengthened by the five teachers who specifically mentioned having a love for their colleagues.

Further evidence for authentic leadership can be seen in these teachers’ leadership sketches and in their personal definitions of teacher leadership as both clearly indicate each teacher’s strong sense of purpose as a teacher leader as well as the actions that come as a result of that purpose. It is also expressed through their unique passions. I believe that their passion and their purpose together give them their sense of purpose about the right thing to do as leaders, as well as motivate them to act with fervor.

This study adds to the literature by providing additional support for distributed leadership as a guiding theory. It also suggests that distributed leadership is appropriate as a guiding theory.

**Conceptual Frameworks**

As discussed in the literature review, it has been difficult for the literature to show a tie between teacher leadership and student learning. In their 2004 literature review,
York-Barr and Duke presented a conceptual framework, based on the literature they reviewed, suggesting a path whereby teacher leaders might impact student learning, or actions that could be taken to potentially improve student learning. This framework flows from conditions favorable to teacher leadership to means of influence. It then proceeds to targets and then on to intermediary outcomes, and from there to student learning.

Their framework begins with a foundation built on the value of teacher leaders and the work they do, as well as the conditions that support teacher leaders. It appears from these interviews with these 11 teachers that, for the most part, these foundational elements are present in the schools where they teach.

York-Barr and Duke’s (2004) conceptual model next focuses on the ways that teacher leaders might exercise their influence. These means include: a focus on teaching and learning, the creation of trusting relationships, and the formal and informal roles teacher leaders fill. Again, these 11 teacher leaders have provided evidence for each of these modes of influence.

The next step in this model is the targets of influence, which include individuals, teams or groups, or organizational capacity. Whether they be mentors, department chairs, PLC coaches, instructional coaches, or trusted teachers, the 11 teacher leaders interviewed apply their influence on at least one, and for some of them all, of these targets.

The last step in this model, prior to the assumed student learning, is the intermediary outcomes of teacher leadership. These are the improvements made to teaching and learning as a result of the work of the teacher leaders. Each of these teachers
shared their perceived influence on themselves, their schools, and their students.

While this study is not intended to prove positive student academic outcomes, it does provide evidence that the steps in York-Barr and Duke’s model are present and applicable among these particular teachers. These 11 teachers do perceive that their work benefits both teachers and students.

More recently, as also outlined in the literature review, Smylie and Eckert (2018) conceived a model that focuses more on the development of a leadership environment and culture. The outcomes of this model are teacher leadership career attitude and decision-making, as well as school improvement, improved teaching, and improved student learning. It also seems that the interviews in this study offer evidence to support this model, as well.

For example, Janice made the choice to turn from negative experiences with some colleagues to focusing her efforts directly on her students’ academic improvement. This focus led to increased feelings of influence. She perceived that her experiences with teacher leadership have made her a more effective instructional coach, and she saw school-wide student improvement as a result of her work with teachers.

Emma provided another example. She perceived that her experiences with teacher leadership have given her a voice and the confidence to advocate more effectively. She perceived a link between her PLC coaching of teacher teams and student achievement in her school.

This study suggests further support for York-Barr and Duke’s (2004) model. While this study does not provide empirical evidence for student academic achievement,
it does suggest that these teacher leaders perceive their work as having a positive impact on students. Additionally, this study gives support to Smylie and Eckert’s (2018) model of culture and environment favorable to the development of teacher leadership.

A Framework for Describing the Process of Becoming a Teacher Leader

After reviewing the transcripts and sketches of these 11 teachers and reflecting on their experiences in light of the research questions for this study and the literature, I propose a conceptual framework describing the process of becoming a teacher leader. This particular framework would be positioned prior to the foundational level of York-Barr and Duke’s (2004) conceptual model and would be useful to those seeking to nurture the development of future teacher leaders. This conceptual framework is shown as Figure 17.

Figure 17

Conceptual Framework
This model suggests an initial leadership event. In James’s experience, for example, this initial leadership event was being mentored by a fellow teacher. Steve’s initial event came with an appointment to a formal leadership position. In his case, that position was a department chair. The initial leadership events for each teacher, as well as the qualities that led to these events, can be found in Chapter IV.

This initial event can become a defining event if it leads to the next step of this proposed framework, which is when the initial event ignites a passion within the teacher leader and/or provides that teacher leader access to opportunities or experiences that provide learning or growth. For example, in Carter’s experience, he turned the confidence he gained in a difficult classroom to believing that he can help even the toughest student to be successful in his class. For Amber, realizing the impact she had on that one 9th grade student ignited a passion within her to ensure that each of her students has a positive experience in her classroom. I have shown the two segments of this portion of the framework connected because it appears that having the access to opportunities and learning ignites a passion and vice versa. The various passions uncovered in this study can be reviewed in Chapter IV.

The next segment of this conceptual framework is the perspective change. This is when the teacher leader obtains an expanded view of their influence. This can come when they see things at a school-level perspective as they work on a school leadership team, or it might come when they have access to observing the teaching styles of others. It also might come from a realization that they have a voice and can influence school vision and direction, or it might come as a sense of school stewardship or ownership. Or it might
involve several of these factors. The perspective changes for each teacher can be found in Chapter IV in the “Leadership’s effect on self” portion of their narratives.

The final segment of this framework are the benefits to the teacher leader, the benefits to the school, the benefits to the students, and the potential tolls to the teacher leader. The specific benefits and tolls for each teacher leader, their schools, and their schools can be found in the individual narratives and leadership processes found in Chapter IV.

Foundational to this conceptual explanation is administrator support. Each of the 11 teachers in this study benefited from the support of a principal or other administrator. In some cases, the teacher leaders may not have had leadership experiences if not for the actions of a principal.

This conceptual model is significant to the further understanding of teacher leadership as it identifies the importance of a passion that gives direction and energy to the work of a teacher leader. This model also supports the findings of previous models (Smylie & Eckert, 2018; York-Barr & Duke, 2004) that have identified the importance of administrator support and teacher leader development activities and experiences.

**Limitations**

As a phenomenology, this study does not attempt to be applied to all teachers generally. It describes the experiences of these 11 junior high school/middle school teachers from a single school district in the suburban western U.S. Additionally, this study asked for nominations from fellow-teachers. While care was taken to ask for
nominations for teachers of influence, and example qualities of what a teacher of influence might be, it is unknown what qualities the individual nominating teachers used to make their decisions as to whom to nominate.

There is also the question of how teachers view teacher leadership. For those believing it to be limited to formal roles and positions, they may not have nominated a teacher who is in fact exhibiting teacher leadership characteristics but doing so informally.

Additionally, as mentioned earlier, one school did not have a teacher with more than one nomination. Instead, there were several teachers nominated by a single individual. That school’s participant was chosen by a random number generator.

**Implications**

As discussed in Chapter I, teacher leadership is an important facet of school leadership, and has the potential to facilitate and maintain positive changes in schools. This study provides a potential theoretical model for the process of becoming a teacher leader. Of particular value is the identification of the initial event and its potential to become a defining event. Also of value is the reaffirmation of the importance of school administrators in encouraging and facilitating teacher leadership development.

This study suggests that a principal seeking to assist teachers in becoming teacher leaders pay attention to these initial events and help to nurture them into becoming defining events. A principal could also create initial events in the careers of teachers to encourage future teacher leadership. Those administrators seeking ideas on where to
This study also lends support to the theoretical frameworks proposed by both Smylie and Eckert (2018) and York-Barr and Duke (2004). Although a connection between the leadership activities of these 11 teachers and student achievement is not shown in this study, these teachers do perceive positive academic effects on their students.

This study adds to the literature by providing examples of teacher leaders’ perceptions of their influence on their schools, their colleagues, and their students, as well as illustrating some of the potential tolls that come with teacher leadership. This study also provides a window into the perceived benefits of leadership on the teacher leaders themselves.

A concern raised by this study, and voiced by Amber, is the possible inequality of teacher access to professional development. Here is how Amber described it: “I really appreciate the chances I’ve had [to receive professional development], but I sometimes worry that it’s not equitable—all teachers should have those same opportunities.” It is clear from these interviews that each of these 11 teacher leaders have benefitted from professional development. With funds for professional development limited, are certain teachers benefiting from these opportunities while others are not?

**Future Research**

Further research is needed to determine the significance of administrative involvement in supporting teachers with their initial leadership event as this study only
involved teachers who are viewed by their colleagues as having influence. Research would need to be undertaken to identify situations where teachers experienced an initial leadership event but were not adequately supported for it to become a defining event. Similarly, in this study, each of the participants received administrative help. Further research is needed to identify teacher leaders who had defining events without administrative support or perhaps even in spite of a lack of administrative support. It would also be beneficial to examine the availability of professional development opportunities available to teachers and if expanding those opportunities would allow for greater leadership within schools.

**Conclusion**

Leithwood et al. (2004) stated that “leadership is second only to classroom instruction among all school-related factors that contribute to what students learn at school” (p. 5). York-Barr and Duke (2004) declared in their literature review that our schools need “active involvement” (p. 255) of individuals at all levels to make lasting impacts and that teachers “rightly and importantly hold a central position in the ways schools operate and in the core functions of teaching and learning” (p. 255). Traditionally, principals alone have taken the role of leaders in the schools, but that is no longer possible. Sustainable school improvement needs leadership involvement at all levels (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001), and teacher leaders specifically are needed to fill the leadership gap (Cranston, 2000).

Through these interviews and sketches, these 11 teacher leaders have
demonstrated their active involvement in their schools and the roles they play in the improvement of their schools. Janice used her prior experiences and professional development to reach teachers and students through her work as instructional coach.

Emma shared her voice and her experience as she participated in her school’s leadership meetings. She felt effective as a leader as she coached teams of teachers in her school. In a similar way, Evan felt success through his work as PLC coach. He also had a career’s worth of teacher leadership experience as he served his school in various leadership capacities.

Tori’s long involvement in her school gave her a strong sense of ownership that transcended administrator changes and allowed for sustainable school leadership. Along with his desire to foster meaningful relationships with his students and colleagues, Steve felt a strong sense of stewardship as he worked to improve instruction in his content-area district-wide. Renée felt a strong sense of duty as she tried to maintain conditions in her school that were favorable to both students and her colleagues.

Amber’s heart was tied to her students and her leadership left its mark on her school as she mentored students through her involvement with student council, journalism, and yearbook. James felt great satisfaction through his grading-reform efforts. He too indicated that his heart was in the center of his work with his students.

As a teacher leader, Naomi developed a strong sense of the power that she had to improve conditions in her classroom and her school in general. Carter had similar experiences realizing the great power that he had to shape the culture of his classroom and his department. Annie took great satisfaction in the efforts she invested in providing
increased opportunities for her students.

This study underscores the value of teacher leadership by examining it through the lived experiences of these 11 teacher leaders. It illustrates the effects of their leadership, the changes they have experienced, as well as their struggles and successes. Perhaps most importantly it provides a window into the experiences of 11 teachers who have allowed their leadership experiences to shape them into becoming teacher leaders whose opportunities and passions have combined to provide them opportunity to improve their schools and positively influence students.
REFERENCES


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APPENDICES
Appendix A

Nomination Email
Dear:

My name is Cory Smith. I am a teacher at [name removed to maintain confidentiality] Middle School in [name removed to maintain confidentiality] School District and a doctoral student in the School of Teacher Education and Leadership at Utah State University. I am doing research into the experiences of junior high school teachers in this district who have a strong influence on their schools. This email is being sent to all junior high school teachers in [name removed to maintain confidentiality] School District.

I am seeking your help in identifying teachers for this study. Please think of junior high teachers in your school or in [name removed to maintain confidentiality] School District who have some combination of the following characteristics: respected as a teacher, learning oriented, have leadership abilities, keep a focus on teaching and learning, create positive and trusting relationships, encourage parent involvement, help other teachers solve problems, are good collaborators, model effective teaching practice, help create a positive school culture, and/or are promoters of change. These teachers may or may not have formal titles.

Please follow the link below to a Qualtrics survey and provide the names of the teachers you believe have some combination of these characteristics. Your responses will be completely anonymous and are very appreciated.

Qualtrics survey: https://usu.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_8208AyDbEj6XU5T

Please feel free to email me with any questions at [email removed]

Sincerely,

Cory Smith

Questions about this recruitment process should be directed to Dr. Scott Hunsaker at [email removed]
Appendix B

Recruitment Email
Dear:

My name is Cory Smith. I am a teacher from [name removed to maintain confidentiality] Middle School and a doctoral student in the School of Teacher Education and Leadership at Utah State University. You are invited to participate in a research study I am conducting as part of my doctoral studies. The purpose of this research is to understand the process of becoming a teacher of influence. You have been invited to participate because you were nominated by other teachers as a junior high school teacher of influence.

Your participation will involve two interviews with me. The initial interview will be about 45 minutes and will be conducted through Zoom at a time convenient for you. The purpose of the second interview to clarify things discussed in the first interview. In these interviews, I will ask you to share your experiences with me as a teacher of influence, as well as your thoughts and feelings regarding those experiences. Your responses will be kept completely confidential. Before our first Zoom interview, I will ask you graphically represent the experiences you have had in influencing students, colleagues, or your school in general. This artwork can be realistic or symbolic in nature. This artistic quality of this sketch is not important, and I anticipate that you will spend no more than 15 minutes to complete it. I will give you more specific instructions regarding this text if you consent to participate in the study. I anticipate that the total time of your involvement in this study would not exceed 100 minutes.

If you are willing to participate in this study, please follow the link below to read the informed consent information, give your consent, and provide your contact information.

Informed consent link: https://usu.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_8208AyDbEj6XU5T

If you have any questions, or if you would like more information regarding this study, please email me at [email removed].

Questions or concerns about the recruitment process should be directed to Dr. Scott Hunsaker at [email removed].

Sincerely,

Cory Smith
Appendix C

Utah State University IRB-approved Informed Consent
The Experience of Becoming a Teacher Leader

You are invited to participate in a research study by Dr. Scott Hunsaker, a professor in the School of Teacher Education and Leadership at Utah State University. The purpose of this research is to better understand the experience of teachers of influence. You are being asked to participate in this research because you have been nominated as a teacher of influence by your peers. Your participation in this study is voluntary and you may withdraw your participation at any time for any reason. If you take part in this study, you will be asked to first create a simple sketch illustrating your experiences as a teacher of influence. This sketch would likely take you 10-15 minutes to complete. Your sketch is not expected to be of high artistic quality but should instead provide a map for us to discuss your experiences. You will also be asked to participate in two 45-minute interviews through Zoom to learn more about your experiences as a teacher of influence. After our first interview together, I will provide a written transcript for you to read to ensure that I have understood your experiences correctly. The purpose of the second interview will be to clarify any questions from the first interview. The maximum total time of your involvement is expected to be about 100 minutes. If you agree to participate, the researchers will also collect information regarding the culture of your school. The possible risks of participating in this study include loss of confidentiality. The benefits of participating in this study are identifying aspects of your teaching that have influenced your school and fellow teachers. We cannot guarantee that you will directly benefit from this study but it has been designed to learn more about the experiences of teachers who have an influence on their school and colleagues. We will make every effort to ensure that the information you provide remains confidential. We will not reveal your identity in any publications, presentations, or reports resulting from this research study. While we will make every effort to mask your identity, it may be possible for someone to recognize the specifics you share with us. We will collect your information through a drawing and Zoom interviews that will recorded. Online activities always carry a risk of a data breach, but we will use systems and processes that minimize breach opportunities. This data will be securely stored in Box.com, an encrypted, cloud-based storage system. Data identifiers will be destroyed after the study has been written. Audio and video recordings will be retained until all analysis and writeup have been completed, at which time recordings will be deleted from the cloud storage and only de-identified transcripts will be retained. You can decline to participate in any part of this study for any reason and can end your participation at any time. If you have any questions about this study, you can contact Dr. Scott Hunsaker at [email removed]. Thank you again for your time and consideration. If you have any concerns about this study, please contact Utah State University’s Human Research Protection Office at (435) 797-0567 or irb@usu.edu. By following this link, you agree to participate in this study. You indicate that you understand the risks and benefits of participation, and that you know what you will be asked to do. You also agree that you have asked any questions you might have, and are clear on how to stop your participation in the study if you choose to do so. Please be sure to retain a copy of this form for your records.
Appendix D

Interview Protocol
Interview Protocol

- Will you please tell me about the events that you have shown on your sketch?
- Why did you choose to represent these events the way you did?
- How did you feel as you were involved with these events?
- How do you feel that these events affected your students, your teaching, and the school?
- Do you feel that these events have changed you as a teacher? What changes have you seen?
- As you look back on all of these experiences with influence, what mentors did you have.
- What was the initial event where you first realized that you had influence?
- (If that event was an official leadership position) What characteristics or qualities do you believe that your principal saw in you that led to them appointing you to that position.
- Would you give me your own definition of the term teacher leadership?
Appendix E

Tables Showing Participant Experiences Viewed Through Leadership Categories
Table E-1

*Janice’s Experience Viewed Through Leadership Categories*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initial event</th>
<th>Being chosen to be a department chair.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Formal positions</td>
<td>Department chair, member of school leadership team, district content-area specialist, national teaching award nominations and other teaching recognitions, instructional coach, and leads the school behavior leadership team.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-identified qualities that led to being chosen for formal roles</td>
<td>Leadership skills, content-area knowledge, and previous experience with the principal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualities I identified through interview</td>
<td>Competent, approachable, sincere, and genuinely cares for student academic and emotional well-being.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal positions</td>
<td>Dresses in costumes to engage students in the content. She is a catalyst for change and a life-long learner.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership’s effect on self</td>
<td>She has faced opposition from other teachers which has affected her confidence and she worries about her colleagues’ reactions to her success. She also experiences internal conflict about whether or not she really does have influence. She has had opportunities to reinvent herself.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership’s effect on students</td>
<td>Because of the opposition she perceives from her colleagues, she has made a deliberate decision to focus on her students. She believes that this has allowed for improved relationships and increased learning. She frequently co-teaches in many classes as instructional coach and affects students throughout the school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership’s effect on school</td>
<td>She knows that she makes decisions that affect the entire student body. Her work with the behavior leadership team reaches every student through a weekly homeroom lesson dedicated to relationship-building.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Driving passion</td>
<td>The mental, emotional, social, and academic well-being of her students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of administrators</td>
<td>A principal recruited her to be a department chair, assuring her that she was the right person for the job and providing access to a conference. She has been given a position where she influences each student in her school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentors</td>
<td>The principal mentioned above. Janice also indicated that each department chair who was in that leadership team was someone she learned from and viewed as a mentor.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table E-2

*Emma’s Experience Viewed Through Leadership Categories*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Initial event</td>
<td>Chosen to be Department Chair and a mentor her first full-year teaching after student-teaching.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal positions</td>
<td>Department Chair, mentor, student government advisor, instructional coach, district content area committee, PLC Coach, and school leadership committee.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-identified qualities</td>
<td>She is a rule follower, follows-through on assignments, gets things done on time, follows procedures, and is honest.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-identified qualities</td>
<td>She is a rule follower, follows-through on assignments, gets things done on time, follows procedures, and is honest.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-identified qualities</td>
<td>She is a rule follower, follows-through on assignments, gets things done on time, follows procedures, and is honest.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualities I identified through interview</td>
<td>She is confident and committed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal positions</td>
<td>A catalyst for change and a life-long learner.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership’s effect on self</td>
<td>She finds joy in her assignment as a PLC Coach, and she finds that this joy makes her more effective. She speaks-up more at leadership meetings and advocates for her department more effectively. She feels more comfortable with herself and the knowledge that she is part of the decision-making process. Her administrators have assigned her administrative tasks that she perceives to be out of her scope of employment, and she has experienced some resistance from teachers who do not want to be coached.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership’s effect on students</td>
<td>Her leadership experiences have helped her feel more confident as a teacher which has helped her with classroom management. She feels that she is able to focus more attention on teaching. She perceives that her PLC experience has helped her students be more academically successful. She enjoyed her time as student government advisor because she liked helping those students become leaders.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership’s effect on school</td>
<td>Her new administrators have relied on her for her institutional knowledge and she feels that she has helped maintain the culture of her school. She believes that her PLC coaching brings more immediate changes to the teachers she works with and benefits students throughout her school. She</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Driving passion</td>
<td>Her work as a PLC Coach and the PLC process in general.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of administrators</td>
<td>She had supportive administrators who helped her be successful as an inexperienced department chair. She was closely mentored by a vice-principal who observed her teaching once-a-week for 13 years and built a large amount of trust. Because of this trusting relationship, Emma was coached and encouraged to share her practices with others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentors</td>
<td>Emma mentioned the vice-principal discussed above. She also mentioned the district content-area specialist that she works with at the district level. Emma respects her as a boss and as a friend and says that she has taught her how to focus on a vision.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table E-3

**Evan’s Experience Viewed Through Leadership Categories**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initial event</th>
<th>He worked for 1 year, half-time, as a vice-principal. He was a teacher on special assignment (TSA).</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Formal positions</td>
<td>Department Chair, TSA, faculty council, data specialist, accreditation coordinator, data specialist, testing coordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-identified qualities that led to being chosen for formal roles</td>
<td>He is willing to do the leadership work and follow-through on assignments. He has a love of learning and a desire to figure out how things work. He likes being a part of the decision-making process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualities I identified through interview</td>
<td>He is friendly, personable, and confident.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal positions</td>
<td>He is a catalyst for change and a life-long learner.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership’s effect on self</td>
<td>He has seen some teacher resistance to his coaching efforts and had a negative experience with some teachers when he acted as vice-principal, but has had a mostly positive experience with leadership. He has a voice in the direction of the school and helps to set the vision. He handles classroom management better and he understands the power teachers have for influencing their own classrooms.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership’s effect on students</td>
<td>There is some time away from his students, but he believes his leadership experience overall is beneficial because he brings ideas into his classroom that he has encountered through his professional development and his coaching. He indicates that coaching other teachers how to teach more effectively has spurred him to become a better teacher.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership’s effect on school</td>
<td>He improves teams through his PLC coaching by learning and sharing ideas. He expands his principal’s influence by encouraging the building of student-teacher relationships.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Driving passion</td>
<td>His PLC work and the PLC cycle.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of administrators</td>
<td>Encouraged him to pursue leadership opportunities, provided leadership opportunities, given him a voice in the direction of the school, and encouraged him to build stronger student-teacher relationships.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentors</td>
<td>He stated that every principal and assistant principal he has worked with has taught him something different about leadership. He considers himself lucky to have been able to work with the leaders he has and for the responsibilities they have given him. He also mentions other teacher leaders who have helped him learn how to balance leadership and teaching.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Tori’s Experience Viewed Through Leadership Categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initial event</th>
<th>Asked to be the student council advisor her second year of teaching.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Formal positions</td>
<td>Student council advisor, department chair, school leadership team, new teacher mentor, district collaboration team leader, and school instructional coach.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-identified qualities that led to being chosen for formal roles</td>
<td>Organizational skills, relationships with other teachers, prior leadership experiences, prior leadership professional development, and a willingness to help.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualities I identified through interview</td>
<td>Dedication to her school, her teachers, and her students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal positions</td>
<td>Sense of stewardship, examines best practices and research, reflective speaking and listening skills, dedication to continued professional development, a catalyst for change, a desire to be approachable, friendly, and caring, and a desire to work hard.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership’s effect on self</td>
<td>She has a sense of stewardship for the school which drives her to seek best practices. She has the opportunity to have input and shape school culture. Mentoring new teachers has helped her to stay current and re-energized. Leadership positions have brought access to PD opportunities. There are times when her leadership activities bring an emotional cost.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership’s effect on students</td>
<td>She applies what she has learned from her own research and from PD into her own classroom to benefit her students. She believes that she is a better teacher because of her leadership experiences. At times, her leadership activities require her to be out of her classroom and away from her students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership’s effect on school</td>
<td>She has helped set the culture of her school since it opened. She has also mentored most of the teachers at her school and she feels that she has strong relationships with them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Driving passion</td>
<td>Her feelings of stewardship for her school. She desires to be a champion and advocate for her teachers and her school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of administrators</td>
<td>A principal who chose her to be a department chair and mentor at her new school. This principal helped cultivate within her a sense of stewardship and a desire to shape the culture of her school. He also worked to cultivate this feeling among teachers school wide. This feeling of ownership has led to teacher buy-in of school mission, vision, values, and goals that has endured through two subsequent administrative changes. This same principal provided access to professional development opportunities that have shaped her thinking and have become integral to her teaching. He also mentored her by giving her opportunities to lead and learn, was complimentary about her skills, and built her up as a new teacher.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentors</td>
<td>The principal mentioned above. She also mentioned some of her colleagues as well as a PLC coach who has helped her with her own coaching. She also views the teams she works with as mentors.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table E-5

*Annie’s Experience Viewed Through Leadership Categories*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initial event</th>
<th>Starting a content-area club at her school.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Formal positions</strong></td>
<td>Runs a school store as part of the school’s positive behavior intervention system (PBIS), runs the school website, is a PLC team lead, and is involved with several state-level content boards.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self-identified qualities that led to being chosen for formal roles</strong></td>
<td>She wants to build student relationships, she is a team leader, ambitious, and a motivator.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Qualities I identified through interview</strong></td>
<td>Initiative and kindness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Informal positions</strong></td>
<td>She supervises a content-area club and uses her talents and skills to help other teachers with projects. She is also a life-long learner and a catalyst for change.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Leadership’s effect on self</strong></td>
<td>She enjoys being in a position to make decisions. She feels that running the club has made her more appreciated by her administration. At times she feels too busy and is occasionally asked to do things outside of her responsibilities. Her state-level work has provided access to PD.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Leadership’s effect on students</strong></td>
<td>The club she supervises helps students be social outside of school hours. The students learn skills and have a chance to compete against other schools. She feels an increased relationship with the students who are involved and believes they show her greater respect and see her as a mentor. She has seen fewer classroom management issues and feels that it makes teaching easier.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Leadership’s effect on school</strong></td>
<td>She feels the club and school store have helped her school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Driving passion</strong></td>
<td>The subject-area club she started at her school. She indicated that it is the biggest in the middle schools in her state.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Role of administrators</strong></td>
<td>Approached her about starting a school store to support PBIS. A prior administrator had blocked her efforts to start a store. She feels that her current administrators fully support and appreciate her work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mentors</strong></td>
<td>Annie spoke of her cooperating teacher who mentored her as she student taught. This teacher made her curriculum available to Annie and offered her full support as she student taught. Annie also mentioned a colleague at the state-level who she models her teaching on. She spoke of a professor who made a boring topic exciting, as well as a current colleague who has helped her respect different teaching styles. Annie also looks to the vice-principal mentioned above as a mentor.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table E-6

*Amber’s Experience Viewed Through Leadership Categories*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Initial event</strong></td>
<td>She received comments from former students explaining the influence she had had in their lives. One student in particular, who struggled with depression, shared with her that she was the reason she got out of bed went to school. She wants to be a positive influence in each of her students’ lives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Formal positions</strong></td>
<td>Member of the school leadership team, department chair, journalism and student council advisor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self-identified qualities</strong></td>
<td>She is able to handle the pressures that come with the position. She is also organized.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Qualities I identified</strong></td>
<td>Desire to connect with her students, thoughtfulness, and sincerity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Informal positions</strong></td>
<td>She is an informal mentor to new teachers, collaborates with colleagues, and seeks to develop positive relationships with her students. She is a catalyst for change and a life-long learner.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Leadership’s effect on self</strong></td>
<td>She has had increased empathy, become more innovative in her teaching and more discerning regarding what changes should be made. She has developed an increased ability to work with colleagues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Leadership’s effect on students</strong></td>
<td>Classroom innovation, and her strong desire to build connections and help students to succeed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Leadership’s effect on school</strong></td>
<td>She likes being involved with school leadership activities. She enjoys influencing school culture. She has influenced students who are in leadership positions and are able to influence other students. She has taken initiative to make needed changes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Driving passion</strong></td>
<td>Making connections with her students and ensuring that each one has a positive experience in her classroom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Role of administrators</strong></td>
<td>Her principal placed her on the school leadership team because of her high level of involvement in her school. She also spoke of a past principal who helped her to see and do things differently.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mentors</strong></td>
<td>Amber mentioned two former high school teachers who had a lasting impact on her. The first is now a professor who she sees frequently at conferences. She told me that he has helped shape her thinking. The second is her high school choir teacher who she keeps in contact with. Amber thinks of her often as she teaches and means a lot to her. Other mentors are some of her masters’ professors who changed the way she approaches her subject.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### James’s Experience Viewed Through Leadership Categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Initial event</strong></td>
<td>Being mentored by another teacher his first year. This gave him the desire to reach out and help others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Formal positions</strong></td>
<td>Department Chair, Grading Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self-identified qualities that led to being chosen for formal roles</strong></td>
<td>He is dependable and would “speak up” when necessary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Qualities I identified through interview</strong></td>
<td>He has a desire to build relationships and share with others. He is motivated by a love of his students, his school, and his colleagues. He showed initiative by initiating discussion and finding allies for grading reforms. He has a desire to help students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Informal positions</strong></td>
<td>Seeks out others to help and shares with other teachers, a catalyst for change, and a life-long learner.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Leadership’s effect on self</strong></td>
<td>He has gained a “school-level” view. This allows him to see outside of his own classroom and support school-wide efforts. It also gives him empathy for his students as he realizes that his is just one class of eight. He has become passionate about grading reform.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Leadership’s effect on students</strong></td>
<td>Being a department chair has provided access to conferences, which have provided tools for him to teach more effectively.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Leadership’s effect on school</strong></td>
<td>He has led the school-wide effort for grading reforms. He sees this as his greatest influence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Driving passion</strong></td>
<td>Grading reform: standards-referenced grading.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Role of administrators</strong></td>
<td>Chose him to be a department chair, provided professional development opportunities, and supported his grading-reform efforts by bringing in additional professional development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mentors</strong></td>
<td>He met with another teacher frequently during his difficult first year of teaching. They talked through classroom management situations and this teacher suggested books to read. James referenced his mentors in his leadership sketch.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table E-8

*Steve’s Experience Viewed Through Leadership Categories*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initial event</th>
<th>Asked to be the department chair in a newly opened school</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Formal positions</strong></td>
<td>Department Chair, District Content Specialist, track coach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self-identified qualities that led to being chosen for formal roles</strong></td>
<td>A good leader, makes and keeps relationships, and stands up for teacher beliefs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Qualities I identified through interview</strong></td>
<td>Sincerity and humility.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Informal positions</strong></td>
<td>Checks on other teachers and builds relationships with them. Seeks to help other students feel successful and be successful. He is a catalyst for change.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Leadership’s effect on self</strong></td>
<td>He enjoys being a leader and making things better for students and teachers. He is busy with his district assignment and is feeling like it might be time to let others step and fill his role.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Leadership’s effect on students</strong></td>
<td>He helps students to feel successful in the classroom and on the track; he brings techniques back to his classroom that he has observed through his district position. Negatively, his district-level work takes some time and thought from his work with his students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Leadership’s effect on school</strong></td>
<td>His desire to reform the curriculum in his content area led him to seek like-minded teachers, he builds relationships with teachers and administrators throughout his district that allow him to build bridges between teachers and administration.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Driving passion</strong></td>
<td>Helping students feel successful in his content-area so they can feel confident in their other classes; maintaining the changes he has initiated in the district in his content-area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Role of administrators</strong></td>
<td>Appointed him to be department chair and encouraged him to apply to be a district content-area specialist.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mentors</strong></td>
<td>A former professor who he has come to know on a personal level. They see each other at conferences and he views him as a father figure in his content-area. He also mentioned district subject-area leaders. He said that by observing some of his administrators he has learned what to do and what not to do. He also says that interacting with his students has mentored him, learning by experience how to be a better teacher.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table E-9

_Renée’s Experience Viewed Through Leadership Categories_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initial event</th>
<th>Department Chair</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Formal positions</strong></td>
<td>Department Chair, school leadership team, instructional coach, state-level content teacher, and district content steering committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self-identified qualities that led to being chosen for formal roles</strong></td>
<td>She had already been taking an active role in leadership without a formal position, initiative in early PLC efforts, competent, willing to work, a passion to improve and learn and to be the best teacher and leader she could be, and her masters’ degrees in both instructional design and administration.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Qualities I identified through interview</strong></td>
<td>Confidence and self-motivation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Informal positions</strong></td>
<td>Teacher mentor, protector of fellow-teachers (gatekeeper), mediator, catalyst for change and life-long learner.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Leadership’s effect on self</strong></td>
<td>She has gained an increased perspective through her work in district-level and school-level leadership. She has an increased understanding of what initiatives might be both beneficial for students and sustainable for teachers, and she has opportunities to express her opinions and influence the direction of her school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Leadership’s effect on students</strong></td>
<td>She desires to benefit the students by protecting teachers from being overwhelmed. She is reflective about what she learns and implements that learning into her classroom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Leadership’s effect on school</strong></td>
<td>She sees herself as a voice of reason regarding new initiatives, she works to protect her fellow-teachers, and she mediates conflicts between teachers, and between teachers and administrators.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Driving passion</strong></td>
<td>Protecting her fellow-teachers from being overwhelmed and implementing sustainable change.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Role of administrators</strong></td>
<td>Encouraged her to accept school-level and district-level positions, sought her input, and provided opportunities for professional growth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mentors</strong></td>
<td>District subject-area specialists who saw potential in her as a new teacher and offered her leadership roles in the district. They respected her and sought her input. They helped her understand leadership at the district-level. She also spoke of a principal who gave her several opportunities for professional growth.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table E-10

*Naomi’s Experience Viewed Through Leadership Categories*

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Initial event</strong></td>
<td>She reached out to local businesses for donations to but needed technology for her classroom. This helped her realize the direct influence she could have on her students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Formal positions</strong></td>
<td>Department chair, mentor teacher, school leadership team, PBIS committee, student-led conference committee, helped pilot a new curriculum, and helped to write state-level tests.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self-identified qualities that led to being chosen for formal roles</strong></td>
<td>Persistence, a drive to get things done that she believes are right, wanting to be the best teacher she can be, and giving her students what they need to be successful.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Qualities I identified through interview</strong></td>
<td>Dedication and initiative.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Informal positions</strong></td>
<td>Presenting at state-level conferences and modeling effective PLCs at a national conference, organized a school-level subject-area club, takes students to subject-area competitions, enters contests and applies for grants and involves her students in those grants, and involves the community in seeking out students who should be in her accelerated class. She also seeks to influence her principal to make changes she feels are positive for the school. She is a catalyst for change.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Leadership’s effect on self</strong></td>
<td>Realizing that she can have a direct impact on her students, feeling that her efforts as department chair were not appreciated, she seems to not feel successful in some leadership activities, seems to equate influence with accolades, and feels more confident in her teaching and is more willing to try new things in her curriculum; relying on her experienced to make informed curriculum decisions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Leadership’s effect on students</strong></td>
<td>She makes incremental changes to improve things for her students, identifies helping students as the greatest part of her influence, she believes that her students need after-school involvement in her subject area and enjoy participating in competitions, and feels that the students who participate in her grant work feel more invested.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Leadership’s effect on school</strong></td>
<td>She believes that she has done a lot of good for the school. It is important for her to have a positive impact on the atmosphere and culture of her school. She has tried to convince her school to adopt what she believes to be a more effective parent-teacher conference format. She believes in taking little steps to influence the school, assisting with the development of flex time and implementing a 9th grade awards night. She feels that she is influential in the community as she seeks to involve as many students as possible in her advanced class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Driving passion</strong></td>
<td>Focusing on the students and making incremental progress to improve school culture.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Role of administrators</strong></td>
<td>A former principal helped her appreciate the importance of data. Two principals in particular were good mentors who gave feedback. She feels that this feedback was a gift to her teaching.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mentors</strong></td>
<td>Naomi mentioned a teacher from another department who helped her brainstorm ideas. She also provided someone for Naomi to express frustrations to and walk-through problems with. She also assisted her with classroom management. She also spoke of her cooperating teacher when she student taught. The principals spoken of above.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 3

**Carter’s Experience Viewed Through Leadership Categories**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Initial event</strong></td>
<td>As a new teacher at a private school at a lock-down facility, he recognized that he could influence classroom culture. He gained confidence in the classroom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Formal positions</strong></td>
<td>Department Chair and athletic coach.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self-identified qualities that led to being chosen for formal roles</strong></td>
<td>He has experience in several schools and teams as a result of an administrative endorsement internship; the way he builds relationships, particularly with difficult students; and his confidence in the classroom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Qualities I identified through interview</strong></td>
<td>Self-confidence, a desire to learn from everyone and from every situation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Informal positions</strong></td>
<td>He supports other teachers in their leadership effort and is a catalyst for change.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Leadership’s effect on self</strong></td>
<td>He has greater self-confidence as a teacher and has recognized that he can have a great impact on culture. His experience and his administrative endorsement have opened up leadership opportunities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Leadership’s effect on students</strong></td>
<td>Desire to build positive relationships with students, particularly the “tough kids.” He also wants them to understand that they can learn from anyone.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Leadership’s effect on school</strong></td>
<td>He actively supports the school’s mission, vision, values, and goals. He shares leadership opportunities with his department in order to support the school’s goal of building capacity. He supports other teachers in their efforts to lead.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Driving passion</strong></td>
<td>His driving passion is building connections with students and helping them to take ownership of their learning. He also likes leading by supporting others in their leadership efforts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Role of administrators</strong></td>
<td>A principal gave him the opportunity to be a department chair to strengthen his leadership abilities. Another principal influenced him by encouraging him to build leadership capacity in his department.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mentors</strong></td>
<td>He said that nearly every teacher he encounters is a mentor because he chooses to be intentional about learning from everyone around him.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix F

Key Concepts from Participant Narrative
Table F-1

*Key Concepts From Janice’s Narrative*

- She measures her influence through the words of others and through formal titles and achievements.
- Her confidence has not always followed her perception of influence.
- She was conflicted over not feeling confident about her influence, yet also being told she was the right person to be department chair.
- She had a very negative experience as a district content-area specialist in a male-dominated content area. Her lesson suggestions were often rejected by male teachers.
- She has desired praise in the past but now rejects it over worries about what her colleagues will think and say about her success.
- She has tried to focus on her students: their academic growth and the way she makes them feel. She tries to show them how dedicated she is to them and that she wants them to succeed.
- She feels that her relationships with students are stronger, and she is happier.
- She feels there are dangers when administrators suggest that teachers who are struggling visit other teachers who are doing things well.
- She takes what she learns at conferences and applies it to her teaching in her classroom.
- She believes that her current role as instructional coach allows her to affect the entire student body.
- She enjoys her work as instructional coach, but says she loves it, but there is a delay on the impact she sees on students.
- She believes that changes in schools and positions have pushed her to change and re-invent herself and that has been positive.
- Benefits of leadership:
  - Opportunities to change and to reinvent herself.
  - Deliberately focuses on her students and their progress.
  - Improved relationships and student learning.
  - Affects students throughout her school.
  - She knows that she makes decisions that influence the entire student body.
  - She has access to PD and applies what she learns to her classes.
  - Conferences have shifted her thinking.
- Tolls of leadership:
  - Faced opposition from male colleagues.
  - Internal conflict regarding whether or not she has influence.
  - She worries about colleague reactions when she is good at her job.
Table F-2

*Key Concepts From Emma’s Narrative*

- She believes that it is important for her to be a teacher first and a leader second.
- Out of necessity, she was given a leadership role her first role in her second year of teaching. She was well-supported by her administration.
- She has obtained a masters’ degree in her content-area and is working on a master’s in administration.
- She has filled several formal leadership positions.
- She enjoys being a PLC Coach and she believes that it allows her to see immediate success with teams and benefit students throughout her school.
- She feels joy in her leadership role and believes that makes her more effective in her work.
- She is highly committed to the PLC cycle.
- She believes that leadership is difficult without good relationships.
- She enjoys helping students become leaders.
- As an instructional coach, she experienced some resistance from her fellow-teachers to be coached. She also believes that the administrators did not adequately prepare her colleagues to be coached.
- As a member of the school leadership team, she believes that she has been assigned some duties and responsibilities that are outside of her scope of employment and are more administrative in nature.
- She has been relied on for institutional knowledge.
- She perceives that she has few classroom management issues and is able to teach more effectively because she is comfortable with herself and because she knows she is part of the school’s decision-making process.
- She believes that she is helping to maintain her school’s culture.
- She believes that her leadership work has helped her advocate more effectively for herself and for her department.
- Benefits of leadership:
  - Access to PD and conferences.
  - Job satisfaction.
  - Affects teacher teams and students school wide.
  - Improved teaching.
  - Advocates more effectively for self and for department.
- Tolls of leadership:
  - Working with teachers who are unwilling to change.
  - Is occasionally asked to do things that are beyond her job description.
Table F-3

*Key Concepts From Evan’s Narrative*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefits of leadership:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>o Gives him a voice in helping set the direction of the school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Offers him insight into how the school functions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Provides access to PD and conferences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Exposes him to different teaching styles and new ideas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Enhanced focus on student learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Personal enjoyment. //</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tolls of leadership:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Working with teachers who do not like their job or are unwilling to help teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Working with veteran teachers who are unwilling to change.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
She views the building of relationships as central to all of her leadership work.

Being asked to be the department chair at a new school placed her on the school leadership team and led to a sense of stewardship toward the school.

This sense of stewardship has led her to seek out best practices and examine research. This knowledge has benefited her school and her classroom.

She has also been a new teacher mentor since her school opened. In this role, she helps new teachers adopt the school culture and to be successful. She also develops strong relationships with these teachers.

Working with new teachers helps her feel re-energized and encourages her to be innovative.

She shared several leadership attributes that she feels are important: reflective listening and speaking, continued professional development, being approachable, friendly, and caring, and working hard and keeping commitments.

She believes that you need to be approachable, friendly, and caring in order to have successful relationships with students and teachers.

She believes in the importance of building trust with students and teachers.

She loves being a team lead because she feels like she is helping her teammates.

There are some frustrations associated with her leadership activities: emotional involvement in personality conflicts with teammates and having to occasionally be away from her students due to leadership requirements.

Benefits of leadership:
- Access to PD and conferences which provides tools that benefit her students.
- Created a sense of stewardship for her school, which urges her to seek out best practices and examine research.
- Opportunities to shape school culture.
- Mentoring new teachers helps her feel re-energized and innovative.

Tolls of leadership:
- Feels obligations.
- Emotional involvement in personality conflicts in teams.
- Occasionally misses class due to leadership responsibilities.
**Table F-5**

*Key Concepts From Annie’s Narrative*

- She has observed that it is the same few teachers that take on more and more roles.
- She feels busy, but she also feels that she has benefited her school.
- She is particularly proud of a content-area club that she started at her school. A student asked her to start this club and she did, even though she felt busy.
- She has been heavily involved with state-level content-area boards.
- She likes being involved at the state level because she enjoys being with people who are making state-level decisions. She also feels that you don’t have the right to complain about the core unless you have assisted in writing the standards.
- She sees building relationships with students as a positive result of her leadership work.
- She perceives that she has fewer behavior issues because of the student relationships she establishes in the content-area club and the school store.
- She feels more appreciated by her administration because of her leadership activities.
- While busy with leadership responsibilities, she indicated that her family comes first. She stated that she is involved with these activities because she wants the same opportunities, she provides for her students to be available for her own children.
- At times she has taken on too much, becoming too busy and overwhelmed. She indicated that she has found a better balance this year.
- She is occasionally asked by fellow-teachers to do things outside of her responsibilities.

**Benefits of leadership:**
- Feels that she has helped her school
- Satisfaction in what she has done
- Enjoys being with people who make decisions at the state-level
- Views building relationships as a positive aspect of her leadership activities

**Tolls of leadership:**
- Has occasionally taken on too much and felt overwhelmed
- Occasionally asked to do things outside of her responsibilities
**Table F-6**

*Key Concepts From Amber’s Narrative*

- She has seen her influence grow from being primarily with her students to her colleagues and to the school in general.
- She loves and cares for her students. While she teaches and influence them, they also teach and influence her.
- She desires to be a force for good in the lives of her students.
- She influences and is influenced by her fellow teachers.
- She feels that her influence on her fellow teachers is expanding.
- She has had opportunities to influence students in leadership roles. These students have spread that influence to other students.
- She has taken the initiative to make changes in her school that she feels should be made.
- She included influencing her own children as part of her influence on students.
- She had a great experience in her masters’ program. She feels that it has changed how she teaches and how she influences others.
- She attends conferences and is involved with a national council in her subject-area.
- She likes being involved in leadership. She likes being able to voice her opinion and be consulted on decisions.
- She enjoys influencing school culture.
- She says that her leadership experience has caused her to be more innovative in her teaching. It has also helped her work with colleagues more effectively.
- Her principal chose her to be on the school leadership team because she is highly involved with the school.
- She has had former students contact her regarding her influence on them. This has given her the desire to never leave a student with a bad experience.

- **Benefits of leadership:**
  - Given her the ability to express her opinion to help set school direction.
  - Allows her to influence school culture.
  - She has become more innovative in her teaching.
  - She perceives that she works with colleagues more effectively.
  - Increased empathy for students.
  - Increased desire to make connections with students.
  - Encouraged initiative.
  - Influenced students who have spread her influence through their leadership.
  - She enjoys her leadership work and influencing school culture.
  - She has become more innovative in her teaching.
Table F-7

*Key Concepts From James’s Narrative*

- He loves teaching.
- He loves sharing with his students and with his colleagues.
- He learns skills at conferences that he has brought into his classroom to help students.
- He has a passion for grading-reform; this came from attending a conference.
- He worked with other like-minded teachers to achieve his goals of grading-reform.
- He helps his students feel successful and be successful through his grading-reforms.
- Desires to build connections with students and teachers.
- Benefits of leadership:
  - Tools from professional development (PD) and conferences benefit students in his class.
  - Ignited a passion for his grade reform efforts, which he believes have benefited students school-wide.
  - He gathered allies to help him in his reform efforts.
  - Has developed a school-level view that helps support school-wide efforts in his classroom and helps him remember that he is just one of many classes his students have in a day.
### Table F-8

**Key Concepts From Steve’s Narrative**

- He has a strong desire to help students feel successful and be successful.
- He uses his subject and his coaching to help his students learn life skills and feel successful in school.
- He wants to build good relationships with his students.
- He had a desire to reform his subject-area’s curriculum at a district level. He worked with like-minded teachers to do that and has remained in leadership to maintain those reforms.
- He enjoys being a leader because he wants to keep things better through the reforms he has made for his students and the teachers he works with.
- He wants to build good relationships with other teachers.
- He mediates between teachers and administrators.
- He sees different teaching styles and brings the best back to his own classroom. He realizes that he does not have all of the answers.
- His district-level content specialist assignment does take some time and thought on the days he is with his own students.
- He is getting tired of his leadership assignments and feels it might be time for others to take over.
- He advocates for servant leadership but does not call it by name.

**Benefits of leadership:**

- Allows him to maintain the district-level changes he has made in his content-area.
- He brings best practices from other teachers into his own classroom.
- He builds relationships with teachers and administrators which allows him to build bridges and mediate as needed.
- He helps students to feel successful and be successful.
- Personal enjoyment.
- He feels that he has become a teacher of teachers with district-wide influence.

**Tolls of leadership:**

- His district job takes time and thought from his teaching.
- He is getting tired from the leadership roles.
Table F-9

*Key Concepts from Renée’s Narrative*

- She sees herself as a “gatekeeper” who does what’s best for her students by protecting her fellow-teachers from becoming overwhelmed.
- She is dedicated to supporting her colleagues.
- As department chair, she delegates responsibilities to other teachers.
- She desires to build professional connections to be a better advocate for her teachers.
- She tries to serve her colleagues.
- Her leadership experiences have broadened her perspectives, giving her both a school-level and a district-level view.
- She is reflective as a teacher and tries to share and implement what she learns.
- She mediates conflicts between teachers, and between teachers and administrators.
- She enjoys leadership because of the effect she sees on her school. She believes that she has helped maintain the integrity of teaching at her school.
- She loves knowing what is going on at her school and having a say.
- She appreciates a former principal who gave her a large amount of decision-making freedom as a department chair. This allowed for professional growth in herself and the involvement of others in her department in leadership activities.
- She feels that it is time for younger leaders to start taking over.
- Benefits of leadership:
  - Increased perspective
  - Increased understanding of what changes might be beneficial and what changes might be detrimental
  - Opportunities to express her opinion and influence the direction of the school
  - Applies learning to benefit her students and her fellow-teachers
  - Protects fellow-teachers from becoming overwhelmed
  - Mentors and serves other teachers
  - Mediates conflicts
- Tolls of leadership:
  - Feeling the emotional weight of the concerns of her teachers
Table F-10

*Key Concepts From Naomi’s Narrative*

- Her education has made a big impact on her. She has a masters’ degree and several endorsements. She seeks out professional development and believes that there is always more to learn.
- She has attended state and national conferences in her subject area.
- She believes that school atmosphere and culture are important.
- She tries to influence her school through small steps.
- She has participated in state-level end-of-year test creation and has shared that experience with her department.
- She has become data-driven and has helped model the PLC process at a national convention.
- She believes that students are the center of her work.
- She has organized an after-school subject-area club at her school and helps her students compete in subject-area competitions. She believes that her students need this and enjoy it.
- She involves here students in grants she participates in.
- She builds relationships with local elementary schools and parents as she works to involve students in her accelerated program.
- She worked to secure donations from local businesses to provide needed technology for her students.
- She felt unappreciated as a department chair and questions her leadership because she has not viewed the whole experience as being positive.
- She does feel that she has benefited the majority of her students.
- She feels that her leadership experience has given her confidence and the desire to try new things in her classroom. She feels that this innovation is done with an improved understanding of what might be effective.

**Benefits of leadership:**
- Independently seeks out PD and other education opportunities.
- Realization of influence.
- Makes incremental improvements to help students.
- Focus on students.
- Students enjoy competitions.
- Students are more invested.
- Effect on school culture.
- Positive influence on community.
- Positive reputation.
- Uses data to make decisions.

**Tolls of leadership:**
- Feels unappreciated as a department chair.
- She equates good leadership with good leadership experiences, when things don’t go well, she feels like a bad leader.
- She equates influence with accolades.
Table F-11

Key Concepts From Carter’s Narrative

- He sees his influence as a compass:
  - It represents his various work locations
  - It shows how he has adjusted his curriculum as he has learned from others
  - It reflects the teachers who have influenced him
  - It shows his impact on other teachers and students
- He was influenced by teachers he considers to be teachers of influence
- He loves school, teaching, students, and other adults at his school.
- He works to build positive relationships with his students
- He connects with the “tough kids.”
- He wants to improve school culture, particularly by supporting school mission, vision, values, and goals.
- He feels ownership for the school, and he desires students to feel ownership for their learning.
- He believes in servant leadership.
- He says that he learns from everyone he encounters.
- He does not like formal leadership positions but prefers to lead by supporting other teacher leaders.
- His masters’ degree provided leadership opportunities.
- He seeks to share the leadership load with others in his department.
- Benefits of leadership:
  - Builds school culture by supporting mission, vision, values, and goals.
  - Shares leadership responsibilities to build leadership capacity within his department
  - Feels ownership in supporting mission, vision, values, and goals, and tries to build academic ownership in his students.
Appendix G

Participant Sketches
Figure G-1

Janice’s Sketch
Figure G-2

*Emma’s Sketch*
Figure G-3

Evan’s Sketch
Figure G-4

Tori’s Sketch

NOTE: Annie’s Sketch

Annie’s sketch was not included to ensure confidentiality.
Figure G-5

Amber’s Sketch
Figure G-6

James’s Sketch
Figure G-7

Steve’s Sketch
Figure G-8

Renée’s Sketch
Figure G-9

Naomi’s Sketch
Figure G-10

Carter’s Sketch
Appendix H

Auditor Attestation
Qualitative Research Attestation

To Whom It May Concern:

On August 4, 2021, I conducted an audit of Cory Smith’s dissertation, *The Experience of Becoming a Teacher Leader*. My qualifications for conducting this audit include:

- Earned PhD in Curriculum and Instruction – 2021 from Utah State University
- Completed six credits of qualitative course work with the addition of another course in which I completed a qualitative project
- Published two peer-reviewed journal articles and one peer-reviewed chapter using qualitative methods, of which one article was featured in the 4th Edition of *Qualitative Data Analysis* by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) as an exemplary use of qualitative methods
- Defended successfully a qualitative research dissertation titled *Gifted and Talented Early Adolescents and Their Experiences with Bullying*.

For purposes of the audit, Mr. Smith provided me with copies of participants’ sketches, interview transcripts, his three-part field journal, data analysis charts, deidentified communications with participants, and copies of Chapters III and IV from his dissertation. To conduct the audit, I used these artifacts to verify that an audit trail existed for randomly selected data gathering and analysis processes and research findings.

The research process described by Mr. Smith in Chapter III was generally followed as reported. This included use of sketches to guide interviews, use of an interview protocol to guide interviews, systematic identification of themes, and application of trustworthiness methods. Two exceptions to this finding included the number of interviews to be conducted and the description of the relationship between the sketches and the interviews. Mr. Smith indicated 13 interviews, but only 11 were conducted. This initially resulted because two nominated teacher leaders failed to respond to requests for participation. This turned out not to be serious because, as demonstrated in the field journals, saturation was reached well before the eleventh interview. The second concern involved Mr. Smith’s report that he recorded his analysis of the sketches for guiding the interview in his field journals. This occurred in only five of the 11 interviews. However, inspection of the interview transcripts indicated that the sketches were frequently referred to throughout all the interviews.

Even with the exceptions being noted, I found the research findings connected back to the original data along the audit trail provided by Mr. Smith. However, he kept shifting terms that made it difficult to follow the audit trail. For example, the label “prior leadership experience” was used in the conclusions, whereas “formal positions” was being used in the analysis. All in all, the research and conclusion were reasonable based on the criteria for good qualitative research. In general, I found that the research is dependable.

Sincerely,

William T. (Tom) Allen Jr.
2252 S. Maverick Road, 
Saratoga Springs, Utah 84045
801-874-4845 
corys411@gmail.com

EDUCATION

Utah State University 2016 - 2021
Doctor of Education, Instructional Leadership
Dissertation: “The Experience of Becoming a Teacher Leader”

Utah Valley University 2011
Master of Education, Models of Instruction
Thesis: “Middle School Students’ Perceptions of Teacher Immediacy Behaviors and Their Effect on Motivation.”

Brigham Young University 2000
Bachelor of Arts
History Teaching Major, Biology Teaching Minor
Integrated Science Endorsement

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Adjunct Faculty
Utah Valley University School of Education 2012 – 2015, 2018 - Current
Classes taught:

EDSC 4250 – Classroom Management II Fall 2012 – Fall 2015
This is UVU’s class for secondary education students who are completing their student-teaching experience. I assist them as they apply the effective teaching practices, skills, and concepts they have learned in their education classes. I review and reinforce effective instructional practices, prepare them for teacher responsibilities such as parent-teacher conferences, assist them in preparing for employment as educators, and encourage them in their on-going professional development.

EDEL 3050 – Foundations of American Education Fall 2014
This is an online course that provides an overview of American education and
helps students understand current educational practices in America. EDEL 3050 also provides opportunities for students to evaluate their own belief system concerning education.

**EDUC 6202 – Classroom Management Practicum**  
Fall 2018, Fall 2019, Fall 2020, Fall 2021  
I was asked to be the first instructor for this master’s level course. I assisted in refining the assignments and developing the course curriculum.

**U.S. History Teacher**  
Vista Heights Middle School, Saratoga Springs, UT  
2010 – Current

**U.S. History, Utah Studies, and 7th & 8th Grade Integrated Science Teacher**  
Canyon View Junior High School, Orem, UT  
2001 – 2010

**Behavior Disorder Unit Teacher**  
Canyon View Junior High School, Orem, UT  
2000 – 2001

**Social Studies Intern**  
Lone Peak High School, Highland, UT  
1999 – 2000

**TEACHER LEADERSHIP**

**Utah Middle Level Association – Presenter**  
“Motivating Students Through Mystery”  
January 2021

**Vista Heights Middle School Leadership Team**  
2019 – Present  
Assist in shaping school mission, vision, values, and goals.

**School Testing Coordinator**  
2018 – Present  
I assist with end-of-year testing and ethics training.

**School Data Specialist, Vista Heights Middle School**  
2015 – 2018  
I worked with the administrative team in accessing and analyzing school performance data and I assisted with ethics training and end-of-year testing.

**School Accreditation Facilitator, Vista Heights Middle School**  
2014 – 2015 & 2019 - 2020  
I supervised the first accreditation process at Vista Heights Middle School, including: working with the lead external evaluator in preparation for the accreditation visit, working with administration and faculty in preparing the self-evaluation, creating schedules, managing logistics, ensuring that the accreditation criteria were met, and answering questions throughout the accreditation process. I
also created an accreditation guide to help guide the next round of accreditation. Vista Heights was successfully accredited.

**Department Chair/Collaboration Team Leader (CTL) 2010 – 2014**
I was the first Social Studies CTL at Vista Heights Middle School and I facilitated the collaborative work of the Social Studies Department. I coordinated and conducted department-level professional development and created a tradition of sharing best teaching practices within the department. I guided curriculum development and common assessment work, including the development of a “core of the core” or essential standards within each grade-level. I mentored several new teachers within the department. I also managed department budgets and assisted with school-level professional development.

**Poster Presentation 2011**
UVU Scholarship of Teaching and Engagement Conference
“Middle School Students’ Perceptions of Teacher Immediacy Behaviors and Their Effect on Motivation.”

**Eighth Grade Team Leader, Canyon View Junior High 2007 - 2009**
I led the eighth-grade team in identifying struggling students and developing plans of action to help them succeed academically. I also helped plan student enrichment and extension activities.

**TEACHER MENTORING**

**School-Wide Mentor Teacher 2017 – Current**
I have mentored several teachers who are new to Vista Heights Middle School. We meet regularly to discuss their questions and concerns, celebrate their successes, consider their short-term goals, and plan for the future.

**Mentor Teacher 2009 – 2020**
I have mentored five student teachers and ten interns. I am familiar with UVU and Brigham Young University’s expectations and evaluation instruments for student teachers and interns. I mentored four additional Alpine School District teachers in their first three years of teaching.

**Member, Vista Heights Middle School Mentor Team 2015 – 2016**
I am part of a teacher and administrative team that works to improve new-teacher mentoring at Vista Heights.

**AWARDS**

**Alpine School District Foundation Accent on Excellence Award 2017**
I was recognized by Superintendent Sam Jarman, Assistant Superintendent John
Patten, and the Director of the Alpine Foundation Tim Eisenhart as one of ten teacher recipients of this award. The Accent on Excellence award honors some of the outstanding educators and employees who are exemplary role models and heroes for their students.

**Utah Valley University Faculty Excellence Award – Adjunct  2015**
I was recognized for making significant contributions to UVU’s mission through demonstrating excellence in teaching, scholarship, and service. I was chosen as the adjunct faculty recipient from the McKay School of Education.

**Spirit of Alpine Award  2011**
I was recognized by the Alpine School District Superintendent and the Board of Education for leading a highly collaborative team. This was during our first year as a social studies team at Vista Heights Middle School.

**Award of Excellence  2010 - 2011**
I was recognized by the Administration and Westlake Council PTA for teaching excellence. I was the first teacher from Vista Heights Middle School to receive this recognition.

**Outstanding Teacher Award  2005 - 2006**
I was recognized by the Administration and PTSO of Canyon View Junior High School as one of four outstanding teachers of the year

**PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

**Diane Sweeney Student-centered Coaching Conference  October 2021**
I attended as part of a coaching and mentorship team and assisted in advancing coaching and mentoring efforts at Vista Heights Middle School.

**Response to Intervention Conference  Summer 2013**
I assisted with school-wide and department professional development following the conference.

**CITES Literacy Conference  2012**

**Participant in the Teaching American History Grant Seminars  2011 – 2012**

**Judge, U.S. Senate Youth Scholarship Competition  2011**
Assisted in the selection of delegates to the U.S. Senate Youth Program.

Wilhelm Secondary Literacy Institute 2008 – 2009
I learned, practiced, and integrated a wide variety of teaching strategies to enhance the teaching of literacy, implemented an inquiry-based approach to teaching the curriculum and completed an action research project.