

2015

# Impact of Voices, Ideas, Vision, Action Exchange for Teachers in Educational Policies of Iowa

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Tammy Wawro

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the review committee have been made.

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2015

Abstract

Impact of Voices, Ideas, Vision, Action Exchange for Teachers in Educational Policies of

Iowa

by

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MA, University of Northern Iowa, 2002

BA, University of Northern Iowa, 1995

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

October 2015

## Abstract

Low teacher morale and high attrition rates can be attributed in part to educational policy changes and instructional decisions made by individuals who are not connected to the classroom. Time constraints, logistical struggles of getting a critical mass of teachers together, and the geography of rural Iowa schools all play a role in teachers' inability to form a unified voice. The Voices Ideas Vision Action (VIVA) Idea Exchange™ is an online process that combines crowd-sourcing methods with individual engagement strategies over a 6- to 8-week period. The purpose of this study was to determine the impact the VIVA program has on teachers' perceptions of their role within the educational system, specifically in the areas of morale, leadership, and ownership of school policy. The literature revealed when teachers were not involved in the process, they became disenfranchised, attrition rates rose, and student learning was impacted. The theoretical framework of positive administrative engagement was the basis for the research. Using a qualitative approach, individual interviews were conducted with 10 participants to determine the effectiveness of the VIVA with regard to participants' views on their ownership in school policy reform. Interview data were transcribed and coded for emergent themes and patterns. Analysis of data revealed 5 themes: (a) program format, (b) teachers' role in policy development, (c) improved communication needs, (d) VIVA as a proactive tool, and (e) moving forward with VIVA. This study may empower teachers earlier in their careers, which may result in lower attrition rates and a higher level of teacher buy-in to the policies and procedures instilled by local and state government. Implications are that the online VIVA exchange can build morale by positively engaging classroom teachers and infusing their voices in policy-making.

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## Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to all of the hardworking, caring and compassionate teachers who work tirelessly to support every child in their classroom. They often sacrifice their own health, family and finances to make a better place for kids. May we continue to support ways to encourage the collective voice from the classroom be heard loud and clear. We must all remember the words of Dr. Seuss and carry them close to our hearts, “Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot nothing is going to get better. It’s not.”

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## Section 1: The Problem

### **Introduction**

There has been a national movement to increase teacher quality. At the heart of this movement is the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), or No Child Left Behind, which has propelled education to the center of public conversation (Cheryl, 2009). Cheryl (2009) further described the movement as one that has placed much of the blame for ineffective education on the teachers. Stewart, Raskin, and Zielaski (2012) stated that this outlook towards educational reform has added more responsibilities to the teacher's daily workload and increased pressure placed on teachers to improve test scores. To augment this growing issue, in 2010, the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE, 2010) released the *Report of the Blue Ribbon Panel on Clinical Preparation and Partnerships for Improved Student Learning, Transforming Teacher Education through Clinical Practice: A National Strategy to Prepare Effective Teachers*. This report called upon teacher preparation programs to include more practical experiences for preservice teachers. Additionally, the report called for school leaders to address the breakdown in communication between teachers and administrators in areas of teaching strategies, curriculum selection, teaching assignments, discipline, and their use of preparation and planning time.

However, the increased attention on school and teacher accountability has increased the rate of attrition of teachers in the profession. Liu (2006) found that teacher attrition followed a U-shaped pattern with a high probability of teachers leaving within the first few years and then another large population leaving at retirement age, indicating

that if teachers can make it through the first 5 years, the probability of them staying in the field through retirement greatly increases. One reason for teachers not continuing past the first 5 years could be that the techniques and theories that were integrated into their teacher preparation programs often do not correlate to success in today's classroom (Costigan, 2008). Costigan (2008) stated that new teachers noted a major discrepancy between their academic teacher preparation work and the experiences they encountered once in the field. Hancock and Scherff (2010) noted that the teachers' inability to utilize the skills they were taught in teacher preparation programs, along with the lack of freedom to integrate creativity in the classroom, could lead to frustration and a withdrawal from the school environment.

A second reason for teacher attrition as noted by Behrent (2009) could be that the constraints placed on teachers from government-based initiatives are a major cause for their desire to leave the profession. In addition to these constrictions that teachers face, the increased pressure for their students to perform has led to increased attrition from the profession (Behrent, 2009). Furthermore, Rubin (2011) found many teachers feared that the blame for poor student performance would be attributed to the quality of the teacher instruction. This has caused many teachers to feel insecure and unappreciated regarding their performance in the classroom (Rubin, 2011).

This study focused on the impact of a Voices Ideas Vision Action (VIVA) Idea Exchange on teachers' feelings of empowerment within a designated school district in the state of Iowa. In 2012, the Iowa State Education Association implemented a program centered on increasing teacher involvement, empowerment, and leadership to address the

low retention rate of its teaching population. All 32,000 members of the Iowa State Education Association were invited to participate in this 6-week online event.

The steps in the VIVA program are as follows:

First, those with frontline experience on how things “really work”— teachers on improving our schools, nurses on better health care practices, police officers on creating safer communities – are invited to join a VIVA Idea Exchange™ and share their ideas on how to solve a challenging problem. Participants brainstorm ideas about solving that societal challenge in a safe, moderated 24/7 online conversation. Secondly, identified using a proprietary algorithm, a small group from the initial conversation is invited to form a Writing Collaborative to distill the ideas generated by the large group into an action plan. Finally, the Writing Collaborative delivers the action plan directly to a decision maker interested in and empowered to make change. (“Voices, Ideas, Vision, Action - New Voice Strategies”, 2015)

The VIVA project was implemented with the goal of providing teachers a forum in which to express their views regarding their profession and the policies being placed upon them. It offers facilitation of the classroom voice to bring teachers’ best ideas and concerns directly to the policy makers. The purpose of this study was to determine the impact the VIVA program has on teachers’ perceptions of their role within the education system, specifically in the areas of morale, leadership, and ownership of school policy, all of which have an impact on teacher attrition.

### **Definition of the Problem**

Andrea (2011) noted that teachers should consider themselves as frontline defenders of the educational system in which they work. However, further research (Berry, Eckert, & Bauries, 2012) indicated that teacher incentive programs and other educational policies are rarely built on teachers' input, their leadership, or their well-being, and almost never include teachers' feedback. Solutions have been sought to include a higher level of teacher input. For example, Berry and Howell (2008) suggested that school districts create *teacher solution teams*, which would be made up of the district's best teachers. Furthermore, Cheryl (2009) recommended that teachers be actively involved in the development of school curriculum.

Despite the recognition of the importance of teacher input in the creation of educational policies, which are still largely developed and controlled by government entities (Cheryl, 2009), Iowa lawmakers have not sought any thorough teacher input in policy making, similar to other states in the No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top era. For example, the 2014 Iowa Congress in its entirety has only three members with experience in the field of education (Iowa.gov, 2014). Yet this has been the legislature that has led the way towards creating educational policies resulting in reform in education in the state of Iowa. Realizing the possible underrepresentation of kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade (K-12) educators in these reform decisions, the Iowa State Education Association contracted with VIVA in an attempt to gain educator voice in a bipartisan manner to share information on policy ideas and implementation with the Iowa Department of Education and ultimately policy makers. The VIVA Idea Exchange™

("Voices, Ideas, Vision, Action - New Voice Strategies", 2015) is an online process that combines crowd-sourcing methods with the individual engagement strategies over a 6- to 8-week period. VIVA utilizes a professional moderator and proprietary algorithm and offers a detailed recommendations report.

In the case of the Iowa VIVA exchange, all 34,000 members of the Iowa State Education Association were invited to share their ideas in answer to these questions:

- How would you envision a greater role for teacher leadership in your school or district and what needs to change in school culture to motivate educators to take on a bigger leadership role?
- How would it help students if educators had a bigger leadership role in schools and what do you think is the appropriate reward system for educators who step up to leadership roles?

In response, 316 members added 81 ideas and shared 111 comments with one another.

The purpose of this study was to determine the impact the VIVA program had on teachers' perceptions of their role within the educational system, specifically in the areas of morale, leadership, and ownership of school policy.

## **Rationale**

### **Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level**

Despite efforts made through the Iowa State Education Association, progress for teachers having a more prominent role in educational policy discussions has been slow. An educational summit was held in 2011, followed by the release of a paper known as a blueprint for Iowa public schools entitled *One Unshakeable Vision: World Class Schools*



*for Iowa* (Iowa Department of Education, 2011). In this document, authored solely by the Iowa Department of Education and a former newspaper reporter, the ways to improve Iowa schools were laid out. “They are clear the answers lie in their document, “This blueprint shows specific steps we can take to move our schools from “good” to “great” to “excellent” – not with isolated approaches, but by having our whole system work better together and in symphony” (Iowa Department of Education, 2011, p. 3). In both of these instances, the actual summit program and the paper released, input from Iowa teachers was not sought. The agenda was released from the Governor’s office to the school districts without prior conversations and the paper was authored without input from Iowa teachers. In January 2012, another brief was created and disseminated to the public and put forth for legislative consideration (Iowa Department of Education, 2012). The author by omission showed that classroom teachers were not a part of these recommendations: “In collaboration with the Governor’s Office, the staff at the Iowa Department of Education and I have worked intensively to prepare a set of legislative proposals worthy of careful consideration” (Iowa Department of Education, 2012, p. 2). A follow-up educational symposium created by the same employees from the governor’s office was held in August of 2012, but again, no classroom teachers were involved in setting the agenda. These recent events contradict research (Bodman, Taylor, & Morris, 2012) that called for teachers’ involvement in school decisions, especially those involving the teaching and learning process. The VIVA Project has been viewed by other education entities such as the National Education Association as a move in the right direction, but the impact and effect is not fully known, thus the need for a deeper look at its influence.

### **Evidence of the Problem from the Professional Literature**

Cheryl (2009) found that the most successful school reform projects are those that treat the teacher as an indispensable part of the endeavor. Those who are closest to the student must be a part of the conversation (Cheryl, 2009). Further research by Ravitch (2010) recognized the importance of teacher input in the field of promoting school reform. Ravitch's work continued to reiterate the fact that true educational reform cannot happen if staff is not involved and invested in the movement. The MetLife Foundation Survey (2011) of American teachers found there to be a 15% decrease in job satisfaction going from 59% of teachers satisfied in 2009 to 44% of teachers satisfied in 2011. This was the lowest level for job satisfaction in over 15 years. Impacts on new teacher satisfaction were found to be very dependent upon the school's overall climate, the administrative staff, and peer relationships. In addition, Brill and McCartney (2008) found that teachers' desire to be involved in the decision making processes of their schools allowed them to better serve their students. These mutual decisions, when permitted to occur, can lead to a higher morale amongst a school's teaching population (Brill & McCartney, 2008).

Studies have noted that students demonstrate higher academic gains when teachers remain at schools for extended periods. Conversely, when teachers stay less than 5 years, student performance drops (Henry, Bastian, & Fortner, 2011). In another study, Lankford, Loeb, and Wyckoff (2011) found that students scored lower on standardized tests when taught by teachers who left the profession after only 1 year of teaching, while test scores of students whose teachers were in their second year and beyond increased

significantly. Further research by Donaldson and Johnson (2011) revealed that when highly qualified teachers were replaced with new teachers, there was a detrimental impact on student learning. The impact of low teacher morale and lack of ability to have input on their profession coupled with the absence of administrator engagement can have devastating consequences on teacher attrition; this in turn impacts student learning, student success, and creates an overall burden on society facing a future workforce that may not be college or career ready. This also has implications for the future of the teaching profession, offering little reason for highly qualified students in the United States to enter the field, thus creating a drain on the entire education system. Finding a way to ensure teachers find their voice, impact policy, and become the leaders in their profession can help support the positive social change needed to turn the tide in the system.

### **Definitions**

*Engagement:* A culture that is created and shared among employees that are either positive or not (Martin & Dowson, 2009).

*Education reform:* Any government-mandated change in knowledge of curriculum, pedagogy, and organizational improvement at the school and system levels, in theory, if states set high standards for student performance, develop assessments that measure student performance against the standards, give schools the flexibility they need to change curriculum, instruction, and school organization to enable their students to meet the standards, and hold schools strictly accountable for meeting performance standards, then student achievement will rise. (Elmore & Rothman, 1995).

*Positive administrative engagement:* Teachers and principals in successful schools support implicitly each other's practice within and beyond the walls of the school, and preserve professional integrity by being able to predict actions of the other based on perceived competency and on the previous consistency of the application of knowledge and skills (Hargreaves, 2003).

*Teacher attrition:* Teachers who leave the profession for reasons other than illness or retirement (Dove, 2004). A reduction or decrease in the numbers of teachers on an annual basis (Boe, Cook, & Sunderland, 2008).

*Teacher retention:* Maintaining teachers who are currently employed in the profession (Russell, 2005).

### **Significance**

While there are a multitude of reasons why teachers leave the education profession, some specific areas that have been attributed to this exodus are poor climate, insufficient administrative support, unsatisfactory relationships with colleagues, and little involvement in the decision making process of their work. A relationship then is recognized between higher teacher morale and higher teacher retention rates.

Work dissatisfaction leads to attrition, which has implications beyond the classroom. While the obvious impact is on student achievement (Patrick, 2007), attrition affects other stakeholders within the school community. To substantiate Patrick's (2007) findings, Donaldson and Johnson (2011) found that the impact of veteran teachers leaving the teaching profession had a negative impact on staff involved with professional development, curriculum, student learning, as well as the continuity of parental and

community relationships. Finally, Brown and Wynn (2009) recommended that in order to slow the rate of teacher turnover, the level of shared decision-making must increase for all teachers. Involving teachers in the policy conversation is one way to increase their sense of empowerment, raise morale, decrease attrition, and in turn raise student achievement. Taking into account this information, it is imperative to identify ways to keep highly qualified teachers from leaving the profession in order to provide the best education possible for students.

The VIVA program highlights the significance of educator involvement in education reform discussions, acknowledges the importance of educator input by creating a process to allow for discussion and input on education policy, and uses online collaboration to support the creation of a final document of educator ideas for dissemination.

### **Guiding/Research Questions**

Iowa classroom teachers should have a voice in the policies that shape the educational environment in which they work. Considering teachers' lack of input in education policy-making, the Iowa State Education Association contracted the VIVA group to work with current teachers in the area of teacher empowerment. The research questions for this study were as follows:

RQ1: How well did teachers feel that the VIVA program allowed them to put their own voices in policy?

RQ2: Did the VIVA program impact teacher leadership within the teachers' schools or district?

## **Review of the Literature**

To address the aspects of teacher attrition, low teacher morale, and its connection to a lack of teacher empowerment within the educational system, sections for the literature review were identified. The first section provides information on the theoretical base supporting the study. The second section addresses the importance of administrative leadership at the school level, specifically so that teachers feel a connection to their profession and the goals they are being asked to reach. EBSCO Publishing ERIC, Google Scholar, and Federal Resources for Academic Research databases were utilized to enter key words. The terms used for this research were the following: *teacher burn-out*, *teacher attrition*, *educational reform*, *educational leadership*, *teacher policy*, *constructivism*, *administrator collaboration*, *administrator effectiveness*, *teacher leadership*, *teacher voice in policy*, and *teacher morale*.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The value of administrative support was the theoretical framework at the foundation of this study. Reese (2007) stated that although new teachers are aware of the challenges facing the teaching profession, many are still surprised at the lack of respect received from governing boards as well as by the pressure they feel in the classroom. These expectations of not just educating children, but of fulfilling political agendas can be overwhelming (Reese, 2007). Additional research suggested a high correlation between a teachers' buy-in within the school environment and his or her tendency to remain in the profession (Liu, 2006). Liu (2006) showed that there were higher levels of satisfaction when teachers were involved in the school decision-making process. Berkins

and Kritsonis (2007) confirmed these findings; they learned that school administrators could positively influence teachers to stay in the profession. To accomplish this goal, administrators need to recognize that a team environment is a key component in the challenge of teacher retention. Furthermore, a willingness by administrators to create an environment that encourages teacher input is necessary (Berkins & Kritsonis, 2007).

Brown (2012) made the case for providing a supportive workplace where the administrator positively engages teachers in order to reduce the number of educators who leave. While Greiner and Smith (2009) previously noted that lack of administrative support is a key factor in teacher attrition, conversely, administrators play a pivotal role in the creation, fluidity, and consistency of a positive school culture (Rhodes, Stevens, & Hemmings, 2011). Tickle, Chang, and Kim (2011) reported promising theories for decreasing attrition and increasing retention by ensuring job satisfaction. Their research indicated administrative support surpassed the negative factors that affect a teacher's feelings toward the school culture and ultimately retention rates in many cases.

Further research showed that superintendents who expressed a connection to teachers showed higher satisfaction levels from those teachers (Seashore-Louis, 2010). Murphy, Elliot, Goldring, and Porter (2007) found that the fundamental premise behind leaders supporting their teachers is that this support ultimately has a positive impact on the students. Kardos and Johnson (2010) reiterated the importance of autonomy based on collaborative decision-making and freedom. They found that as teachers felt less support, their performance in the classroom decreased.

The impact of positive administrative engagement has been supported through research studies that established a relationship between a trusting environment where opinions are valued and utilized and teachers are empowered as the findings from parts of the Met Life Report (2011) revealed. Consequently, teachers feel supportive of the organization in which they teach (Tasdan & Yalcin, 2010). This should be considered as well when factoring in educators' ability to trust or support the larger education system in a district or a state. Trust, support of administration, and open dialog are relevant to the conversation of successful education reform initiatives at the local, state, and national level. Finally, Lick, Clauset, and Murphy (2013) discovered in a recent study that the relationship between a teachers' autonomy within the classroom is directly related to higher job satisfaction rates, and ultimately leads to higher student achievement.

Many factors contribute to a student's academic performance, including the individual student experience. Clearly educators impact students (Rand, 2012); in fact, among school-related factors, teachers matter most. Because the classroom teacher is an integral part of the learning process, teachers should be at the center of the conversation regarding what should be happening, in order to improve their classroom. Understanding the theory of positive administrative engagement, where teachers and administrative leaders support each other's practice within and beyond the walls of the school, (Hargreaves, 2003), teachers should be recognized by those in positions of administrative power in their organizations to share their knowledge, build on what they know to be true, and then be supported to construct education policy based on that knowledge.



### **Teacher Input in Education Reform**

The concept of including teachers' views in the area of educational reform is not a new concept. Goldman and Conley (1997) found that any education reform must begin with the basic questions of learning and teaching before any official policy is set in motion. Harris (2009) noted that significant educational reforms have to deal with basic questions about learning and teaching before organizational structure of the educational institutions is modified. Noguera and Rothstein (2008) indicated that education reforms usually only produce small victories that rarely impact the lives of most students; however, Mitra (2006) stated that for reform to truly work, input from teachers and students is of vital importance. Furthermore, Lick et al. (2013) suggested that teachers want to provide input on educational change and that this must be done in a culture of mutual respect. A piece of the puzzle to creating a culture of respect involves a deep feeling of belonging to the greater whole (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011). A feeling of true belonging and relevance to the education conversation can allow teachers to feel valued. This sense of belonging to the entire education community is elevated when a teacher feels empowered by reform policy rather than confined by it. Vicars (2012) details the need for administrators to engage in open conversations and to show interest in teachers' opinions as an agent for positive system-wide change in order to create the culture of change.

### **Teacher Attrition**

Teacher attrition is not a new issue plaguing the educational system. Since 2000, teacher attrition percentages in the United States have increased by as more than 50%

(National Center for Educational Statistics, 2007). Teachers have always left the profession, but the reasons for leaving and the rate at which they are exiting has become more alarming. In 2010, teacher attrition rates were between 14% to 16%; (Hancock & Scherff, 2010) and while comparable to other professions, the attrition of educators has significant impact on the education system at the classroom level and a consequently negative impact on student learning (Abdullah, 2009; Brown & Wynn, 2009). The impact of teacher turnover within a school can weaken the organizational stability, collaboration, synergy, and morale, which in turn can lead to total decline of the school as a whole (McLeskey & Billingsley, 2008). Additionally, when high attrition rates are present in a school or district, the ability to nurture and build collegiality, teamwork, and strong support systems are lessened due to the revolving introduction of new teachers to the school community (Brill & McCartney, 2008; Darling-Hammond, 2003). Gujarati (2012) simply reiterated the importance of consistency by stating that schools lose their momentum to improve when they have to replace teachers on a regular basis.

Attrition is not just an issue for new teachers, while beginning teachers leave the profession earlier than any other teacher category; researchers have revealed 33% of teachers leave within their first 3 years and 50% leave within the first 5 years (Greiner & Smith, 2009; Swars, Meyers, Mays, & Lack, 2009). While researchers have estimated that more teachers will be needed as the attrition increases, a focus on retention of teachers rather than focusing on the recruitment of teachers may be a more effective strategy in reducing teacher attrition (Baker-Doyle, 2010). Thus, learning what keeps teachers and what motivates them to stay in a building and in the profession is important

to this conversation. As Mihans (2009) shared, veteran teachers have different desires and often different reasons for leaving than beginning teachers. For example, veteran teachers believe the lack of autonomy has the greatest negative impact on their voice and ability to influence decisions (Mihans, 2009). It is not to say that this same lack of input does not also impact new teachers and so as attrition variables for teachers are decreased, the strategies behind teacher recruitment continued to be difficult and ineffective (National Education Association, 2008).

### **Implications**

While there has been much research on education reform, the literature review revealed that there has been very little accomplished in terms of how to engage educators in the topic. Teacher attrition and turnover due to lack of autonomy, administrative engagement, and education reform policies that do not take into account the classroom impact can have detrimental impact on student learning (McLeskey & Billingsley, 2008). Finding ways to increase educator empowerment and higher level of autonomy can lead to more teachers remaining in the education profession. Consequently, this paradigm shift could ultimately lead to higher teacher morale, which in turn can lead to higher student performance. The theory of positive administrative engagement (Vicars, 2012) is the framework for this project, while the purpose of VIVA is to empower educators to share the knowledge they have built upon in their journey in the field of education. Allowing those who are closest to the students to construct education policy from what they know can alleviate feelings of helplessness; and assist in lessening the current attrition rate.

The VIVA program has proven to be a valuable tool for teachers to share ideas of what they know to be true, construct relevant policy, and share useful information with each other and lawmakers; therefore it could be repeated at another opportune time. There may be the potential for other topics besides the question put forth in Iowa. While the topic of the Iowa project was on teacher leadership, other pertinent topics used as the question starter of another VIVA project could be the basis of another policy statement written and presented to lawmakers from classroom teachers. This could be repeated not just in Iowa, but also in other states or even used as a national teacher conversation. Topics such as teacher evaluation, student learning time, school calendar, implementation of the Common Core State Standards, and student learning environments could all be a part of state or even national conversations among classroom teachers. For the teachers in Iowa, another VIVA project may not be the most effective means to support their work, but a professional development opportunity that is focused on the Iowa VIVA question of teacher leadership may be in order to continue the work that was started with the VIVA project.

### **Summary**

It is clear from the literature that teacher attrition and turnover are not good for students and are not healthy for the educational system as a whole. Teachers have cited a lack of input into the policies that impact their work as a major reason for leaving the profession. While having a major impact on federal policy maybe extremely difficult from the classroom setting, there needs to be a way to ensure this can happen. Utilizing the theoretical framework of positive administrative engagement, the VIVA teacher

project is poised to offer a way for classroom teachers to share ideas and create a summation of teacher voices into a platform that can be shared with policy makers. The following sections will provide an overview of the methodology of the case study that was done to evaluate the VIVA project, its ability to use constructivism and positive administrative engagement to support teachers to create policy, and its impact if any in one school district. It will describe the participants as well as the tools used to gather information.

## Section 2: The Methodology

### **Qualitative Research Design and Approach**

The intent of this study was to develop a better understanding of the impact the VIVA project has had on teachers in the area of creating and implementing educational policy. Specifically, in this qualitative case study, I investigated the perceptions of teachers regarding their involvement in the VIVA project and the impact this initiative has had on their role as teachers. A qualitative inquiry design was most appropriate for the study as it allowed me as the researcher to understand the depth of the VIVA project and the implications for teachers. In selecting a form of qualitative research, a case study approach was most appropriate because, as Merriam (2009) stated, this approach is ideal for studying the emotional and affective human experiences. This method of research allowed for the examination of teachers' perceptions regarding the VIVA project and how this project has impacted their career in the field of education. The information is then presented in a rich descriptive narrative that helps better understand the phenomena, ultimately contributing to the existing body of knowledge.

Qualitative approaches are used to focus on paradigms and participants' conceptual overviews on a topic (Creswell, 2007). The three most common qualitative approaches are case studies, grounded theory, and ethnography (Creswell, 2003, 2007). This research followed a case study approach.

#### **Justification for Case Study Approach**

A case study design was selected for this project study due to the focus on one particular school setting and those teachers' views concerning the VIVA project and its

impact on teacher leadership. I intended to gain a better understanding of teachers' perceived views in relationship to teacher leadership roles and opportunities to improve teacher retention. Additionally, teacher morale and student learning could be increased, thus leading to positive social change at the school and throughout the district.

Other qualitative methodologies were considered but were not selected.

Ethnography (Creswell, 2007) is used to interpret patterns within a group of people of the same culture. Whereas the setting for this research was a vital facet of the study's design, it was the phenomena of the educators' voices and in policy development and teacher leadership that was at the forefront of study. Additionally, an ethnographical study would require a timeline that would exceed what was logical and feasible for this topic. Another option is a grounded theory approach. However, the purpose of this study was to resolve a local problem, not the formation of the theory (Creswell, 2007).

## **Participants**

### **Setting**

The setting for 2012 Iowa VIVA exchange occurred online throughout the entire state of Iowa. Teacher members of the Iowa State Education Association could access the conversation 24 hours a day for a 6-week period. In this case study, an urban school district within a mid-size city in Iowa was selected as the location. The district had over 1,200 teachers and a student population of approximately 16,000 students, of which over 40% qualified for the free or reduced lunch program. The district was one of the 19 districts to receive the Teacher Leadership and Compensation grant monies from the state

of Iowa for the 2014 school year. The actual participants interviewed came from a group of teachers within this school district who had participated in the VIVA exchange.

### **Population and Sample**

Creswell (2012) stated that while conducting qualitative studies, the number of participants is dependent on the researcher's goal, as well as the logistics of the study's context. To best understand the roles of teacher leadership and the relationship to the VIVA project, the teachers needed to be from one of the 32 districts that received a Teacher Leadership and Compensation Grant from the Iowa Department of Education. The teachers also had to have participated in the Iowa VIVA exchange that occurred for 6 weeks in October of 2012. To this end, a purposeful sample of 10 teachers was selected from a TEACHER LEADERSHIP AND COMPENSATION district. Because of the confidential nature of the VIVA participation, teachers who were part of the VIVA discussion were not named, nor was I privy to the list of the 316 VIVA participants, therefore a teacher had to self-identify to be included in this study. In order to ensure all teachers in the selected district were offered the ability to be a part of this study, all 1,200 preK-12 teachers were sent an e-mail offer to participate with a 2-week deadline for response. There were exactly 10 responses received within the set due date, and these 10 teachers became the purposeful sample from the population. The sample size of 10 kept data collection and analysis manageable, yet still meaningful.

This purposeful sample provided the opportunity to obtain a detailed description of the phenomena. Purposeful sampling is based on selecting participants with certain criteria. Merriam (2002) further suggested that participants who are experienced and



knowledgeable on the topic will add credibility to the findings. Thus, the criteria for selecting participants were teachers who participated in the VIVA project who were currently working in the field and were teaching in a district that utilized teacher leadership roles.

### **Justification for the Number of Participants**

According to Creswell (2003) and van Manen (1990), a sample of 10 participants encapsulates an in-depth experience due to the qualitative nature of this study. The total number of volunteer participants in the Iowa VIVA exchange was 316. For this case study, in order to probe more deeply into the participants' experience, I selected five elementary teachers and five secondary teachers. I cross-referenced the findings both within and across the groups to look for commonalities, themes, and differences between the secondary and elementary groups. While this was an acceptable number of participants, written sources including the final VIVA policy report generated from the project published in January of 2013 as well as the Iowa Code, in particular the Iowa Education Reform Bill (H. File No. 215, 2013) were also used to support the research. This allowed comparison with what teachers were reporting to what was actually occurring.

### **Procedure for Gaining Access to Participants and Establishing a Researcher-Participant Working Relationship**

An e-mail (Appendix B) was sent to the potential participants explaining the details of the research from the president of the local association asking for any willing participants to e-mail me directly. Additionally, the e-mail outlined the justification for

their selection, as well as possible benefits their contributions could have on the future of the teacher leadership policy in the state of Iowa, and on the future use of the VIVA initiative. Upon each teacher's consent to participate, an interview session was scheduled.

An introductory e-mail (Appendix B) was sent from a third party in order to anonymously invite the subjects to participate. The participants then e-mailed me to indicate their willingness to participate. The selected participants were e-mailed the consent form to read and sign prior to the interview. I ensured that each scheduled interview session took place at a time that was accommodating to the participant. Because interviews were the primary source of data collection, I asked permission from the participants to communicate via phone or e-mail for possible follow-up questions.

Prior to the start of each interview, I reviewed the consent form with each participant, detailing the purpose of the study and how data were being collected, the privacy and confidentiality information, and specifically that interviews were to be recorded for the purposes of transcribing the interviews. Additionally, I reiterated that their participation in the research was voluntary. My contact information was listed in all communications in case questions or comments regarding the study arose after the interviews took place. Opportunities to express concerns and ask questions during the study were provided as well.

As the president of the state teacher's union, I was privy to contact information from districts that had teachers involved with the VIVA project. I have collaborated and served with many teachers on school projects and committees. This personal relationship is an asset in gaining access with knowledgeable and experienced participants, as well as

establishing rapport. However, I am cognizant that objectivity is essential to the data collection process. Because of the need to ensure all participants were totally willing to participate on their own and free from any pressure to engage, I asked the president of the local association of the district in this case study to e-mail the study information along with my e-mail address. The participants then contacted me directly to participate and set up a time for the interview that worked best for them.

### **Methods for Ethical Protection of Participants**

The assurance of suitable ethical standards is essential to this study. To this end, certain procedures were implemented. Approval of the Walden Institutional Review Board (IRB) was received before any contact was made to conduct research. A consent form (Appendix C) was given to the participants prior to the interview sessions. This document included the purpose of the study, the process of conducting the research, and the safeguards in place to ensure confidentiality. Additionally, to further ensure confidentiality, pseudonyms appear throughout the study. This shall prevent the possibility of anyone being able to identify the participants. Finally, to assure accuracy of data, personal memos and field notes were used.

### **Data Collection**

Semi-structured interviews in which the participants were asked specific questions from the Interview Guide (Appendix D) that allowed for follow up, as well as clarifying and probing questions from the researcher were conducted to obtain data from the participants. According to DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006), this is the most common form of data collection used in qualitative studies. My goal was to encourage

participants to share their descriptions of the phenomena based on their personal experiences. The following questions were used to guide the interview:

What grade level and area are you currently teaching?

Had you been working as a teacher when you participated in the VIVA project?

What is your level of understanding of the purposes of the VIVA Project?

What is your level of satisfaction with the VIVA project?

From teachers' perspectives, what do you think is the purpose of the VIVA Project?

Do you think teachers should be responsible for *developing* educational policy in your (school, district, state)?

Do you think teachers should be responsible for *piloting* education policy in your school, district, or state? Please explain.

Do you think your experiences as a teacher can *impact* policy development and/or piloting in your school, district, or state? Please explain.

What challenge(s) do you face when there is a change in your school environment?

When a new policy is put in place and implemented in your school, without your input, how and in what ways do you adapt to the new situation?

What are your recommendations for the inclusion of teachers' perspectives into policy development and implementation?

As this was a qualitative study, there was leeway in the interview guide to allow for the respondent to share more information than prescribed by the direct questions in

the guide. Research (Warren, 2001) has found that the use of interviews as a means for collecting data is the best method to determine the participants' perceptions regarding the research topic. Additionally, I asked open-ended questions that were constructed so as to allow participants to share personal experiences and examples to describe their views on the VIVA program (Warren, 2001).

Personal interviews were held at an agreed location, and took place after school hours, so as not to interrupt the workday. Interviews were limited to a maximum time of one hour with the average taking approximately forty-five minutes. Participants were advised of this time frame when each interview was scheduled to ensure that they understood the time commitment of the interview. I began the interview process by taking a few minutes to build rapport with the participants by engaging in casual conversation. Shortly after this, I reminded the participant of the study's purpose and confirmed that I had received their signed Consent Form (Appendix C). To ensure the participants spoke openly about their experiences, the questions were open-ended and based on the study topic, by asking, for example, "What are your perceptions of the VIVA program?" I incorporated the use of an audio recording application on a personal cellular phone to ensure all dialogue was captured. Additionally, personal notes were taken during the interview using a record log.

Pseudonyms were used in place of all participant names. Interview transcripts are housed on a password protected external hard drive. Additionally, recordings of interviews are stored in the researcher's personal password-protected cellular phone, to which only I have access and is password protected.

As stated earlier, it was noted that the researcher is the president of the state teachers' association and a former classroom teacher from the district. The researcher brings knowledge of the district and the programs from working there four years prior to the case study, but not of the current situation in teacher leadership and morale in the district or school site.

### **Data Analysis**

Merriam (2009) suggested assigning codes as a way to build themes. Color-coding of transcripts will be incorporated so as to detect commonalities among and within interview transcripts. The NVivo software was used to transcribe all interviews and to support coding of themes. Coding consisted of highlighting consistent words throughout the transcript, along with making notations next to data. These words and phrases along with the NVivo software, allowed data to be analyzed in a more systematic manner.

The extraction of participant narrative in an attempt to formulate themes is called textural description (Creswell, 2007). Using this technique, I described how the participant experienced the phenomenon through conditions, situations, and context (Creswell, 2007). Furthermore, the written descriptions of themes should symbolically provide a picture of what the participant experienced (Merriam, 2002). I believe this form of data analysis will provide the reader with a more in-depth understanding of the participants' experiences regarding their recruitment process and what aspects were favorable and which were not. Furthermore, thematic analysis organizes the primary research findings for the reader. For instance, whereas the initial data analysis revealed a

broader based set of findings; further analysis lead to the formation of themes and sub-themes.

Because this study focused on understanding the participants' perceptions of reality, it is important that the findings match the data. Although one phenomenon was studied, the perspectives of several people were taken into account. These written accounts are an attempt to show how participants understood their current teaching reality at the time of the interviews as well as during the six week VIVA exchange. Therefore, it is important for the researcher to explain how the data was interpreted. An audit trail is an important aspect of showing how the research progressed (Merriam, 2009). The record log details how data was collected, and how information from interviews is coded and placed into categories. This detailed account of procedures throughout the study increases the trustworthiness of the study and its results. The log has been used by the researcher and will be kept securely for the required amount of time as specified by the IRB.

Credibility was achieved through the use of member checks. These member checks were also used to assure that the participants' words and ideas were recorded accurately. This check identified any misunderstandings. This was a clear-cut way to ensure that the participants' opinions were captured during their interview.

The use of a rich description is important in assisting readers in determining whether this study and its findings can be transferred to their district or school site. Because case studies allow for the information to be presented in a rich description, it is vital to provide readers with an extremely detailed description of the setting and participants, as well as information that supports the findings (Merriam, 2009). To

present these details and provide such evidence, relevant quotes from individual interviews are presented so that readers have a full understanding of the setting, participants, and their experiences. Although the study will be focused on a particular phenomenon at a specific site, the sample consists of teachers at elementary, middle and high school levels in the district, this allowed for a greater range of understanding of the VIVA project as a whole and not just one particular grade or building level. This variation in the sample will also allow readers to determine whether the study and its findings can be transferred to their site or for another educational reform topic in Iowa, another state, or nationwide.

### **Data Collection and Analysis Procedures**

The researcher transcribed all audiotapes. Upon completion of interviews, the transcripts were analyzed for reoccurring themes. These themes were then organized by grouping them according to similarities amongst the participants' responses and assigning codes to represent the contents of each group. Responses of all participants are presented for each item in an effort to provide accurate and thick descriptions. Instances during interviews where participants repeated words, paused to formulate responses, or recanted or revised comments were omitted from all direct quotations. No omissions, however, compromise the substance or integrity of the participants' responses. The context within which each response was given and the depth and breadth of the responses are represented accurately.



## Findings

The primary purpose for conducting this study was to determine the perceptions of teachers regarding their experiences with the VIVA program. I was able to learn about the respondents' experiences by conducting one-on-one individual interviews. The voices of these teachers may address the gap within the literature regarding their unique perspectives of the VIVA program.

The selection process was developed after extensive coordination with my doctoral committee, as well as the Walden Institutional Review Board. The research participants were selected from the district selected and met the following criteria: (a) currently teaching, and (b) was involved with the integration of the VIVA program. I conducted all interviews over a three-week period.

One of my primary goals was to protect the identity of the participants. In devising a protocol for the interview process, anonymity was the central concern. Several safeguards were instituted to guarantee anonymity. They were as follows: (a) neither the date nor time was recorded for the interviews, (b) identifying information was not used for the interviews except for race, and (c) nothing linked the content of the discussion with the participant. These procedures were closely followed.

The data answered the general research question, "What were the experiences of teachers regarding the integration of the VIVA program within their school environment?" Because the question of the VIVA exchange was about teacher leadership, the data also included ideas and thoughts about the teacher leadership program being implemented in the district.

An analysis of the themes is best represented by quotes from the participants. A detailed examination of the results is given in the form of a summary to better explain each of the five major themes. The five major themes with sub-themes in parentheses are as follows: a) program format, b) teachers' role in policy development, c) improved communication needs, d) VIVA as a pro-active tool, and e) moving forward with VIVA framework.

### **Theme 1: Program Format**

Responses to program format are to the protocol item: *What is your level of satisfaction with the VIVA project and from a teachers' perspective, what do you think is the purpose of the VIVA Project?*

All participants expressed that the format of the VIVA program, specifically the on-line discussions, were beneficial. The value they place on their time was evident and the fact that VIVA allows them to access the on-line discussion on their own time was cited as a benefit of the program. Participant 1 stated, "The format was good in that we were able to participate on our own time. Teachers are so busy these days; for the program to be a live interaction would not work. The on-line dialogue was good."

Lack of professional recognition, poor relationships with colleagues, curriculum demands, low income, and high workload lead to stress among teachers. The format of the VIVA initiative is designed with these challenges in mind. All participants were adamant in their claim that the asynchronous design of the program was a welcome change to many of the initiatives mandated by the educational system.

Participant 3 found, "I liked the process of having everyone participate on their own time in a blog scenario. This helped me refine my thinking and gave me time to construct my thoughts." Participant 4 reiterated these thoughts.

The on-line discussions were great, especially the ones surrounding policy issues in Iowa. I thought it was a very cool opportunity to network with other educators in Iowa. We were able to enter into discussions we normally would not be able to have.

The on-line discussions appear to be enhancing communication amongst educators and the ability to participate in the program at their own pace limits the stress associated with having to add another activity to their already busy day. Participant 8 found that although time was an issue, once she was able to read and contribute to the posts, it was worth her time. "It is just a matter of finding the time to get into the VIVA atmosphere. I had to make an effort to do this on my own time. Teachers do not have much time during the day. But once I became engaged, I found the on-line conversations useful and interesting." Participant 7 also spoke of her appreciation of the VIVA on-line discussion format.

For me, having the discussions after hours was good. At first, I would forget, but once I started to check in, it became part of my evening schedule and was not as bad. Having the different discussion threads made it easy to pick which discussion you wanted to be part of. The fact that I could log in at night once the kids were in bed, made it very convenient for me as well. I also liked the voting function.

There were times when I was not able to actually write anything, but I could click on the “thumbs up” and contribute to the conversation that way.

While Participant 4 found value in the conversation, was reluctant to call the discussion board a complete success.

The fact that we were able to work on our own time was nice. I wish I had taken more time to see what others were saying. The different discussion strands allowed for multiple conversations and I liked that. However, I was a little concerned that all the posts were being put together as one voice. I just wanted to make sure my thoughts were credited to me. But the discussion board posts were a nice aspect.

A forum which allows their voice to be heard has led to a feeling of empowerment in regards to professional recognition. A primary goal of the VIVA program is to build leadership skills amongst faculty. Permitting an environment, which allows their voice to be heard, and considered, is proving to be a benefit to this initiative.

## **Theme 2: Teachers’ Role in Policy Development**

Responses to teachers’ role in policy development are to the protocol items: When a new policy is put in place and implemented in your school, without your input, how and in what ways do you adapt to the new situation? and what are your recommendations for the inclusion of teachers' perspectives into policy development and implementation?

All participants expressed that teachers should have a voice in the educational policy making process. Responses were not only positive, but specific as well. Participant 1 stated,

Prior to VIVA, I was involved with piloting one program; it was high school drop-out prevention program. We thought it was so cool that our views were going to be used to help kids stay in school and graduate. We were told at that time that our experiences with the program would be used to build and implement the program, but we never really heard anything else about it.

Participant 2 said, “I think the teachers’ voice is critical to the people who are intrusted to make educational policy. I believe it is a struggle to find that balance between policy makers doing their job, yet doing so by with using the information provided to them by teachers. If policy makers do not utilize teacher’s experiences, then they are operating on limited information.”

Theme 2 displays teachers’ desire not only to be heard, but also to initiate change. An overriding sentiment of wanting to be involved in educational policy resonates throughout the findings. Teachers express a frustration in being asked to implement change within their classrooms without having being consulted by school leaders. To this end, leadership in education must embrace deep and lasting reform and educators must be prepared to ensure its success.

Participant 8 continued with the thoughts on leadership considering the voice of the teacher, “Of course they can. I have been around a long enough time to see that when policy makers listen to teachers, the profession moves to a better place. I totally believe that a teacher’s voice can make a difference, but they must be given the opportunity; this is not always the case.” Participant 7 continued, “I think if the right people talk to teachers and allow them to serve on committees, policy can be impacted in a positive

manner. But teachers must be listened to; it cannot just be committee appointments.”

Participant 3 provided one of the more detailed responses.

Teachers’ voices need be there for sure, but my concern would be that it would be allowed to become another duty placed on the teacher. The input of the teacher should be allowed to assist in making policy decisions, but we should not have to be responsible for writing policy. But I agree that more collaboration is needed.

In addition to this study leading to the building of a professional development opportunity for teachers on how to enhance one’s assertiveness within the school environment and become a leader for other teachers, it also presents data that will be beneficial for school administrators.

Theme 2 reveals an overriding sense that teachers have knowledge that is left untapped when discussing and implementing school policy.

Participant 4 added, “I absolutely think people should listen to teachers. However, it should be done so in a logical manner. If a policy directly impacts a teacher, then there should be large teacher input, if not, then no, allow teachers to teach.”

Participant 5 stated, “I absolutely feel teachers should be allowed to assist in policy decision. Without the teachers’ input, it is a wasted opportunity.”

Whereas the overall sentiment was that teachers should have a voice in policy development, the findings would be incomplete if specific information regarding “how” teachers’ experiences should be utilized in policy decision was not provided. Participant 4 began,

Any initiative should have representation of the entire school community. I think that most teachers are comfortable in professional development environments. This is what we know. If policy makers will initiate and facilitate the initiative, then I believe you'll see teachers accepting the challenge and contribute in a positive way. If it's not handled correctly, then I feel teachers will get the impression that they are being overworked once again. It is important that policy makers let them know it is their opinion that is being sought, not more work.

This idea of appropriately approaching the faculty concerning policy decisions is vital for the success of a cooperative relationship between school administration and teachers.

Based on these findings, the mandating of policy is not an effective means of approaching teachers, but to this end, neither is seeking their input on the terms of the administration. Theme 2 presents findings expressing teachers desire to be involved in policy decisions, but also to be respected and truly listened to by those overseeing school change. Participant 6 stated, "Do something in which teachers are familiar. We are used to serving on committees; this is a good way for the teacher input to be brought into the discussion. If teachers can have someone in the same room facilitating the conversation and actively listening, that helps. If not, we'll get defensive and feel more work is being asked of us." Participant 1 added, "I like the idea of forming a task force; allowing us to collaborate with different groups of people. This gives us the chance to have a voice and tell the stakeholders our true stories. Prior to the meetings, send out an e-mail with prompts and talking points." Participant 2 continued this thought,

We do not need a paper and pencil survey. Instead, allow us to contribute and communicate in a thoughtful and logical manner. If we can be allowed to truly discuss with those in charge our opinions and experiences, I believe they will be satisfied with our feedback.

Participant 8 simply said, “I think you have to find the right time and place. This is critical to gaining good teacher feedback. Be kind to the teachers; do not force anything on them.”

Participant 3 continued the idea of contacting and involving teachers at the right time and place, along with the integration of teacher feedback into the professional development agenda.

If you want to get meaningful input from teachers, they need to be fresh. Teacher moral is such an important issue, and if they are not approached at the right time, then asking for their input may seem as if more work is being placed on them. I would allow professional development days to be used for teacher input. If you just ask them casually, they will go off on tangents. Handle it professionally and let them know what is coming and that their input is desired.

Finally, Participant 5 added, “Don’t send us a survey if you want teacher buy-in. If you want voices, then actually hear our voices. Schedule something where teachers could discuss with other teachers; a forum where we can feed off one another.” Theme 2 validates this point and shows teachers’ willingness to show buy-in to school initiatives when they are involved in the planning of such change.



### **Theme 3: Improved Communication**

Responses to improved communication are to the protocol items: From teachers' perspectives, what do you think is the purpose of the VIVA Project? and what challenge(s) do you face when there is a change in your school environment?

Although the VIVA program was received positively by all participants, when asked if there were challenges, or areas which needed improvement, participants cited many examples. Participant 2 said, "I would improve the communication from the very beginning of the initiative. I need to be involved right away. I felt like I was not informed of the details of the program until I was already involved. Maybe some literature or something giving us more detail up front." Participant 8 agreed,

Regarding the discussion boards, I would have liked if someone from VIVA could have consolidated the comments and sent out snippets or a consensus of what everyone was saying. There was a lot being said and I really did not have the time to filter through all of it. So, some weekly communication reports would have been nice to have.

The notion of having an open line of communication amongst faculty and administration was prevalent throughout all interviews. For teachers to fully take on the role of being a teacher leader, they must be involved in the early stages of the decision making process. Data from theme 3 contributes to both the project, as well as the body of knowledge to be used to inform administration on how to effectively include teachers in school decision making procedures.

Participant 1 continued the topic of increased communication,

I would have liked an e-mail report on the status of everyone's thoughts as well as the status of the program. You get on-line and comment on certain threads and really get caught up in certain conversations. However, there is not enough time to read everything that is being said or done. A summary of activities would have been nice to have; just a weekly e-mail to keep us in the loop.

Participant 4 also addressed the communication issue, but brought to my attention the issue of anonymity,

I enjoyed reading other's responses to my comments I had made, but I was never really sure of the security of my comments. There were times I wanted to say more, but was not sure if my name was actually being attached to my comments. I would recommend that VIVA consent with everyone regarding their privacy prior to the discussion boards being opened. Also, if they could send out reports or updates of the program, that would help.

Although teacher and administration are within the same building, the nature of the teaching profession prevents the two groups from interacting much throughout the day. Furthermore, when communication does occur, it is often in the form of a performance review or even a dispute that has occurred within the classroom setting. The idea of administration and teachers communicating in a way that leads to school improvement was embraced by all participants. However, although the idea of enhancing communication was recognized as being eminently important, the logistics of how this communication is organized amongst faculty, as well as with administration must be considered. Again, information from this study has been used in the creation of the

project to demonstrate to new teacher leaders not only the importance of school communication, but ways to be assertive and to have their voices heard. For administrators, this data needs not only to be considered, but adhered to as well. It is one thing to hear the voice of the teacher, but to truly allow for your faculty to be a part of the school policy and decision making process, administrators must listen to what their teachers are experiencing and reflect on these thoughts as school environments are being built upon and improved.

Participant 3 said,

I thought about the communication between everyone. I sensed some frustration in regards to the process. There were literally hundreds of posts and for me; I really didn't have time to read through all of them. Also, I would have liked to have known who was saying what. I couldn't always tell if the posts were from a teacher or an administrator or maybe even from someone from VIVA. I would have appreciated more communication from VIVA about the organization of the discussion boards. For me, it was too random.

Finally, Participant 7 stated, "I would have liked reports on the big ideas that had come from everyone's posts. Send out an e-mail containing a report of all the main topics. I would like that."

#### **Theme 4: Proactivity of VIVA (Hearing the Teachers' Voice)**

Responses to improved communication are to the protocol items: Do you think teachers should be responsible for developing educational policy in your (school, district, state)? and When a new policy is put in place and implemented in your school, without

your input, how and in what ways do you adapt to the new situation? All participants expressed one of the issues surrounding the implementation of new initiatives in the education system is their reduced role in the program or policy being implemented. Although a lack of communication from VIVA was cited as a challenge of the program administrators, the fact that the goal of the VIVA program was to include the teacher's voice was greatly valued by all participants. Participant 1 said,

Typically, we are thrown into a new program without any knowledge of the program or why we are even being asked to participate. In many cases, it is a bad product. If the decision makers would have allowed our voice to be heard at an earlier stage of the project development, we could have informed them of some of the problems. In the end, everyone just gets frustrated. This can be prevented and I believe that VIVA gets this.

The idea of including the everyday workforce in the decision making process is not a new or groundbreaking idea. However, the act of actually going through with the idea is rare. Theme 4 is important in that this data shows that VIVA is working. Teachers are feeling an empowerment. Participant 4 continued this thought, "If I have a problem with a new initiative, I have to initiate conversations with the individuals who established the policy. There is usually no organization or defined hierarchy of command. You have to keep going up the ladder for your voice to be heard. The VIVA program seeks the teachers' voice. I like that aspect of the program." Participant 8 stated, "I am a veteran teacher, so when new policy begins to work its way into our school, I try to immediately find the

impact it will have on student learning. Not all policy and procedures are beneficial for the students. No one really knows this other than teachers.”

Of all themes revealed from this study, data from Theme 4 may be the most important for stakeholders to receive and understand. School and state administrators need to hear that VIVA is not a wasted effort and that it is working. If this information is not passed on to these parties, then the program could be dismissed and thought to be a failure.

Participant 3 reiterated the previous thoughts,

When change happens in school there is normally a lot of venting and whining from the teachers. However, I always say that it is vital to keep the interest of the student in mind. At the end of the day, we have to keep teaching and work with these kids so that they are moving in a positive direction. I have seen situations where teachers have to attend school board meetings just to voice their opinion.

That should not be the case. We should be on the front line of policy development. VIVA allows this idea of seeking the teachers’ voice to be a prominent component of educational change. This is a step in the right direction.

Finally, Participant 2’s comments confirmed the proactive nature of the VIVA initiative as a major theme,

I think there has to be a balance between administration calling the shots, yet still allowing teachers’ voices to be heard. VIVA promotes the sharing of decisions. It allows a forum for the sharing of ideas; and for these ideas to actually be considered. VIVA is proactive by asking teachers up front what they think on

certain topics. I believe this has allowed teachers to feel more connected to what we are being asked to do. We have ownership. This is long overdue.

The overriding sentiment is that VIVA worked. Teachers are engaged and are feeling they are a part of the decision making process. If positive change is occurring at the teacher satisfaction level, this can only lead to an increase in moral and ultimately higher levels of student learning.

### **Theme 5: Moving Forward With the VIVA Framework**

Responses to improved communication are to the protocol items: *What are your recommendations for the inclusion of teachers' perspectives into policy development and implementation?* Not unlike other state or federal government programs, once the support is removed, the benefits of the program are gone as well. The focus of this study is to not only understand the workings of the VIVA project, but to ensure that the positive change brought about by the program remains intact. This final theme articulates the participants' views on how VIVA has changed their approach to the teaching profession in a way that demonstrates a higher level of confidence, and ultimately, a higher level of teaching effectiveness.

Participant 1 stated that knowing her opinions were valued increased her confidence as a teacher. "In the past, I was intimidated to express my thoughts on certain things. My role was not to offer advice on school policy or school change. Instead, I followed the rules and taught. VIVA allowed me to see that I am more than just a teacher. My experiences can lead to things getting better." Participant 4 added,

Prior to becoming a teacher, I sat on the school board. I believe VIVA helped me, but I already knew how to express my feelings. What VIVA did was show all teachers that our experiences are valued. Additionally, it showed school administrators that they not only should listen to the views of the teachers, but now they *must* listen. It has definitely increased the confidence level of the teaching population.

Participant 2 said,

We need to make sure that this was not just a one-time thing. It needs to be more than a special occasion. If we can continue this rise in confidence in teachers' attitudes, it can be extremely valuable to teachers and students. This type of training needs to be embedded in our teacher education training. That is probably too lofty of a goal, but we can definitely add a professional development workshop to assist other teachers who were not involved in the VIVA project and share our thoughts and experiences. The increased confidence level needs to become contagious.

Participant 5 continued with this sentiment, "Communication with administration is the key. If they will listen to the teachers' voice, then good things can happen. I have had frustrations in the past with my opinions not being considered. VIVA has forced a shift in the area of teacher empowerment." Finally, Participant 8 articulated, "I feel like I am a larger part of the school now. I have more of an ownership in the way we are doing things. Makes coming to work easier."

## Conclusion

In this case study of the impact of VIVA on teachers in Iowa, two research questions were investigated:

RQ1: How well did teachers feel that the VIVA program allowed them to put their own voices in policy?

RQ2: Did the VIVA program impact teacher leadership within the teachers' schools or district?

In response to RQ1: How well did teachers feel that the VIVA program allowed them to put their own voices in policy? Teachers shared they had an increase in their own feeling of value by being able to put their ideas into a conversation. They remarked that VIVA itself is a platform to allow teachers voices to be used in policy. The final theme that emerged validates the implementation of VIVA and gives solid credence to the use of VIVA as a way for teachers to engage in sharing ideas to create information and share policy. It demonstrates that if the program is continued and utilized as it has been thus far, teacher morale is increased, teaching effectiveness is improved, and the overall school environment is enhanced. The project which emanates from this research will augment the already improved status of the relationship between teachers and administrators

In answer to RQ2: Did the VIVA program impact teacher leadership within the teachers' schools or district? While not all participants talked about the direct implication of their district work, six participants connected their district work to the ideas that surfaced in the VIVA conversation. The written documents analyzed give solid evidence



that VIVA ideas were included in the Iowa Teacher Leadership and Compensation law. When comparing the Iowa VIVA report created by the teachers from the idea exchange with the Iowa law, there is evidence that the VIVA report was utilized by lawmakers for the suggested requirements of districts wanting to access grant monies to implement teacher leadership. Thus there is a connection to VIVA and the implementation of teacher leadership in the schools and districts across Iowa engaged in the Teacher Leadership and Compensation System.

While the value of the VIVA project was found to be positive for the teachers in the case study, it is clear that continued focus on teacher development and assuring teacher input at various levels of implementation of any program is necessary. VIVA can be utilized to bring forth ideas from the classroom teacher and move them forward into policy, but without further supports it could become one more exercise of futility in the world of education reform. Because the topic of this VIVA exchange was centered on teacher leadership roles, and the Iowa legislature enacted law to include teacher leadership roles, a natural professional development need arose. The following section will describe a follow up support for teacher leaders in the state in the form of a three day professional development training for teacher leaders who have entered into the roles established by the state following the VIVA conversation.

### Section 3: The Project

#### **Introduction**

This case study focused on teachers who had been involved in the VIVA Project and were employees of the local Iowa school district, a district participating in the first round of state Teacher Leadership and Compensation system. This 6-week online discussion forum was designed to assist teachers in sharing the knowledge they had from their classroom experiences to create policy and provide opportunity to have voice in school decisions. The primary focus of the VIVA exchange was on teacher leadership, therefore, the interviews brought forth information on whether the VIVA project allowed teachers to have a voice in policy and the decision making process as well as information regarding the concept of teacher leadership.

After conducting and analyzing interview data, themes emerged from the participants' feedback on both the VIVA program and the question posed by VIVA about teacher leadership. Taking into consideration these themes, a 3-day workshop was created around the one theme that seemed most relevant to teachers at the time of this study. The idea that teacher leaders in Iowa need more training and have not been allotted the time and space to learn about their role was prevalent in the interviews. The fact that the Teacher Leadership and Compensation law is in its infancy in Iowa corresponds to the need for teacher leader professional development. This professional development project was designed to support the needs of teachers based on what was revealed within the data collection and analysis process. Whereas the results revealed positive comments from the teachers regarding feeling of enhanced ownership in policy and leadership

decisions within the schools, the professional development project will continue these advancements made by the VIVA project by incorporating ideas conveyed by participants into a workshop for all teachers who are in new leadership roles. The questions asked during the Iowa VIVA conversation, which formed the discussion topic and the basis for the Iowa VIVA report, were as follows:

How would you envision a greater role for teacher leadership in your school or district and what needs to change in school culture to motivate educators to take on a bigger leadership role? How would it help students if educators had a bigger leadership role in schools and what do you think is the appropriate reward system for educators who step up to leadership roles? (VIVA ISEA Teachers Writing Collaborative, 2012)

In the interview conversations—which delved beyond the formal questions of the interview guide as teachers spoke of their current experiences with the new teacher leader roles, as well as the Iowa education report *One Unshakable Vision* (Iowa Department of Education, 2011)—participants concurred that many elementary schools in Iowa had previous experience with instructional coaches and other non-formal teacher leader roles. Teacher leadership in a formalized way was more of a novelty at the secondary level. The following section will lay out the strategy for providing a learning opportunity for current teacher leaders, specifically teacher leaders in the secondary grades (Grades 6 through 12).

### **Description and Goals**

Taking into account the themes that emerged around VIVA as well as the theme that surfaced around the question VIVA posed, I created a professional development opportunity for teacher leaders to meet in person and learn from each other. As a result of this opportunity, secondary teachers will feel more comfortable in their role, gain an understanding of how to best support colleagues, and develop a collegial network with other teachers.

These are the goals of this 3-day professional development (Appendix A):

- Participants will be provided time and to engage with each other.
- Participant will be introduced to the importance of collegial interactions including ways to build trust.
- Participants will learn basic elements of adult learning and its relevance to building communities of practice.
- Participants will be introduced to the Teacher Leadership Competencies (Center for Teaching Quality, National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, & National Education Association, 2014) and utilize the competencies as a guide for their growth as teacher leaders.
- Participants will leave with a framework to connect with each other throughout the following school year in order to construct meaning and learning from their work.

### **Rationale or the Project Genre**

Tallerico (2005) defined five professional development models that address the adult learning styles: (a) individually guided, (b) collaborative problem solving, (c) observation and assessment of teaching, (d) action research, and (e) training. Individually guided professional development uses reading materials and journaling. In reviewing these five different types of professional development models, I decided to implement the training model. Based on the information that needs to be shared, the timeframe available, and the location of the learners involved, this model seemed most suitable to ensure the goals of the project are accomplished

The nature of this project is more in-depth than individually guided professional development could provide. This would not build upon the collective nature of the learning of each teacher to benefit the group. It would also not allow for individuals from rural districts to interact with other teacher leaders. Interaction of teacher leaders is one of the main goals of this professional development training therefore; this type of professional development would not ensure all of the project goals are met. Additionally, individual learning would limit one's interaction with others, which is an important aspect of gaining a deeper understanding of the topic.

Learning through collaborative problem solving is an approach used with students of all ages and can be a productive strategy to engage adults in professional development. It is fundamentally driven by the social interdependence theory (Johnson & Johnson, 2009) whereby students mutually construct knowledge and share learning. Collaborative learning and problem solving can be used to promote positive engagement within a

classroom and build a sense of community (Smith, Sheppard, Johnson, & Johnson, 2005). Collaborative problem solving, defined by Tallerico (2005) as professional development that includes interpersonal and group discussion with reflection, would not have the value when teachers are brought together for a brief time, from across the state without the same team building capacity available. Thus guided training from a state-wide perspective is needed to instill knowledge and skills to the teachers in regards to building leadership capacity as teacher leaders. In this manner they will be better equipped to disseminate their learning back in their local schools.

Observation and assessment of teaching focuses, another type of professional development defined by Tallerico (2005), is focused more on pedagogical skills, not the unique training required of this project. Finally, the focus of the project is not experimental. Whereas the practicality of action research, have the learners plan a strategy, do it, and then return to study how it works, is desirable, it would not lead to the appropriate training that is required of the learning participants in this group within the timeframe and circle of influence available to me as the researcher. Action research (Tallerico, 2005) requires an active experiment element. To this end, it is the training model that will allow the freedom and flexibility to deliver the information warranted in a professional development environment within the constraints available.

### **Rationale for the Project**

The goal for this case study was to determine the level of success the VIVA project had in fulfilling its promise of bringing together teachers' voices so as to shape policy. While the data revealed the VIVA project a success, to continue the positive

momentum, it was determined that a professional development opportunity for secondary teachers is merited. The findings revealed teachers' thoughts on both the successes and challenges of the VIVA project. A consistent theme in the findings was the participants' appeal for teachers to have adequate training and support in order to significantly help other teachers. This professional development opportunity will expose all teachers to the positive gains put forth by the VIVA project, as well as warn them of possible pitfalls in which they may succumb.

There is a strong relationship between the positive impact of quality professional development the quality of education provided to students (Desimone, 2009; Fullan, 2007); and with 25% of the state of Iowa's teachers aiming to be in a leadership position by the 2016 school year, sharing knowledge of quality professional development for teacher leaders is vital to the future success of Iowa schools. Whereas the data did reveal both positive, as well as negative characteristics of the VIVA project, the findings centered primarily on participants' views of teacher leadership and the leader's capacity of building a positive community of practice with colleagues. It is fundamental to support teacher leaders in this complex movement of leading the profession in order to facilitate the best learning experiences for all teachers and ultimately provide the best learning experiences for all students. The problem that made this professional development opportunity necessary is that there has not been time and training set aside for teacher leaders in their new roles to learn directly from each other or gain better understanding of the impact they can and do have on classroom teachers.

Therefore the content of the professional development training is centered around the goals of providing time and space to engage secondary teacher leaders with other secondary teacher leaders, as well as providing learning on the topics of collegial interactions, building trust, adult learning, establishing communities of practice, as well as using the Teacher Leadership Competencies to reflect on their work. All Iowa State Education Association (ISEA) secondary teacher leaders from across the state of Iowa will be invited to attend the face-to face training over three days in July, which is tied to the ISEA Summer learning conference. It is expected that the secondary teacher leaders will construct meaning and learning from the training through interactions with each other, bringing their own knowledge of what is working and not working, through guided learning lessons from professional staff and from follow up conversations throughout the year in order to better serve the teachers and the students of their district. This will bring forth teacher leaders who are more accustomed to serving and leading other teachers in a manner that allows them to be accepted, listened to and valued in order to elevate all teachers. An evaluation of the training will be conducted following the session.

### **Review of the Literature**

After gathering data from the personal interviews and reflecting on the increasing role of teacher leadership in the state of Iowa, a second literature review was conducted to refine topics from the original review based on the information gleaned from participants interviewed. The proposed professional development project has been built on both collected data from research along with the literature that supports the findings of this study.



In my search for the most effective type of professional development for empowering teachers, the Walden research library was used along with Walden dissertation as well as current professional journals. To that end the literature review for this section encompassed the use of Boolean search for the following topics: teacher leadership, teacher-leader professional development, adult learning, distributive leadership and servant leadership.

### **Teacher Leadership Professional Development**

Collaboration is a key to teacher leader success (Lord, Cress, & Miller, 2008) and for all teachers to have the most positive impact, they must have a trusting relationship with administrators, collaborate amongst themselves, and model assertiveness to one another. This is not always found in the learning of pre-service teachers therefore, professional development training should be available to assist teachers in these areas of growth (Lord, Cress, & Miller, 2008). Furthermore distributed leadership, sharing the ability to lead within the building or district with more than just administration, has an encouraging impact on instruction and school climate (Devos & Van Keer, 2010). To this end, collegiality between school leaders and teachers must have an open relationship in which both parties are able to freely express their thoughts on the school policy. Finally, researchers (Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008; Weathers, 2011) have highlighted the significance of professional development in order to build a school community which fosters teacher support and growth through open communication.

## **Adult Learning**

The idea adult learning theory is not new, but studies have grown more supportive of a differentiation in the way adults learn compared to children. It is important that educators are mindful of this when working with colleagues. Research (Vanderburg & Stephens, 2010) has shown that when teaching adults, the process is as important as the product. Knowles, Holton, and Swanson (2011) noted that adult learning should be an active process facilitated by matching prior experiences with the topics being discussed. Although content expertise is crucial when teaching other adults, content expertise alone does not facilitate adult learning (Galbraith, 2004; Knowles et al., 2011). On the contrary, Galbraith (2004) found that technical content proficiency in teaching is secondary to learner-centered approaches to adult learning. Learner-centered teachers of adults have common characteristics, such as being seen as a roles model, having ability to counsel, and consistently locating content resources (Galbraith, 2004).

## **Implementation**

### **Potential Resources and Existing Supports**

As president of the Iowa State Education Association (ISEA), I have access to support systems which will aid in the creation and implementation of this professional development opportunity. First, I will seek guidance and tools from the ISEA Teaching and Learning Director. This individual is responsible for constructing and organizing the ISEA Summer Learning Conference. This resource alone should lead to an immediate implementation of the project, even if in a limited format. Additionally, the ISEA has a working relationship with the Center for Teaching Quality (CTQ). This partnership is

currently focusing on online communication as means for teachers to communicate with one another, as well as school administration. The use of this means of communication in the VIVA project and the feedback received from the participants regarding its use will be of great interest to the CTQ. Finally, the National Network of State Teachers of the Year (NNSTOY) has created a comprehensive teacher leadership electronic resource library. I plan to contact this organization as another outlet for bringing the project to a larger audience.

### **Potential Barriers**

Time is a barrier for professional development at any level when the professional development is not embedded within teachers' workday. This training being proposed is for the summer, and thus will present a challenge not only of teachers having time to attend, but the willingness to give up other activities to voluntarily attend for three full days. It is important that I work with the Communications Department of the Iowa State Education Association, as well as the Iowa Department of Education to help advertise the opportunity for secondary teachers to attend. I am cognizant of the fact that each district has its own vision for their teacher leadership roles. Because of this, I will be sure to advertise the fundamental pieces of collaboration, trust, and adult learning theories. All of these pieces are key functions to any successful teacher leadership program regardless of the location or size of district. Because this training is over 15 hours of seat time, the training will have the capacity to be used for recertification credit for teacher license renewal, this will help teachers fulfill their licensure obligation in an area that is new and relevant to them and thus maximize on the use of their time in the summer.

### **Proposal for Implementation and Timetable**

The core implementation of this professional development project will occur during the ISEA Summer Leadership Conference in July 2015. Follow-up offerings will be made available throughout the 2015 school year. The following timeline will be necessary for the professional development project to reach fruition:

- I will work with professional development personnel of ISEA to ensure the course is added into the summer conference planning agenda and included in the advertisement of the conference (April/May 2015 )
- I will work with ISEA PD personnel to ensure Center for Teaching Quality is prepared to work with teacher leaders through ongoing technology networking after the conference and throughout the 2015-16 school year (April/ May2015).
- I will work with ISEA communications department to ensure conference is advertised including the session on secondary teacher leadership. (May/June 2015).
- I will work with the ISEA professional development personnel and a teacher quality leader at the Iowa Department of Education to complete workshop materials including evaluation tool (June 2015).
- I will coordinate with stakeholders to hold Secondary Teacher Leadership Workshop as a part of the ISEA summer conference (July 27-29, 2015).
- I will ensure an evaluation is conducted (post conference).

- I will monitor The Center for Teaching Quality technology networking conversations with willing participants from the workshop (2015-16 school year).

### **Roles and Responsibilities of Student and Others**

I will be responsible for managing, implementing, and monitoring this professional development project. I will coordinate with the Professional Development Department of the Iowa State Education Association for logistics, advertisement, and resources. Because this will be imbedded into an existing conference there should be little cost associated with this opportunity. Additionally, I will work with the Center for Teaching Quality to facilitate a separate on-line community specifically designed for secondary teachers across the state.

### **Project Evaluation**

#### **Project Evaluation Plan**

A questionnaire, presented by Survey Monkey will be used to gather feedback from teachers who participated in the professional development. This will provide information which will help determine future professional development needs, changes, or follow-up activities not already anticipated. This survey will use questions with forced choice answers based on a four scale Likert system. The survey system will be password protected with the researcher's Survey Monkey private account.

#### **Justification**

Results of a national survey (Jacobs, Gordon, & Solis, 2013) have implied that teachers learn from dialog and problem solving with other teachers. Providing teachers

the opportunity to learn from each other and network, will ultimately impact the staff being served by them in their local districts. Furthermore, allowing teachers access to a network of resources is paramount to addressing critical issues that surfaced throughout the VIVA implementation. The justification is clear for the need of teacher leadership professional development opportunities

### **Overall Goals**

The goal of this professional development training opportunity is to increase secondary teachers' comfort level in expressing themselves as leaders within their school. Also, this project will hopefully lead to a support system which will allow them to gain a more concrete understanding of how to best support each other. Finally, an online collegial network for secondary teachers to interface with one another is a primary goal of this professional development. Understanding from the study that teachers need more time and space to interact with each other in order to learn and to impact the system in which they are working.

### **Key Stakeholders**

The major stakeholders in this study are the teachers who will participate in the training, as well as the teachers with whom they will ultimately mentor. The results of the evaluation of this project will be shared with the ISEA Professional Development Committee, the School Administrators of Iowa Professional Development Committee, and the Iowa Department of Education Bureau Chief assigned to teacher leadership and compensation.

## **Implications Including Social Change**

### **Social Change**

The results from this study can lead to teachers' growth as they learn from one another. Ultimately, if the voice of the teacher is placed at a higher value level, the implications on student learning and teacher satisfaction are increased. This professional development opportunity will allow teachers to engage in dialog regarding the challenges of becoming more of a leader within their school environment. This platform will help to break down teachers' feelings of isolation and encourage them to express their ideas. To this end, it is paramount that administrators and legislators not only hear the voice of the teacher, but appreciate their voice and value their ideas. If accomplished, allowing teachers to become a more vital part of school decision-making can become a reality.

### **Local Change**

The need for statewide support of teachers is clear. It is the state's responsibility to continue to seek out the views of teachers and allow their input to be a part of the decision making process in the state of Iowa. Connecting teachers to one another through a professional development opportunity, which is grounded in adult learning theory, will create a network of proactive teachers who are grounded in the frame of mind that their voices can make a difference. This collaboration can spread throughout the state and can help promote teacher leadership skills, eliminate feelings of isolation, and encourage appropriate ways to engage other teachers in reflecting on their practice. This will improve teacher effectiveness, which is at the heart of student learning.

**Far-Reaching**

Iowa has enacted cutting edge legislation ensuring that by the year 2016, twenty-five percent of all Iowa teachers will be in a formal, compensated teacher leader role. For this law to be deemed a success teachers and students must also be successful and success will be measured not only by student learning but also by lessening the rate of teacher attrition and increasing teacher morale across the state. This professional development training would be one component that can support the roles of teacher leaders, knowing that high quality professional development builds capacity within the system. While the state is still working on how they will measure the impact of this law, other states are looking to this grand experiment in teacher leadership. If this system proves to be successful, teachers will feel more valued, be more supportive of each other, attrition rates will slow and the educational system as a whole will be successful.

**Conclusion**

Teachers in the state of Iowa have taken a leap into the world of teacher leadership. The teachers in this study were teachers who participated in the VIVA project in 2012 and are employed in a district that has created formal compensated teacher leader roles for over 300 of their 1200 teachers. While the teachers' feedback in this study was primarily based on their experience with the VIVA project, a consistent theme was about the teacher leadership roles themselves and how to help the system be more successful in their workplace. The VIVA organization itself has done and will most likely continue to host other conversations with teachers across the country around other topics, but for the



state of Iowa at this time, the importance of professional development training for teacher leaders in these new roles was the researcher's priority.

## Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

### **Introduction**

This section will focus on the reflections of the overall project, a professional development opportunity created as a result of a need that emerged from the project, as well as of my professional growth as the researcher. This reflection will include the project's strengths, recommendations for remediation of project limitations, scholarship, project development and evaluation, leadership and change, as well as a self-analysis of myself as a scholar, a practitioner, and a project developer. This section concludes with the project's potential impact on social change and implications for future research.

### **Project Strengths**

This professional development project was developed as a result of the case study conducted in a local school district on the impact of a 2012 Iowa VIVA teacher idea exchange. While the VIVA project itself allowed for educators in the field to be able to share their thoughts and ideas on policy around teacher leadership that would eventually impact their classrooms. During the literature review, there were very few, if any, significant instances of a program created to accomplish this feat. The project developed following the qualitative research allows for a professional development opportunity for actual teacher leaders across the state.

The elevation of practitioners' ideas into the higher levels of state policy making did occur from the Iowa VIVA project. There are parts of the teachers' idea exchange from the VIVA white paper (VIVA ISEA Teachers Writing Collaborative, 2012) that have been incorporated into the Iowa Teacher Leadership and Compensation Law,

including suggestions for types of teacher leadership roles and the process in which teacher leaders should be selected. The final policy paper, produced by VIVA, was a collaborative writing effort of a group of 10 teachers from the VIVA project conversation. This small group incorporated ideas from the 1,000 teachers who participated in the project into one cohesive document. The VIVA project provided an out-of-state moderator with facilitation background, which allowed for participants to be questioned, pulled into conversation topics, and facilitated conversations among educators. Without this type of effective conversation “organizer,” the online VIVA discussion would have looked more like a Facebook comment area post without substance; instead, with a moderator, it targeted deeper thinking and critical conversation to move the topic to a level that would allow policy to develop. This type of professional facilitation challenged thinking, brought out ideas from participants who previously had only made a few statements, and encouraged bigger group dialogue. Finally, having a document as a policy paper written by teachers, shared by teachers, and supported by teachers became the true strength of the VIVA project.

The qualitative case study allowed interviews to take place with teachers who had participated in the VIVA project in 2012 and who were now serving in a district that was a new participant in the Teacher Leader and Compensation Law. In order to receive Teacher Leadership funds from the state, the district had to elevate, at a minimum, 25% of their teachers into a specific teacher leader role by the fall of 2014. By interviewing teachers in this district, there was information to learn firsthand about teacher leader roles and what was still needed to help teacher leadership be successful and effective.

The strengths of the project created as a result of the case study around the VIVA exchange include leveraging the capacity of the Iowa State Education Association along with its partners in professional development to provide for a 3-day professional development opportunity for teacher leaders state-wide. Bringing together teacher leaders from all areas will give a foundation for leaders to share their current status of teacher leadership in their schools and learn positive ways to engage their colleagues. This positive engagement of all teachers via the enhanced leadership skills of teacher leaders will encourage higher functioning collaboration, trust, and support systems to lessen teacher attrition and in turn increase student learning.

### **Recommendations for Remediation of Limitations**

While the VIVA project was an online conversation open to teachers across the entire state, this case study only sought to understand the impact in one large district. Because Iowa has over 300 school districts, there is potential value to learning about the impact in rural districts as well as suburban districts. A quantitative survey of the teachers across the state could also lead to information on the value of VIVA and suggested topics for future VIVA projects. This case study research was limited to one district and therefore did not give full data on how teachers across the entire state embraced the VIVA project. There would be value to a statewide survey of participants; however, the timeliness of the survey may or may not warrant it at this point. Since the inception of this research study, VIVA has done other projects at a national level and there would be value in researching how effective those VIVA conversations were and teachers' perceptions of how their ideas were being used and disseminated.

A recommendation for the state of Iowa, which could potentially be groundbreaking in light of the new Teacher Leadership and Compensation Law, would be to enact VIVA as a tool to receive feedback from teachers in districts who are now completing their first year of the teacher leader system. A limitation of how this particular VIVA project was conducted was the fact it was voluntary and completed on the teachers' personal time, outside the school day. Because of this, there were roughly 1,000 participants in a state of over 34,000 education association members. If VIVA was used by the Iowa Department of Education and given to districts as their tool to seek feedback on how the teacher leadership system could be tweaked, it could be done during the teachers' workday and as a part of their professional development. This would help with the limitations of number of responses, late-night work, and the overall concern of time as a factor of teacher involvement.

### **Scholarship**

The importance of utilizing scholarly articles, relevant and timely research that had been peer reviewed, became very clear as a necessity for scholarly work early on in the process of this research project. This was a learning curve for me due to the fact that I gather lots of current information on a daily basis in my role as the president of a large teachers' association, information that I must use to make decisions and move quickly through issues. I struggled early on to ensure my references were high quality, thoroughly researched, and grounded in theory that allowed the information to be used in my work.

There was not a plethora of research around the topic of teachers' involvement in high-level policy making. This forced me to analyze more fully the need for teacher

involvement in policy making and what would be important to support it, as well as delving deeper into what teachers are already doing that could show an impact on student growth or school climate. I began to gather information on other topics that were pointing in the direction of the importance of this work, such as collaboration and shared decision-making. These topics helped me to understand the importance, through research, of teacher involvement at a lower level of school decision-making and thus opened the door for the conversation of teacher involvement at an even higher level of decision-making. If it were not for this extension, it would have been difficult to find many peer-reviewed pieces on the topic of teachers' involvement in policy.

### **Project Development and Evaluation**

As themes surfaced throughout the interview process, it became clear that a project needed to be created that would not only align with the new Iowa Teacher Leadership and Compensation Law, but would help to improve the situation for teachers in the field who were immersed in the work. The goal became apparent that professional development was needed to support the teacher leaders who had not been in this role before. The area of most need was at the secondary level: the middle and high school teachers who had not usually received support from instructional coaches, professional learning communities, or peer coaching. This group had been charged with leading others and placed into a teacher leader system, but they did not have the same background knowledge and experiences as the elementary level faculty.

So, while the VIVA project itself helped to bring teachers voice into a policy that was ultimately implemented in the state, the need for professional development that

emerged because of the law, became the basis for the project. This was a daunting task considering the ramifications of this law are felt statewide in every school. The goal of this project is to support one area of need and tackle one component time in order to help support the system. Because this is a statewide professional development project, it was imperative to work with experts in the field of adult learning and cognitive coaching to ensure this professional development opportunity is as effective as possible to best support the current system in place.

It will be important to evaluate the professional development seminar for its impact on the future work of secondary teacher leaders. It will also be imperative to follow up with all of the participants to encourage participation in the online conversation with other teacher leaders throughout the following school year. Evaluation of the professional development opportunity will be used to tweak the online conversation system in order to best support the teacher leaders' needs.

### **Leadership and Change**

Change is not easy and as the leader of teachers in my state, it is required of me to lead by example in the face of great change. Education is certainly facing great change. In the state of Iowa, our change in law has provided great opportunity and great concern. I have been attempting to work through this change by enlisting solid plans to support teachers in sharing their stories, presenting their ideas to policy makers and to encourage them to take risks. My goal as a leader is to help each teacher in my state see themselves as important leaders both inside and outside their classroom.

This doctoral study has provided more researched-based rational to support this goal and has made me even more focused in my support of teacher empowerment. The goal for educators to take leadership roles in their building, their district, their state and beyond is something that I know will be good for education and ultimately society because it brings forth the student and classroom voice that has often been absent from decision making. In the midst of reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, and the ability of teachers to mobilize on social networks, more teachers need to become a larger voice at the national level as well. This can happen if they feel empowered to take that risk. Part of encouraging teacher leadership is the professional development this project offers to help build capacity not only within their teacher leader roles in a building, but to impact the world beyond the school walls.

#### **Analysis of Self as Scholar**

This doctoral study has pushed me beyond my comfort zone of using current events knowledge, news reports and conference speakers as a basis for most of my educational arguments. I was able to use the knowledge of the chair and the other supports from Walden to drive myself to a higher scholarly level in my work. It was very difficult for me to take my time to truly research and find rationale for the argument versus using the knowledge I have on a daily basis from less research-based sources that I must use in my work life.

#### **Analysis of Self as Practitioner**

As an elected state leader, I am always striving to hone my skills as an effective speaker, teacher and motivator. This project has not only supported my efforts to become



more solidified in the rationale behind the importance of teacher leadership, but also increased my understanding of the importance of research in the process of learning.

It was my hope to select a project of professional development that would help the system of teacher leadership that is in place in Iowa as well as to impact the individuals involved. Through my research I have learned there is a need to better support teachers once they are actually given the “voice” we fight so hard to get. My optimism in this professional development opportunity is that we will start to increase this capacity and it will continue to grow with every educator in which these leaders connect daily.

### **Analysis of Self as Project Developer**

As a project developer it is imperative to work collaborative with others in order to put together a professional development opportunity that is worthy of the teachers volunteering to participate. The major goals will be to promote teacher leadership, collaboration and social change through professional development for secondary teacher leaders at a summer leadership conference. The follow-up project of an online connection for these teacher leaders will support those leaders who are in rural areas across the state. This type of project, while not new to me, has encouraged me to move out of my comfort zone, engage other experts and seek alternative ways for teacher leaders to continue their learning. It is my hope that the development of the on-line follow-up encourages “just-in-time-learning” for the teachers involved, a process considered important for students to learn.

### **The Project's Potential Impact on Social Change**

Both the VIVA idea exchange and the professional development project have potential impact on social change. While the project created to support teacher leaders will have impact on classroom teachers in Iowa, the VIVA idea exchange has far reaching potential in many areas. It is vital that educators feel a shift in public policy from being a top-down approach in which they are pawns in a game of chess to a system where they are truly an integral part of the inception of ideas. To this end, educators must find the voice to share what is happening in their classrooms with neighbors, colleagues, parents and elected officials. Topics that must be discussed from the classroom perspective include but are not limited to: student assessment and use of testing, curriculum choices, student poverty and its impact on learning, the importance of the arts, recess, school calendar implications, impact of school funding on programs offered, class size, as well as many local issues that impact learning.

The VIVA project is one way that ideas can be discussed, written as policy and shared with leaders on many different levels. In this case study the information was shared at a state level on one topic, teacher leadership. Ultimately the ideas were shared with policy makers teachers' ideas were included and some ideas became law. There are great possibilities of social change if this type of a process could be used at local, state and national levels.

### **Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research**

Implications of this research show that the VIVA project, done in Iowa, was effective because educators did have an opportunity to impact an actual law that was

written in the state. It would be important for policymakers to utilize this type of online collaborative experience for more teachers to have input in public policy before implementing programs that dramatically impact their work. The learning gained from the case study has allowed for professional development to be created to support the new law and to help ensure a more successful experience for educators.

Finding ways to allow educators to be involved in discussion early on puts them in an offensive mode, helping to make policy better and helping to implement ideas to best serve students. This enables educators to be positive even during somewhat difficult times and thus keeps everyone working on change instead of fighting ideas and policies. The VIVA project is one way to help structure this type of engagement.

Future research may involve a deeper survey that would delve into all facets of the teacher leadership roles in Iowa to better understand the statewide impact. It also would be important to learn about the other VIVA projects that have been completed in other states and compile work of educators who have had these policy discussions. It would be interesting to learn what topic or topics teachers would like to tackle in their next policy discussion.

### **Conclusion**

Finding ways for educators to lead the profession is practical and imperative for the success of the future of any educational system change. This case study research sought to understand if the VIVA project that took place in the state of Iowa for six weeks in the fall of 2012, allowed for teachers to have a voice in public policy and take ownership of leading the profession. Clearly these things happened: The VIVA project

engaged over 1000 teachers in a conversation on the topic of teacher leadership, a subgroup of teachers wrote a policy brief incorporating ideas from the VIVA exchange, teachers presented the paper to policy makers and a law was written entitled Teacher Leadership and Compensation that included parts of the Iowa VIVA policy paper.

When assessing the overall success of the VIVA project, it was apparent there were limitations as far as voluntary participation, time constraints and topics covered. However, the fundamental idea of being able to include classroom teachers' ideas into a policy that would ultimately impact an educational change as large as the one that has taken place in Iowa, leads to the conclusion that this should be looked at more closely. There is not much research done in this area and it is extremely important. Teacher involvement to truly impact change in the educational system must not be underestimated.

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<http://vivateachers.org/ideaexchange/teacher-leadership>

## Appendix A: The Project

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this professional development is to provide a specific time, space and constructed conversation for current secondary teacher leaders to network face-to-face to interact with each other. This will follow with continued on-line interaction for interested participants.

### **Goals**

As a result of this opportunity, secondary teachers will feel more comfortable in their role, gain an understanding of how to best support colleagues through, and develop a collegial network with other teacher leaders. Specifically:

- Participants will be provided time and to engage with each other.
- Participant will be introduced to the importance of collegial interactions including ways to build trust.
- Participants will learn basic elements of adult learning and its relevance to building communities of practice.
- Participants will be introduced to the Teacher Leadership Competencies and utilize the competencies as a guide for their growth as teacher leaders.
- Participants will leave with a framework to connect with each other throughout the following school year in order to construct meaning and learning from their work.

### **Timetable**

The core implementation of this professional development project will occur during the ISEA Summer Leadership Conference in July 2015. Follow-up on-line network will be made available throughout the 2015 school year. Continual work on documents will occur with collaboration with other experts.

### **Materials**

Power Point

Chart paper

Markers

Situation note cards

Teacher Leadership Competencies guide books

### **Readings Printed:**

Russell, R. F., & Stone, A. G. (2002). A review of servant leadership attributes:

Developing a practical model. *Leadership & Organization Development Journal*, 23(3), 145. Retrieved from

<http://search.proquest.com/docview/226924747?accountid=14872>

Covey, S. M. (2006). The thirteen behaviors of a high trust leader.1-6.Retrieved

[://www.coveylink.com/documents/13%20Behaviors%20Handout%20\(wtihout%20contact\).pdf](http://www.coveylink.com/documents/13%20Behaviors%20Handout%20(wtihout%20contact).pdf)

American Association of Higher Education, EDUCAUSE, iCohere (2015,

February). *Community of practice design guide: A step-by-step*

*guide for designing & cultivating communities of practice in higher education.*

### **Evaluation Plan**

Survey Monkey will be used to gather feedback from participants. This link will be emailed and open for three weeks following the session.

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/JHJG2Z7>

### **Teacher Leadership Summer 2015 PD evaluation Participant Feedback**

Thank you for engaging in the teacher leadership professional development opportunity. Please take a moment to give feedback on the PD as well as to share any ideas for future support.

**1. To what extent do you believe this PD will help you to better support your colleagues in your role as a teacher leader**

**not at all                      somewhat                      helpful                      very helpful**

**2. The time-frame for this PD was helpful in my role as a teacher leader for the next school year.**

**not at all                      somewhat                      helpful                      very helpful**

Other (please be specific)

**3. How much did the assigned reading help you to understand key concepts?**

**not at all                      somewhat                      helpful                      very helpful**

**4. How would you rate the amount of time provided to interact with other teacher leaders?**

**not enough time                      too much time                      the right amount of time**

Other (please specify)

**5. Overall, how productive were the three days of PD in terms of your role as a teacher leader?**

**not at all                      somewhat                      productive                      very productive**

**6. How could this learning opportunity be improved?**

**7. I plan to participate in the online conversation through the Center for Teaching Quality next school year.**

**YES**



NO  
Other (please specify)

**8. What other topics would best support teacher leadership learning throughout the year? (select all that apply)**

- knowledge and understanding of instructional practices
- supporting others with classroom management
- supporting teachers through the evaluation process
- use of student feedback
- understanding and working with the administrative/teacher leader firewall
- supporting the new teacher
- supporting the veteran teacher
- Other (please specify)

**9. Optional\*\* Please complete to get more information about online-learning opportunities throughout the school year.**

**Name**

**School District**

**Address**

**Address 2**

**City/Town**

**State/Province**

**ZIP/Postal**

**Code**

**Country**

**Email Address**

**Phone**

**Number**

**PowerPoint presentation with description of activities:**

<u>Day 1</u>
--------------

8:00 a.m. – 8:55 a.m.	Breakfast / Meet and Greet
9:00 a.m. – 9:30 a.m.	Presentation 1 – Background and Nature of Study
9:35 a.m. - 10:15 a.m.	Breakout Session 1
10:20 a.m. – 11:20 a.m.	Presentation 2 – Introduction to VIVA
11:25 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.	Brown Bag Lunch
12:35 p.m. – 1:30 p.m.	John Harbaugh Servant Leadership Video
1:35 p.m. – 2:25 p.m.	Breakout Session 2
2:30 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.	Final Discussion

## Presentation 1: Background and Nature of Study

### Background of the Study

- There has been a national movement to increase teacher quality. At the heart of this movement is the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), or No Child Left Behind, which has propelled education to the center of public conversation (Cheryl, 2009).
- Cheryl (2009) has further described the movement as one that has placed much of the blame for ineffective education on the teachers

### Background of the Study

- But the increased attention on school and teacher accountability has increased the rate of attrition of teachers in the profession
- Behrent (2009) could be that the constraints placed on teachers from government-based initiatives are a major cause for their desire to leave the profession. In addition to these constrictions that teachers face, the increased pressure for their students to perform has led to increased attrition from the profession (Behrent, 2009).

## Background of the Study

- Furthermore, Rubin (2011) found many teachers fear that the blame for poor student performance will be attributed to the quality of the teacher instruction. This has caused many teachers to feel insecure and unappreciated regarding their performance in the classroom (Rubin, 2011).

## Background of the Study

- This study is focused on teacher attrition within a designated school district in the state of Iowa. In 2012, the Iowa State Education Association implemented a program centered on increasing teacher involvement, empowerment, and leadership to address the low retention rate of its teaching population.

## Nature of Study

- Qualitative Case Study approach
- Personal Interviews were conducted with 12 participants
- The criteria for selecting participants were teachers who participated in the VIVA project, who were currently working in the field and were teaching in a district that utilized teacher leadership roles.
- Interviews were transcribed, coded, and analyzed

### Nature of Study

- The intent of this study was to develop a better understanding of the impact the VIVA project has had on teachers in the area of creating and implementing educational policy
- I intended to gain a better understanding of teachers' perceived views in relationship to teacher leadership roles and opportunities to improve teacher retention.
- Additionally, teacher morale and student learning could be increased, thus leading to positive social change at the school and throughout the district.

### Breakout Session 1

Reflect on your tenure in the teaching profession. Come up with three scenarios in which you felt a school policy – local, state, or federal - interceded in your ability to increase student learning. What advice could you have offered decision makers that would have made the transition into the new policy more seamless in its implementation?

### Presentation 2 – Introduction to the VIVA Project

Iowa – Secondary Teacher Leaders

July 27, 2015



My research has shown the need for TIME for Iowa teacher leaders to CONNECT (engage in discussion with each other) and EMBRACE leadership (beyond academics) to get to the heart of leading in order to better gain trust and support colleagues

**T R U S T**

“...the very top people of truly great organizations are servant leaders” ~ Stephen Covey

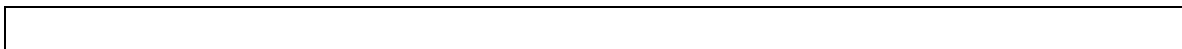
**What would servant leadership look like as a secondary teacher leader?**

- listening without judgment
- being authentic, open and accountable
- sharing power
- building community and showing appreciation
- developing people

*Ask* –WHAT DO YOU THINK?

*Act* –ACTUALLY CARE ABOUT THEM!

Breakout Session 2



Formulate a group response to Harbaugh's lecture. Discuss an area in which you can use his tips to empower yourself as a teacher.

**Read article**

*A review of servant leadership attributes:  
Developing a practical model*

!

?

Day 2

8:00 a.m. – 8:55 a.m.

Breakfast / Meet and Greet

9:00 a.m. – 10:15 a.m.	Presentation 3 – Study Findings
10:20 a.m. – 11:20 a.m.	Breakout Session 3
11:25 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.	Brown Bag Lunch
12:35 p.m. – 1:30 p.m.	Presentation 4 – Action Based Research – How to Understand if Your Effective
1:35 p.m. – 2:25 p.m.	Breakout Session 4
2:30 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.	Final Discussion

## Presentation 3 – Study Findings

### Theme 1 – Program Format

- On-line discussions
  - “The format was good in that we were able to participate on our own time. Teachers are so busy these days, for the program to be a live interaction would not work. The on-line dialogue was good.”
  - “It is just a matter of finding the time to get into the VIVA atmosphere. I had to make an effort to do this on my own time. Teachers do not have much time during the day. But once I became engaged, I found the on-line conversations useful and interesting.”

---

### Theme 2 – Teacher's Role in Policy Development

- “I think the teachers' voice is critical to the people who are entrusted to make educational policy. I believe it is a struggle to find that balance between policy makers doing their job, yet doing so by with using the information provided to them by teachers. If policy makers do not utilize teacher's experiences, then they are operating on limited information.”
  - “Teachers voices need be there for sure, but my concern would be that it would be allowed to become another duty placed on the teacher. The input of the teacher should be allowed to assist in making policy decisions, but we should not have to be responsible for writing policy. But I agree that more collaboration is needed.”
-

### Theme 3 – Improved Communication

- “I would improve the communication from the very beginning of the initiative. I need to be involved right away. I felt like I was not informed of the details of the program until I was already involved. Maybe some literature or something giving us more detail up front.”
  - “I enjoyed reading other’s responses to my comments I had made, but I was never really sure of the security of my comments. There were times I wanted to say more, but was not sure if my name was actually being attached to my comments. I would recommend that VIVA consent with everyone regarding their privacy prior to the discussion boards being opened.”
- 

### Theme 4 – Hearing the Teacher’s Voice

- “Typically, we are thrown into a new program without any knowledge of the program or why we are even being asked to participate. In many cases, it is a bad product. If the decision makers would have allowed our voice to be heard at an earlier stage of the project development, we could have informed them of some of the problems. In the end, everyone just gets frustrated. This can be prevented and I believe that VIVA gets this.”
  - “I am a veteran teacher, so when new policy begins to work its way into our school, I try to immediately find the impact it will have on student learning. Not all policy and procedures are beneficial for the students. No one really knows this other than teachers.”
- 

### Theme 5 – Moving Forward with VIVA Framework

- “In the past, I was intimidated to express my thoughts on certain things. My role was not to offer advice on school policy or school change. Instead, I followed the rules and taught. VIVA allowed me to see that I am more than just a teacher. My experiences can lead to things getting better.”
  - “Communication with administration is the key. If they will listen to the teachers’ voice, then good things can happen. I have had frustrations in the past with my opinions not being considered. VIVA has forced a shift in the area of teacher empowerment.”
- 

## Breakout Session 3

Discuss the study’s findings and determine three ways in which you believe the VIVA Project could impact your school environment. Also, discuss three challenges that you feel the VIVA Project would pose within your school environment.



## Presentation 4 – Action Based Research

### Action Research

- 
- Purpose is for practitioners to investigate and improve their practices.
  - Look systematically at ways to deal with issues you are close to, such as instructional practices, social issues of schooling, supervision of staff, etc....
  - No sampling, work with individuals around whom their everyday practices evolve.
  - Truth in context

### Action Research



### Action Research



### Characteristics of Action Research

- Purpose is for practitioners to investigate and improve their practices.
- Look systematically at ways to deal with issues you are close to, such as instructional practices, social issues of schooling, supervision of staff, etc....
- No sampling, work with individuals around whom their everyday practices evolve.
- Truth in context
- Can be quantitative or qualitative

### Example of Action Research Projects

- Administrator is interested in decreasing student absenteeism
- Administrator wants to investigate incidents of school vandalism
- High school principal wants to improve the morale of her faculty
- Biology teacher wants to know if discussions are more effective than lectures in motivating students to learn biology concepts
- Elementary teacher wants to investigate the usefulness of cooperative learning environments

### Breakout Session 4

Action Research is a form of research that should result in practical and immediate results within a particular setting. All teachers and school personnel collect and analyze data on a regular basis, yet are often unaware that they are doing it. Think of a way you could integrate an action research plan that would enable you to collect data to assist in the continued implementation of the VIVA Project.

### Day 3

8:00 a.m. – 8:30 a.m.	Breakfast / Meet and Greet
8:35 a.m. – 8:55 a.m.	Ice Breaker
9:00 a.m. – 10:15 a.m.	Presentation 5

10:20 a.m. – 11:20 a.m.	Breakout Session 5
11:25 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.	Brown Bag Lunch
12:35 p.m. – 1:30 p.m.	Final Group Discussion

## Appendix B: Introductory Letter

Greetings:

My name is Tammy Wawro and I am a doctoral candidate at Walden University. I am examining teachers' perceptions regarding the impact the VIVA has had on their views regarding their roles as leaders within the school environment. Because you are a certified teacher who was involved with the VIVA initiative, I am inviting you to participate in this research study.

Personal interviews will be the means of my data collection. There is no compensation for taking part in an interview session, nor is there any known risk. In order to ensure that all information will remain confidential, your name will not be used in any reporting of data. Copies of the project will be provided to my Walden University doctoral committee and to Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB).

If you agree to participate in this project, please contact me as soon as possible so that we can schedule an interview time and location at your convenience. You will need to provide consent to participate in the research study. Participation is strictly voluntary. You may refuse to participate at any time, and your information and responses will not be included my report.

If you have any questions regarding this research study, please contact me by email: [tammy.wawro@waldenu.edu](mailto:tammy.wawro@waldenu.edu) or by phone at

Sincerely,

Tammy Wawro  
NBPTS, Middle Childhood Generalist

### Appendix C: Consent Form

The researcher is inviting all teachers who participated in the VIVA project to participate. The provided information is part of a process called “informed consent” to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part. This study is conducted by a researcher named Tammy Wawro, who is a doctoral candidate at Walden University. You may already know the researcher as the president of Iowa’s teacher education union.

#### **Background Information:**

The increased attention on school and teacher accountability has negatively impacted the retention rate within the profession. A 2006 study found that teacher attrition follows a U-shaped pattern with a high probability of teachers leaving within the first few years and then another large population leaving at retirement age, indicating that if teachers can make it through the first five years, the probability of them staying through retirement greatly increases (Liu, 2006). Behrent (2009) found that the constraints placed on teachers from government based initiatives are a major cause for their dissent from the profession. In addition to these constrictions teachers face, the increased pressure for their students to perform has lead to increased attrition from the profession (Behrent, 2009). Furthermore, Rubin (2011) found that many teachers fear the blame for poor student performance will be attributed to their work. This has led many teachers to feel insecure and unappreciated regarding their performance in the classroom (Rubin, 2011).

This study is focused on teacher attrition within a designated school district in the state of Iowa. In 2012, the Iowa State Education Association implemented a program

centered on increasing teacher involvement, empowerment, and leadership so as to address the low retention of its teaching population. The VIVA project was implemented with the goal of providing teachers a forum in which to express their views regarding their profession and the policies which are being enforced onto them. It offers facilitation of the classroom voice so as to bring their best ideas and concerns directly to the policy makers. The purpose of this study is to determine the impact the VIVA program had on teachers' perceptions of their role within the education system; specifically, in the areas of morale, leadership, and ownership to school policy.

**Procedures:**

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to:

- Consent to the study
- Provide demographic information
- Participate in personal interview

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

This study is voluntary. Everyone will respect your decision of whether or not you choose to be in the study. No one at ISEA will treat you differently if you decide not to participate in the study. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind later. You may stop at any time. The procedure involves meeting the researcher for a brief personal interview that will take approximately 30-45 minutes. Your responses will be confidential and no collection of identifying information such as your name or email address will occur. Your participation is completely voluntary and your decision to

participate, or to decline to participate, will not impact or affect your current or future employment status or relationship with the ISEA.

**Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:**

Participating in this study involves minor risks that can be encountered in daily life, such as: fatigue of participating in personal interview and recalling possible uncomfortable instances. Being in this study would not pose risk to your safety or wellbeing. Potential benefits of this study have not been identified nor are there any adverse effects for not completing the survey. Subjects may experience an indirect benefit of self-satisfaction knowing that by participating in the study, they are assisting in the possible development of results, which might lead to positive changes within the local school district.

**Payment:**

Subjects will not receive any financial rewards for completing the rating tools.

**Privacy:**

Any information you provide will be kept confidential. The researcher will not use your personal information for any purposes outside of this research project. Also, the researcher will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in the study reports. All data will be stored in a password protected electronic format. To help protect your confidentiality, the surveys will not contain information that will personally identify you. The results of this study will be used for scholarly purposes only.

**Contacts and Questions:**

You may ask any questions prior to the by contacting the researcher via cell phone 515-681-5931 or email [tammy.wawro@waldenu.edu](mailto:tammy.wawro@waldenu.edu). If you want to talk privately

about your rights as a participant, you can call Dr. Leilani Endicott. She is the Walden University representative who can discuss this with you. Her phone number is 612-312-1210. Walden University's approval number for this study is 09-16-14-0275701 and it expires on September 15, 2015.

**Statement of Consent:**

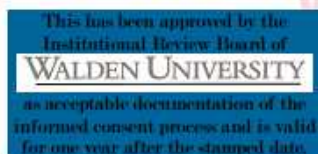
I have read the above information and I feel I understand the study well enough to make a decision about my involvement.

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Signature of participant

---

date



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## Appendix D: Interview Guide

**Description of Sample of Population:**

1. What grade level and area are you currently teaching?  
     PrK-5                      6-12  
  
     Regular Classroom          Special Education      Other \_\_\_\_\_
2. How had you been working as a teacher when you participated in the VIVA project?  
     0-3 years                      4-10years                      10-20 years                      >20
3. What is your level of understanding of the purposes of the VIVA Project?  
     minimal                      somewhat                      extensive
4. What is your level of satisfaction with the VIVA project?
  - i) not satisfied
    - (1) What parts of this project did not work for you?
    - (2) What if any improvements could make it work?
    - (3) Do you think this should be continued or repeated?
  - ii) somewhat satisfied
    - (1) What parts of this project did not work for you?
    - (2) What improvements could make it better?
    - (3) What parts of this project were beneficial?
    - (4) Do you think this should be continued or repeated?
  - iii) very satisfied
    - (1) What specifically was helpful to you?
    - (2) Do you think this should be continued or repeated?

**Purpose of VIVA:**

5. From teachers' perspectives, what do you think is the purpose of the VIVA Project?
6. Do you think teachers should be responsible for *developing* educational policy in your (school, district, state)? Please explain.
7. Do you think teachers should be responsible for *piloting* education policy in your school, district, or state? Please explain.

8. Do you think your experiences as a teacher can *impact* policy development and/or piloting in your school, district, or state? Please explain.

**Educational Reform**

9. What challenge(s) do you face when there is a change in your school environment?

10. When a new policy is put in place and implemented in your school, without your input, how and in what ways do you adapt to the new situation?

11. What are your recommendations for the inclusion of teachers' perspectives into policy development and implementation?