

2016

# Perceptions of Highly Recognized Teachers about Approaches to Teacher Leadership

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*Walden University*

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Maryann Woods-Murphy

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Walden University  
2015

Abstract

Perceptions of Highly Recognized Teachers about Approaches to Teacher Leadership

by

Maryann Woods-Murphy

MA, Montclair State University, 1987

BA, Montclair State University, 1978

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

November 2015

## Abstract

State and regionally recognized New Jersey teachers struggle to use their professional knowledge in their schools and districts in roles other than teaching. The purpose of this study was to discover the perceptions of highly recognized New Jersey teachers who were interested in taking on additional roles and responsibilities in schools. Guided by Sergiovanni's concept of school communities, DuFour's vision of school culture, and Lieberman's professional development practices, this study examined the connection among these 3 concepts and explored approaches to the creation of trusting communities of teachers who work collaboratively to improve schools. The research questions focused on teacher leaders' perceptions of teacher leadership roles and the skills, knowledge, and dispositions they most valued. The participants were 12 state teachers of the year in New Jersey with 3 or more years of teaching experience. A case study design was used to capture the insights of participants through interviews, online discussions, and a focus group. Emergent themes were identified from the data through open coding, and findings were developed and validated. The key results were that teacher leaders have a desire to engage with school leaders to find ways to share their knowledge and skills with colleagues, and that they value big-picture thinking, fearlessness, and a clear commitment to their students. A project of customized content was designed to guide interested classroom teachers who aspire to be teacher leaders in order to develop the awareness and capacity to take on new roles in schools. Implications are that teachers will be empowered to become more deeply involved in school leadership and that school administrators will foster a culture that supports emerging teacher leaders.

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## Dedication

I would like to dedicate this doctoral study to my whole family, especially to my husband, Joseph Murphy, whose patience and support have been unyielding in this journey. My parents, Henry and Frances Woods, encouraged me to think, dream, and create from the earliest days of my life, and to them I am eternally grateful. Finally, I dedicate this work to all of the teachers with a will to serve their students as teacher leaders. May they proceed on a path of continual improvement, undaunted by politics and confident in their own ability to contribute to our understanding of this noble profession.

## Acknowledgments

Special thanks go to my chair, Dr. Timothy Lafferty, who has guided me at every stage in this process from my first wobbly first steps as a scholar to the stride of a more confident researcher. I want to further acknowledge the contributions of my second committee member, Dr. Tabitha Otieno and of my URR, Dr. Paul Englesberg, along with the Dean of The Richard Riley School of Education at Walden University, Dr. Kate Steffens. I am extraordinarily grateful for having the opportunity to see the world through the eyes of the scholars who have toiled for centuries to add to our understanding of education today. Without the support I received at Walden, I would not have been able to add my voice to theirs.

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## Section 1: The Problem

### **Introduction**

In this study, I strived to reveal how teacher talent can best be used in New Jersey schools, both in and out of the classroom, to assist in school improvement. To do this, I focused on the experiences of highly recognized New Jersey teachers and how they used their expertise in school improvement efforts through the varying roles they played and services they provided. I assumed that teachers who are recognized as county teachers of the year (CTOYs) or state teachers of the year (STOYs) have demonstrated their abilities to both peers and school leaders and would likely be good candidates to assist in the continuous improvement of schools. Nevertheless, reports from the field (B. Jones, personal communication, June, 2011; M. Benevuti, personal communication, March, 2012; A. Rivera, personal communication, June, 2014) led me to believe that opportunities to diversify teachers' roles to best use what they have learned were limited. New Jersey participates in the National Teacher of the Year program run by the Chief State School Officers. All state program coordinators choose STOYs through a "rigorous selection process" (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2012, para 7). In the process of selecting a state teacher, the New Jersey selection committee designates 21 CTOYs who represent all of the regions of New Jersey. From this group, five to seven finalists are chosen, one of whom is selected as the state winner. To assess how well teachers' skills were being used in New Jersey, I selected 4 STOYs and 8 CTOYs for interviews in order to hear the in-depth stories of their lived experiences after their year of recognition. Through online discussion posts centered on specific topics, I offered the study's participants additional opportunities to share perceptions and experiences. Finally, by using a focus group, I

created an opportunity for participants to add additional insights and stories to the study.

The themes that surfaced from the survey, interviews, and online discussion board allowed me to capture rich descriptions that I in turn used to learn about what works and what doesn't work concerning teacher leadership in schools.

Though many highly regarded teachers are eventually offered positions related to education outside of the classroom, (L. Blue, personal communication, August 9, 2013) in this study I captured the voices of teachers about ways teachers can serve schools without leaving the classroom. Using this study's findings, I intend to assist schools and districts create plans for better use of teacher talent in schools. I also hope my findings offer teachers a view into their teaching peers' experiences. Even though the participants in this study are all New Jersey STOYs and CTOYs, a situation that limits the participant pool, these educators are a group chosen to represent thousands of similarly talented peers. It is the similarity that Teachers of the Year have with all responsible, dedicated educators, not the differences, that make this study a serious contribution to the field.

### **Definition of the Problem**

In this study, teacher leadership refers to the ways that teacher talent, expertise, and learning might be used in schools to lift up student achievement and create a supportive school culture that fosters the continuous professional learning of teachers (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Nevertheless, some teachers have wondered whether the term "teacher leadership" is an oxymoron (J. Moran, personal communication, March, 2014). Graduate programs and certificate programs abound with these two words in their titles, accompanied by a series of courses that promote collegial interactions and the development of teacher talent (Walden, 2014; Johns Hopkins, 2014; Rider College, 2014). New York

City, for instance, launched a program for the 2014-2015 school year seeking teachers who wanted to deepen their understanding of the city's instructional goals as they developed an understanding of adult learning. This program was designed with the intention of developing teachers' capacity as school leaders (Fariña, 2014). Teacher leadership is being studied, promoted and discussed, but often teachers themselves are at a loss to know how to exercise their professional lives as teacher leaders.

The problem, therefore, that prompts this study is that New Jersey teachers who are recognized at state or regional levels often struggle to use their professional knowledge in their schools and districts in roles other than teaching (Teacher Leadership Exploratory Consortium, 2012). STOYs and CTOYs are good examples of these phenomena. After receiving high professional honors, New Jersey STOYs and CTOYs report that colleagues and administrators are not sure how to appreciate or use their newly recognized skills and experiences. Colleagues often whisper unkind remarks and administrators frequently assign these teachers the most difficult classes, waving away concerns with comments like: "you should be able to handle this – you are the Teacher of the Year!" (C. Walker, personal communication, June, 2014). In some cases, teaching observations become harsher as teachers are reminded that their role in a school is still one of a subordinate, despite outside honors. Perhaps worse, when teachers ask to participate in professional organizations and events outside of school, they are advised that they are paid for student contact time and not for policy work or for representing the district to the outside world. One teacher, for example, described her role as the chairperson of a state professional standards board and her district's failure to give her the permission to attend the state-level meetings she organized (D. DellaLuna, personal communication, April 9, 2012). Eventually, she decided

to leave her teaching job in frustration to become a consultant much sooner than she would have if only the district had been more flexible and had seen her work on professional standards as part of the natural job of a teacher. Another Teacher of the Year was not permitted to remove the chairs in her class to maximize kinesthetic learning in her early elementary aged students because “every student needs a desk and a chair” (W. Forchette, personal communication, October 5, 2011). Examples such as these demonstrate that teachers with skills and interests related to direct instruction as well as to roles outside of the classroom often struggle to find a way to deploy their abilities in schools.

Throughout their year of recognition, Teachers of the Year are trained to use their teacher voice to advocate for the profession, but when they enter their schools and classrooms, they are seen as interchangeable components within the school system (Weisberg, Sexton, Mulhern, & Keeling, 2009) who are not valued for the benefits they could and would bring to the organization. Although some recognized teachers decide to pursue administrative roles, where many of their skills are a ready fit, others choose to remain as classroom teachers. Nevertheless, such teachers often yearn for additional leadership roles in addition to teaching, particularly because they have learned a great deal from their new networks about innovative practices from outside their region and they have personally observed how teachers are helping students achieve in ways that they might not have suspected before they had such opportunities. Though filled with energy, an increased expertise, and a desire to share with colleagues, many teachers find themselves in top-down structures (Dolan, 1994) that do not have a position or role for teachers who want to remain in the classroom while taking on greater responsibilities. Highly recognized teachers are “neither fish nor fowl” (Diaz, 2011) who are shocked to find unexpected obstacles in their



paths if they choose to disrupt the system by questioning the expected work that teachers do, even when such efforts would lead to system improvement and student learning.

The study focused on 12 highly recognized teachers who have been awarded the honor of State Teacher of the Year or County Teacher of the Year. The gap in practice that justifies the local need is highlighted by an emerging consensus among major educational organizations that recognizes that teachers need enhanced roles that tap into their skills, knowledge, and abilities even if they decide to remain in the classroom rather than transition to an administrative role (U.S. Department of Education, 2012; U.S. Department of Education, 2013a; Commission on Effective Teachers and Teaching, 2012; Teacher Leadership Exploratory Consortium, 2012). The relationship of this problem to the larger educational community is evident when a review of education jobs in New Jersey does not list teacher leadership positions. Education jobs advertised on NJhire, a popular job search web site, on November, 1<sup>st</sup> 2014 (NJhire, 2014) listed administrative, supervisory and teaching positions with no reference to teacher leadership positions. Furthermore, state level certificate endorsements that codify the roles that educators may play in New Jersey schools include teaching, supervisory, principal, school business administrator or superintendent certificates (New Jersey Department of Education, 2014a), but do not offer options for teacher leaders or hybrid roles for teachers. Even positions that might appear to fit a teacher leader's expertise, such as a curriculum development position, often require administrative or supervisory licensing. Although it is true that teachers frequently serve as teacher leaders in unofficial capacities, the lack of concrete job opportunities for teachers is worthy of note. In addition, the average salary for a classroom teacher in New Jersey is \$62, 583, although administrators and supervisors earn an average of \$148, 719 and

superintendents, \$176, 505 (New Jersey Department of Education, 2014c). Career advancement, with the financial and professional rewards that accompany it, creates incentives for teachers to leave classrooms at a time when teacher expertise is sorely needed (Bird, Black & Hancock, 2006).

### **Rationale**

Teacher retention and quality are important factors in serving students, yet a high percentage of teachers leave within their first 5 years. Offering teachers more paths to teacher leadership might encourage their ongoing dedication to the profession (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003), especially when one considers the reported obstacles to deploying teacher leadership faced even by teachers with a proven track record. With little access to leadership opportunities that expand the roles teachers play and the contributions they make to schools, one would understand why top teaching talent might indeed choose to leave the teaching profession. Increased interest in what some call the professionalization of the teaching profession has led to the grass-roots creation of numerous fellowships and organizations that strive to lift up teacher voices (Pennington, 2013). This includes increased attention to attracting and retaining generation Y teachers who are entering teaching and who are seeking to enter into a profession that has opportunities for career advancement (Pennington, 2013). Learning how Teachers of the Year navigate teacher leadership opportunities, hybrid teacher roles, and their frustration with human resource systems that fail to offer them the roles they crave, helped me gain me insight into ways that schools can better use their experts in ways that serve students and expand teaching as a profession.

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

The local problem in New Jersey arises from increased demands on teacher time due to new state evaluation systems, changes in data management, and instructional changes. These state mandated changes reflect the New Jersey's State Department of Education's goal of increasing student achievement by improving educator effectiveness (New Jersey Department of Education, 2014d). Although the New Jersey Department of Education reform agenda mentions increased roles for teachers, there is no indication of how such roles would be created or sustained at the school level. Although there has been some state money to help schools support changes in the state's evaluation system, only 10 districts out of a possible 613 New Jersey districts received the funds (McGuinn, 2012). On the other hand, the New Jersey Education Association (NJEA) has expressed concern about how increased accountability during a time of great change for educators has lowered teacher morale and has caused many to decide to retire or leave the profession. An NJEA survey of members found that 70% said that morale was worse than it had been in many years (Jandoli, 2013). Teachers are anxious because they have been asked to accomplish tasks related to state mandates during their 1-2 hours per day of planning time, when they are not engaged in direct student contact (McGuirk, 2014). Traditional leadership roles and compensation structures do not provide options for teachers that fall outside of typical job descriptions. Although some teachers take on informal teacher leadership roles (Jackson, Burrus, Bassett, & Roberts, 2010), they are not always recognized or compensated for their efforts (Curtis, 2013) and their leadership work may even appear to disrupt existing power structures (O'Connor, 2013). Nevertheless, when teachers are able to take on enhanced roles and responsibilities, it has the potential to greatly benefit schools (York-Barr & Duke,

2004), especially when teacher leaders receive support from principals who use such educator effort to optimize school improvement (Jackson et al., 2010).

The notion of the teacher as leader has extended into the policy world through the creation of many fellowships and teacher voice organizations (Pennington, 2013). In 2011-2012, I spent a year in Washington, D.C. working as a Washington Teaching Ambassador Fellow (TAF). Each year, the Office of the Secretary conducts a national application process to select 3-5 teachers to serve in an advisory capacity to the U.S. Secretary of Education as well as to help classroom teachers understand the policy work that affects them. Each TAF has a particular area of focus, and my focus area was national and international teacher policy and labor-management collaboration. I formed part of a team that wrote a White House blueprint on the transformation of the teaching profession called R.E.S.P.E.C.T.. “R.E.S.P.E.C.T.” is an acronym that means “Recognizing Educational Success, Professional Excellence, and Collaborative Teaching” (U.S. Department of Education, 2013a). Once a draft of the R.E.S.P.E.C.T. narrative had been written in the fall of 2011, TAFs travelled the country from 2011-2013 to conduct focus groups with teachers to make sure that the policy makers in Washington were aligning their vision to the realities of the classroom.

Our conversations with teachers were lively and often emotional. The sessions took place in classrooms and faculty rooms, community centers and union offices where teachers entered fresh from the classroom. During a two-year period, my colleagues and I met with almost 6,000 teachers in over 360 group conversations (U.S. Department of Education, 2013b). At one such roundtable discussion for teachers held in a Virginia Beach community health center, one teacher’s comments were reflective of those offered by

colleagues across the nation: “I can’t believe someone is asking me for my opinion about my own profession” (M. Sanchez, personal communication, June, 2012). The TAFs learned that these practicing teachers had many dreams, interesting solutions, and a desire to improve education for children, but they reported frustration with school systems that they frequently characterized as places with limited professional opportunities. “This is my last year,” said one Washington, D.C. teacher, “I’m done. I cannot take it anymore!” (S. Higgins, personal communication, November 11, 2011) This dedicated educator had tried numerous times to contribute more than her job required, but she was weary from dealing with collegial obstacles, a lack of administrative support, and an ever-waning supply of energy with which to do, what she called, “battle.” Nevertheless, teachers were excited about having the opportunity to lead the transformation of their own profession (DeBose, Jellinek, Mullenholz, Walker, & Woods-Murphy, 2012) even though they could hardly believe that such a thing would ever be possible. Teachers reported that they remained in the profession, despite challenges, to support their students. “I am working with incarcerated youth,” said a teacher in a focus group organized by the White House Initiative for Hispanics, “I want them to be remembered by policy makers and I want my school to help me help my kids succeed. I can see things that other people do not.” (M. Gonzalez, personal communication, May, 2012) Again and again, teachers bucked systems that did not seem to understand that the information and experiences these teachers gathered from the classroom and from their direct contact with students, was valuable.

The stories of untapped talent shared in R.E.S.P.E.C.T. focus groups were also confirmed by reports from STOYs (U.S. Department of Education, 2013b), teachers recognized by the National Education Foundation Global Fellows (NEA Foundation,

2012), and networks of World Language Teachers of the Year. Within all of these networks, teachers, who were highly praised by their professional organizations as the most exemplary practitioners in their field, shared stories of their underutilization in schools. Even though they all confirmed that they were indeed working very hard, the kind of work that they were asked to perform did not always tap their talents effectively. “I can help solve problems,” said one New Jersey teacher, “if only my school would let me” (M. Benevuti, personal communication, May, 2014).

This study is important because it indicates that schools and districts can capture the perceptions and voices of practitioners to provide information about how systems might better use teachers’ capacity to improve schools. Using this study’s findings regarding environments that support good use of teacher talent, districts will be better able to retain and support teachers who crave increased leadership opportunities. A principal in Colorado who participated in a teacher residency program said: “My school is a laboratory for learning and every teacher who learns here and grows should be a credit to the support we’ve given them” (T. Klien, personal communication, 2012). Compare that to the numerous reports of “knucklehead principals” (R. Hess, personal communication, 2014) who are more focused on procedures than achievement and who are not able to see that their jobs would be easier if they could use the talent in the building more effectively. This study indicated the conditions in New Jersey schools that are most ripe for teacher leadership as well as those that halt teachers’ best efforts. Though teachers report on many satisfying relationships with principals and school leaders, many are blocked by limits on their role imposed from the ranks above.

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

In order to recognize the collective intelligence of their teachers, school districts must develop “organizational competence” (Sergiovanni, 2004, p. 18). Schools contain “a sleeping giant of teacher leadership” which can be used to change the roles and reach of teachers in schools (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001, p. 2), but to tap this rich reservoir of human potential, one must examine the attitudes, norms and values that make up schools’ “cultural DNA” (Schein, 2004, p. 21). Furthermore, at a time of increased accountability and high expectations for all students in public schools, teacher leadership can provide critical human resources to meet the demands and improve the systems that serve students (Curtis, 2013). But despite a clear need to use the best and the brightest educators to improve schools, one must consider the particular characteristics of any given school community; a school’s climate and culture may create a system within which teacher leadership fails or thrives.

DuFour (2004) envisioned schools as be places where all professionals are driven to work together on improving student learning, to collectively understand the obstacles students encounter, and to jointly develop metrics that assess such learning (DuFour, 2004). DuFour observed that teachers must coordinate their strategies to ensure that all students are learning. If the metrics used to evaluate instructional success are not sufficiently aligned, for example, schools run the risk of keeping the bar too low for struggling students or failing to effectively focus on student learning (DuFour, 2004). Lieberman (2010) concurred with DuFour’s emphasis on the collective professional work of educators as she encouraged schools to recognize that teaching is work that is public and that the artifacts and reflections that make up teaching must be part of a professional and social setting.

Lieberman (2010) contrasted the professional experience of U.S. teachers, for example, who spend 3.5 hours per week prepping their lessons, to teachers in Japan, Singapore and South Korea, who teach only 35% of their work day, with the rest of their time devoted to collegial interactions and professional development that improve student learning (Lieberman & Pointer-Mace, 2009). Lieberman and Pointer-Mace (2009) further suggested the value of closely examining the social aspect of teachers' work in what she calls "communities of practice." In such communities, teachers make a shift from thinking of themselves as individuals to seeing themselves as part of a group, as members of a community within which they are responsible for their own professional learning as well as that of their colleagues (Lieberman & Pointer-Mace, 2009). As an example of how such teacher leadership can improve student learning, Lieberman and Pointer-Mace (2009) reflected on the professional journey of Yvonne Divans-Hutchinson, a Los Angeles teacher who participated in the National Writing Project (NWP). Divans-Hutchinson's teacher leadership is manifest in a website where she shared teaching videos, strategies, reflections and planning with colleagues. When this educator engaged with colleagues, she had deep professional conversations that often resulted in her colleagues' willingness to share their own work and efforts (Lieberman & Miller, 2004). If teachers did not feel like respected and trusted members of a professional learning community, it is doubtful that they would risk sharing work, reflections and strategies with their peers.

Some schools, however, have extreme cultures of isolation where teachers work so independently that they seem to be more like assembly-line workers in factories than professionals in educational communities. In such a model, principals are often more like managers than facilitators of professional growth and learning, and teachers themselves are



seen as isolated and unthinking cogs managed by a thinking leader. As cogs, the information they receive about school issues does not allow them to serve as reflective partners who collaborate to solve school problems (Fulton, Yoon, & Lee, 2005). Teachers in schools that run according to a factory model often do not have the chance to observe colleagues, comment on their work, or share their own struggles and vulnerabilities so that they might continually improve. While it is true that teachers in every context and school culture may receive professional development opportunities, such professional learning may seem unrelated to the issues they face every day in the classroom and will therefore be seen as having little use (Lieberman & Pointer-Mace, 2009). It is vital, therefore, to understand teacher leadership within the contexts and cultures where teachers work. This study sheds light on what sorts of communities are able to provide a rich environment for the growth of teacher leadership and which sorts of professional contexts may not prove conducive to the development of teacher leadership.

I found evidence that the problem existed in schools in resources like the Gates Foundation large-scale study identifying great teaching (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2010), and the National Education Association's Commission on Effective Teaching. The NEA study was composed of exemplary classroom teachers from across the nation who made recommendations to initiate major changes in the teaching profession including the creation of a diversity of teacher roles that fit school needs (Commission on Effective Teachers and Teaching, 2012). Finally, I gathered field data for this study from participant interviews, a six-week online discussion board and a focus group, drawn from teachers who have been awarded the distinction of NJSTOYs and NJCTOYs.

## Definitions

*Teacher Leadership:* Teacher leadership describes a professional path for exemplary teachers to use their expertise both in and out of the classroom in a variety of roles that serve students, colleagues, schools, and communities (York-Barr & Duke, 2004).

*Culture:* In this study, “culture” refers to a constellation of variables that affect student success, teacher work and the envisioning and achievement of shared school goals. (Wu, Hoy, & Tarter, 2013).

*Climate:* School climate refers to a wide variety of aspects of school life, encompassing both students and staff while affecting how safe and productive each feels in the environment (Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, & Pickeral, 2009).

## Significance

The significance of this study is that it will add to the growing body of knowledge of what roles teachers may take on in schools that effectively use their skills and interests to improve education for children. Although professional growth is a constant mantra in many national educational organizations (U.S. Department of Education, 2012; National Education Association Foundation, 2012; National Network of State Teachers of the Year, 2014; New Jersey Department of Education, 2014b), many teachers and the schools they work in do not have structures or budgets that accommodate expanded roles. In schools, expanded roles for teacher leaders are manifest in the work of teacher leaders who serve as curriculum coordinators, parent/community liaisons, mentors to pre-service teachers, partners to outside organizations, or, perhaps most frequently, mentors and leaders of professional learning teams (Jackson et al., 2010).

What is crucial to understand, however, is that specific roles for teacher leaders should not be rigidly determined by educational planners who work outside the school or district. Teacher leaders' work must emerge from the needs and issues that live in a specific school context. The nature of such leadership roles will necessarily vary, based on how the interests and talents of a specific teacher leader are wed to the needs of his or her school. Expanded roles for teachers, therefore, are immediately useful to students and colleagues because the teacher leaders' organizational energy will be spent on what matters most in a specific context. In one school, this could mean that the teacher leader is focused on an improved implementation of a reading or math program, while in another she will develop and nurture a vibrant partnership with a local publishing company who agrees to help fund needed resources. Teacher leadership work is therefore intrinsically beneficial to the school as it provides educational expertise where and when it is most needed. Moreover, these teacher leadership behaviors foster a collegial atmosphere because teacher leaders are not working for their own benefit, but are instead devoted to the health and welfare of the community that helps to "transform them from a collection of 'I's' into a collective 'we'" (Sergiovanni, 1994b, p. 9). When schools are thus seen as communities where the members are interdependent and nurture each another, leadership and authority emerge from the ideas they share and the work they do together (Sergiovanni, 1994b).

This research contributes to an understanding of the problem because it captured the perceptions of teachers who are working hard to discover ways to expand the roles they play in schools, including and beyond the classroom. Such teachers are invigorating systems, improving student learning, and helping schools reinvent themselves as powerful systems that support teaching and learning. This study not only helps teachers discover new

roles to serve children, but it helps schools better understand how to support and encourage teachers who seek to teach and lead.

### **Guiding/Research Questions**

Teachers of the Year at the county, state or national level are selected for this honor based on rigorous measures. I used the following questions to capture perceptions from this group of teachers about what teacher leadership is, how it manifests itself in roles, and what kind of school climate or culture is most conducive to fostering such leadership:

1. How do Teachers of the Year perceive teacher leadership?
2. What are the perceptions of recognized teacher leaders about how they use or might use their leadership skills while remaining as teachers rather than transitioning to administrators?
3. What are some roles of teacher leaders in schools?
4. What are the skills, knowledge and dispositions that teacher leaders most value?
5. What are the perceptions of recognized teacher leaders about what aspects of school culture support teacher leadership?

Research supports the notion that teachers' collective intelligence and talent has the potential to improve schools. This study captured teachers' perceptions of the roles they played in such school transformations as well as their institution's readiness to recognize and use their talents. Furthermore, teachers' perceptions revealed the attitudes, norms and values that support or fail to support teacher leadership.

## **Review of the Literature**

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework of this study was based on Sergiovanni's work on school communities that are characterized by strong interpersonal relationships, shared values, purposes and group emotional cohesion (Sergiovanni, 1994a) This was further supported by DuFour's (2004) work on school cultures, Lieberman's (2010) research on how schools can become places where teachers' skills and talents are maximized, and Killion's (2011) suggestion that schools need leaders at every level, both in the classroom and outside of it. I used this conceptual framework as a tool for research and reflection to better understand the various roles that teachers play in schools along with factors that support the development of their capacity.

Teachers bring many talents to schools, but they need a collaborative school community to use them. In collaborative school cultures, teachers work together in teams, share resources, and are willing to oversee their own professional behaviors (DuFour, 2004). Evidence suggested that teachers will continue to work in schools where they can perform their daily duties well and where they can grow in their profession over time (Johnson & Birkeland, 2003).

Teachers will work with shared purpose and loyalty when they can continue to learn in communities where their values are reflected by their professional peers. DuFour (2004) discussed how teachers' collective ability could manifest itself in professional learning communities that focus on problems of practice and are able to help teachers sustain effective work. Lieberman (2010) pointed out that teachers can and do take charge of their own learning. Examples both in the United States and internationally have demonstrated

that teachers have created learning communities that are attentive to the way adults learn, are goal oriented, and sustainable. In such learning communities, teachers are in charge of their own professional development because when they take the lead, they are able to connect such learning to their everyday classroom needs and professional interests (Lieberman, 2010). When teachers have the opportunity to grow their own professional learning, they are able to serve as talent scouts for their own colleagues to tap into the skills, information, and abilities that each possess. When teachers work in schools that support learning and collegiality, they are able to use their leadership skills (DuFour, 2004).

Schools may have an organizational culture that demonstrates a shared meaning of group members, behaviors, underlying assumptions, and even computer etiquette (Gumuseli & Eryilmaz, 2011). In schools with a high degree of collegiality, teachers share a common understanding of how to act and what is important. Teachers, in such environments, are not just recipients of best practices and research (Waldron & McLeskey, 2010), but are active participants in everyday problem solving that lifts up student achievement and values members of the team as professionals. Responsibilities for running a school and raising student achievement, therefore, may be seen as a collective responsibility where the internal expertise of teachers is tapped and collaboration is the norm rather than the exception (Killion, 2011). In schools that have created a shared culture of collegiality, teachers are active thinkers who are responsible for important work.

Many teachers exhibit what Sergiovanni (1992) calls “professional virtue” (p. 43) that is shown through a commitment to practice and an ethic of caring. When schools are envisioned as communities, teachers frame their work as service and stewardship as they

work together to create caring schools where students, teachers, and leaders thrive (Sergiovanni, 2004).

According to Gully (2013), exemplary teachers thrive in schools when their best thinking is welcome and their attempt at innovation is fostered and collectively developed with professional peers. Conversely, teachers will encounter obstacles in schools where fresh ideas are perceived as threats to the hierarchy (Dolan, 1994). However, in schools characterized by communities with common loyalties, purposes, and sentiment, teachers will succeed in finding appropriate roles and opportunities to share what they have learned (Sergiovanni, 1994a). This conceptual framework serves to define and make sense of the data that flow from the research questions.

### **Current Research Literature**

The purpose of this study was to gain insight into the experiences that highly recognized New Jersey teachers have in their efforts to remain in the classroom while taking on additional roles and responsibilities in schools. Teacher leadership refers to those teachers who are both exemplary leaders of students in their own classroom, but who also contribute to their community of teaching peers by providing professional influence, learning, and problem solving that leads to the improvement of the school community (Burgess, 2011). Teacher leadership emerges when teachers collaborate to improve student learning and their own practice (Chapman, 2009). The leadership that teachers provide can improve schools by deploying teacher talent to improve student achievement, both in the classroom and in the school as a whole. The forms that teacher leadership takes vary, depending on the school in question, but most teacher leaders contribute in some positive way to improve their schools (Natale, Bassett, Gaddis, & McKnight, 2013). Furthermore,

when teachers have opportunities to use skills to contribute to school improvement, there is improved retention and higher teacher morale (Pucella, 2014).

In exemplary schools, leadership is fostered at all levels to create enduring change that promotes student learning (Killion, 2011). Communities of teachers who teach, lead their peers, and reflect upon classroom and organizational issues are needed to create organizations where continuous learning is the norm. For this to happen, leadership at all levels may collaborate in supporting such learning. Furthermore, to create communities of active and committed teachers who work collaboratively, teacher groups often find common time for collaboration to disrupt the habit of teaching in isolation (Lujan & Day, 2010). Teachers themselves learn to distinguish between criticism and critical inquiry, thus overcoming the fear that their teaching practice will be judged as inadequate by colleagues (Learning Point Associates, 2007). By sharing their practice and exposing it to critical inquiry, teacher leaders discover new ways of purposeful collaboration that rest upon strong systems of support within the school.

School leaders who seek to engage teachers in collaborative communities of continuous improvement benefit from remembering that teachers are adult learners. Knowles (1980) identified four assumptions about adult learning: 1) the learners are self-directed, 2) learners tap into personal experiences, 3) learners apply learning to social situations, and 4) learners apply learning to daily life. Ongoing professional learning requires reflection and collaboration along with professional development plans designed for adult learners (Brodt, 2011). As adult learners, teachers may experience what Danielson (2007) called, “professional restlessness” (p. 14). Many teachers want to contribute to schools in multiple ways that extend beyond their own classroom such as creating a parent



newsletter, collaborating on assessments, or serving on a district or state team. Increased focus on the notion of teacher leadership indicates that teachers seek to apply their years of learning to issues and problems that arise in their daily professional context (Danielson, 2007).

In recent years, teacher quality has been a topic of high interest, both in and outside of the educational community. Studies of effective teaching (Gates, 2010), analyses of winning teacher behaviors (Teach Like a Champion, n.d.), and a National Education Association commission of teachers (Commission on Effective Teachers and Teaching, 2012) concur that teachers are at the center of student achievement and school improvement. However, under so much scrutiny, teachers often wonder if the work they do is properly compensated and appreciated. Alexander (2010) discussed research focusing on teacher retention that suggested that administrators should motivate teachers, speak to them as adults by valuing their thoughts, and figure out ways to allow teachers to think through and solve tasks.

Issues with ineffective teacher evaluation that treats every teacher equally without differentiating strong and weak performers (Weisberg, Sexton, Mulhern, & Keeling, 2009) highlight the need for deep reflection about what accountability means and who is in charge of it. In 2011, the United States Department of Education met with the 23 top performing countries at the International Summit on the Teaching Profession, where results of the convening revealed that teachers in high performing nations treat their teachers in a respectful, professional way and their work as teachers is highly respected and supported (Hammond, 2011). The United States was influenced by contact with other high performing nations and created a project called R.E.S.P.E.C.T., a vision for the teaching

profession that includes higher pay, differentiated teacher roles, and a focus on teacher professionalism and continuous learning (U.S. Department of Education, 2013a). Such efforts arose from an emerging sense that the roles that teachers play in schools and the way these roles are evaluated and supported warrants rethinking. Nevertheless, a critical perspective of a focus on teacher accountability and performance suggested that applying a business model to evaluate and measure the practices in schools was not an appropriate frame for education (Tuck, 2013). The wide array of diverse perspectives on teaching, accountability, and of the roles that teachers play, support the need for this study.

Interest in teacher leadership exists parallel to disagreement about how human resources should be handled in schools. Ohio, for example, instituted a teacher leader endorsement that would help teachers facilitate peers as adult learners, lead change, and manage conflict. The state has also learned that it is important to foster flexibility in roles “to maximize teacher leaders in every building” (Hohenbrink, Stauffer, Zigler, & Uhlenhake, 2011, p. 42). Sergiovanni’s notion that professional virtue is demonstrated by a commitment to the school community and an ethic of caring (Sergiovanni, 1996) may indeed manifest itself in current examples of teacher leadership. Schools frequently have tremendous pressure to make significant learning strides for students that a solitary school leader may struggle to accomplish alone (Hohenbrink et al., 2011).

When schools are envisioned as communities, however, teachers collaborate to serve students (Sergiovanni, 2004). Lieberman’s (2010) affirmation of the potential of teachers as researchers and thinkers and DuFour’s (2004) insight about how to optimize professional collaboration serve to support emerging teacher leadership in schools. In this

study, therefore, I examined the experiences of highly recognized New Jersey teachers to shed light on their perceptions of emerging teacher leadership as it lives in schools.

### **Teacher Leaders**

Teacher leaders take on many diverse roles and responsibilities in schools and districts. Specific roles, however, emanate from a broader leadership capacity that fits into and forges a school's direction in dynamic relationship to its needs and dreams. Significant reforms in schools need teachers who continually improve professional expertise in the context of a "whole system" that supports the development of their capacity (Fullan, 2007, p. 18). Teachers must see themselves as learners and must have the opportunity to continue learning from each other. Schools must be, therefore, places where a "professional culture of intellectual inquiry" exists that allows teachers to reflect, share ideas, and improve each others' practice (Westheimer, 2008, p. 762). In New Zealand, for example, from 2002-2004, the system shifted from a norm-referenced form of assessment for high school students to a standards-based approach. To support teachers through this change, a cohort of experienced teachers were released from teaching for a year to support colleagues through professional development that was tailored to their expressed needs and supported by area universities (Taylor, Yates, Meyer, & Kinsella, 2011). Teacher leadership, in this case, was both academic and personal as teacher leaders used their expertise to collaboratively support changes the system needed by coaching their peers in the subject area and the standards.

Rather than seeing teachers as useful elements who serve as perfect pieces used to fulfill any given administrative team's vision, teacher leaders are part of creating that vision by active and deep involvement in school life. Teacher leaders take on roles as

intellectual leaders, facilitators of innovation, system redesigners, and wellness facilitators. They often build empathy in students and in peers (Larabee & Moorehead, 2010), or open the door to community partners and parents who are invited into a participatory relationship with the school. Teachers are embedded in a social context where their relationships allow expertise and resources to flow (Penuel, Riel, Krause, & Frank, 2009). Teacher leaders with strong skills and vision make a profound impact on school life and student learning because they see what is needed and they are able to gather the people, resources, and administrative support to effect purposeful change. Schools have the opportunity to distribute leadership effectively across multiple individuals without the need to limit leadership to a particular formal role or position (Hargreaves, Halász, & Pont, 2008).

### **Teacher Leaders as Thinkers and Researchers**

Teaching is a thinking profession that needs constant renewal. To improve, teachers need to engage in an internal conversation as well as have opportunities for rich conversations with others to reflect upon and assess current practice. Vetter (2012) suggested that teachers choose a teacher identity and position themselves as educators by making professional choices and reflecting upon these choices. This process is dynamic, and comes from practicing teaching behaviors, making presentations to colleagues, and taking on different positions within a school. Teachers think both independently and collaboratively to accomplish their work successfully (Lee, Sachs, & Wheeler, 2014).

Collaborative thinking, for example, may take the form of working through dilemmas that appear in a colleague's classroom, thus stimulating responses to scenarios that the teacher may not have experienced personally. In Helsinki, Finland, teachers successfully engaged in a collaborative model of reflection and inquiry that helped teachers

learn effectively from each other (Kim, Lavonen, Juuti, Holbrook, & Rannikmae, 2013). The researchers used an examination of process to ascertain how participants changed their beliefs and practices before and after a half-year in-service program on inquiry teaching. Teachers were provided with planning experience, workplace collaborations with at least two teachers in their school, theoretical workshops, and follow-up seminars during which participants had the opportunity to reflect on their lessons and on the feedback given by their students. The study's findings revealed that this process of reflection and feedback helped teachers to discover personal reasons that supported their continuation of the kind of inquiry style teaching that involved them in both independent and collaborative thinking (Kim et al., 2013).

Changing one's personal beliefs and entering into unknown spheres of learning, however, is often complicated. Schmidt (2013), speaking from the perspective of music educators asked, "What would it mean to embrace complexity as imperative for a meaningful education?" (para. 1). Schmidt suggested that thinking educators recognize learning spaces and communities as places where tension is invited and risky and passionate conversations, critical thinking and empowered discussions are the norm (Schmidt, 2013). Schools should be places, therefore, where educators manage complexity and learn to frame it by looking at it through a variety of lenses. This messy perceptual work positions the educator in the context where he or she works and, rather than focusing on solving problems, allows the thinking teacher to understand and help students understand the "meanings, models and practices that humane systems of education should offer to an increasingly demanding social experience" (Schmidt, 2013, para. 7). Clearly, educators who are capable of leading students through an increasingly ambiguous and

multifaceted domain of reflection and understanding must develop the capacity for deep thinking (Ruenzel, 2014).

The classroom, therefore, led by such thoughtful teacher leaders, is a space for thinking and for building “one’s capacity for adaptability” (Schmidt, 2013, para. 13). Gibboney saw many educational reforms, with their high focus on testing and accountability, as arising from Thorndike’s mechanistic, expert-driven theories that focused on quantifiable learning. Such views stand in sharp contrast to Dewey’s focus on democracy building through the development of learner capacity. For Thorndike, human learning was machine like, but for Dewey, a focus on human beings’ ability to grow, develop, and build capacity is paramount (Gibboney, 2006).

Diana (2011) proposed that “action research” is a viable way for research to reflect the reality that teachers live in the classroom and suggested that it can present practical solutions to authentic problems. Most importantly, action research is driven by teachers. In action research, an educator forms a statement of a problem, examines some possible causes, looks at those affected by it, and discerns how to remedy the situation or to understand it better. As more is understood about the problem, new goals and additional problems emerge from reflections that then lead to more action planning which, in turn, creates new problems and possible solutions in a cycle of continuous improvement. Action research comes alive in a classroom because it is a system of inquiry that relates directly to the lived problems and issues that teachers and administrators encounter (Diana, 2011).

Teacher leaders are reflective practitioners who lead by thinking for and with their students. They possess a propensity for reflection that leads to action. Participatory action research, one kind of action research, arose from a desire to take charge of the life path and

economic future of subordinated social groups or individuals who are dominated by powerful elements (Glassman & Erdem, 2014). Such research is nonhierarchical because everyone who participates works together in an egalitarian manner to solve problems, reflect and learn (Glassman & Erdem, 2014).

Educators, thus, who participate in and engage in action research, are increasing their awareness of a living context so that they might take meaningful action to improve it. As teachers dig deeper into research, they increase their critical awareness (Kukner, 2013). Teachers who perform action research define a problem in the classroom that they want to look more closely at and then they discover a variety of possible solutions. In an early childhood context, a group of teachers wondered, for example, why girls weren't using the outdoor playground (MacNaughton & Hughes, 2009). This question led to a critical reflection that asked the thinker to stand back from his habitual frame to question whether his threadbare way of seeing a situation was the only way. By involving colleagues as partners in this kind of reflective activity, more potential solutions are revealed and new ways of seeing a situation and solving problems arise (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Furthermore, critical reflective practice helps action researchers to examine "any social habits or customs" (MacNaughton et al., 2009, p. 99) that hinder new discoveries and improved practice. One gets used to thinking in a certain way so using strategies to rethink and challenge perceptions can produce powerful revelations and solutions. In this way, action researchers are empowered by their own and their colleagues' thinking. The "empowerment," then, comes from both the inner dialogue and outer engagement to create action.

Thinking while teaching and standing back to reflect upon one's actions requires intellectual risk-taking behaviors. Leaving the comfort zone of daily practice is not easy, however, but with practice and support, it is possible. Sometimes teacher leadership involves exactly this sort of small, local action: teachers collectively reviewing student work or challenging routine practices (Westheimer, 2008). To further understand the importance of risk-taking in the thinking teacher leader's practice, it is useful to think about student teachers who must test the waters daily with theoretical knowledge that has not withstood the test of seasoned practice. Every single instructional strategy, for teaching candidates is a risk whose effectiveness will be supported or will fail to be supported by how well the intervention achieves its goal with real students (Commission on Effective Teachers and Teaching, 2012).

Ardley (2009) studied how video mediated conferencing between cooperating teachers and their student teachers opened up a world of collaboration and support. Veteran educators were the cooperating teachers in the study and at first, speaking online to pre-service teachers was an obstacle for some, especially because the teachers were so used to their isolated practice. The researchers discovered that risk taking was an important quality for participating in the video conferencing modality. Teachers who are asked to enter into the unknown territory of new technologies benefit from peer support and targeted professional learning (Orlando, 2014).

Some educators find the support they need from their own students, a practice which underlines the nonhierarchical nature of action research in which all participants are partners who learn from each other in a dynamic context. Students, in such a scenario, are



both witnessing and helping teachers open themselves up to new learning as they build their own capacity for learning and risk taking (Kane & Chimwayange, 2014).

### **Teacher Leaders as Collegial Network Leaders**

Lieberman (2010) and Jones (2014) suggested that thinking and working with colleagues increases teacher capacity, but some teachers find themselves alone, with no access to collegial support. Nevertheless, many teachers overcome the challenge of teaching in isolation by connecting to networks of like-minded peers, who work, both in their own school and across great distances (Holmes, 2013). Hur & Brush (2009) studied the participation of teachers in 3 online communities by analyzing their postings, profiles and email interviews. Teachers may benefit from participating in professional learning communities to share emotions while connecting to other educators in order to overcome teacher isolation (Du, 2007). The online environment allowed teachers to seek help, share challenges and gain support. Professional learning takes root in an atmosphere where it is safe to be vulnerable, make mistakes and seek the sort of support that leads to growth (Sergiovanni, 2005). In addition, collegial interactions and connections may extend and enhance deep professional learning (Penuel, Sun, Frank & Gallagher, 2012).

The 21<sup>st</sup> Century has, therefore, created one answer to the frustrating limitations of working alone in a field where thinking together enhances practice. Communities of practice have emerged around subject areas and hot topics that instantly allow teachers to connect to peers, expertise, presentations and information from original sources (Pennington, 2013). This phenomenon even allows teachers who want to reach out to global peers to do so via virtual conferences, webinars and discussion threads led by thoughtful colleagues (Jaffe-Walter, 2008).

In one online cross-cultural collaborative learning project, between undergraduate students in the United States and China, students communicated openly with each other, but teachers also shared their insights about student learning, evaluations and products (Chen, Caropreso, Hsu & Yang, 2012).

Whether the networking is national or international, the notion of “teacher voice” seems to have emerged along with increased opportunities to speak, share and weigh in on complex educational matters, without checking in for permission with traditional school supervisors. Dodor & Hausafus (2014) studied the online asynchronous participation of Family and Consumer Science (FCS) teachers on professional bulletin boards. Because FCS teachers are often the only one in their department in a school, they are at high risk for professional isolation. The authors found that when teachers were given access to FCS electronic bulletin boards, they asked reflective questions, shared professional expertise and voiced concerns in a way that allowed them to be more open than they might have done in a face-to-face environment. The online networking experience was professional, collaborative and social.

Without access to these online communities, teachers in brick and mortar institutions that may not encourage cyber connectivity for professional growth in teachers, have few opportunities to work outside the confines of their classroom (Sindberg, 2014). Isolated teachers often close the door and do the best they can to singlehandedly lift up achievement for the students on their roster. Some have a few trusted colleagues with whom they plan lessons or discuss student concerns, but in many schools, teachers do not have sufficient time or an adequate context to grow or learn professionally from their colleagues. Professional development (PD) experts are frequently brought into schools to

instruct teachers on the latest pedagogy or to help them align with current standards, but teachers-as-learners do not have the time or space they need to process this new learning and use it in the classroom as they might. Stewart (2014) suggested that current best practice in professional learning must shift from professional presentations where teachers are disengaged to active professional learning with engaged peers that directly emanates from the kinds of situations, issues and problems that teachers encounter.

Teachers, hungry for such professional learning opportunities, where they can learn and connect, have forged their own alliances and partnerships around the areas of professional growth that most matter to them. Pennington (2013) discussed the landscape of the new organizations that capture teacher voice and leadership. During the last 5 years, many fellowships and organizations have been established to redesign the roles that teachers play in schools and to activate their voice. Topics that such groups consider range from policy to practice, but all support a vision of informed and empowered educators leading the teaching profession. Pennington noted that such organizations have several common characteristics including development according to a grassroots model, the recognition that teacher voice is diverse, a desire to professionalize teaching, the use of technology as a driver and a link and the recognition of teachers unions' history and role. Furthermore, these groups all receive outside funding and have policy interests that are unique (Pennington, 2013). Teacher voice organizations include groups like Teach Plus, Educators for Excellence, VIVA Teachers, Center for Teaching Quality, National Network of State Teachers of the Year along with Fellowships like America Achieves, Hope Street National Teacher Fellowship and the U.S. Department of Education Teaching Ambassador Fellowship. Teacher voice organizations and fellowships galvanize teachers around the

most important issues in education, but it is important to remember that it is the teacher members of these groups who decide what they believe about key issues and what course of action might be taken to contribute to the national or local dialogue (Rizzolo & Behrstock-Sherratt, 2015). Teachers who envision themselves as leaders expect to participate in decision-making process (Natale et.al., 2013). The Common Core State Standards, the distribution of effective teachers, educational technology and 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning, federal policy initiatives, teacher evaluation, career ladders and professional development are examples of focus areas for the kinds of teacher network discussions and projects that one might find in these teacher voice organizations (Pennington, 2013).

Teachers living in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, therefore, must break down the physical barriers of their classroom walls to seek out expertise, collegiality and fresh ideas (Akorede, 2014). In this way, teachers network to think and plan with colleagues about education's messiest problems. As 21<sup>st</sup> Century learners, teachers must develop the capacity to cope with ambiguous problems that take time to reflect upon, analyze and learn to propose feasible solutions (Kelley, 2014). Technology, a powerful tool for collaborative thinking offers teachers around-the-clock access to each other's best solutions and support. Such connectivity may result in keeping novice teachers in the profession. Schlichte, Yssel & Merbler (2005) studied first-year special education teachers and found that loneliness and poor relationships had a significant impact on attrition whereas strong teams with positive relationships encouraged retention. The authors further suggested that teachers should bring what they learned about their own need for social connections to their classroom by supporting strong communications and network building among their students. Pre-service educators, who learn to connect virtually while still in school, will be the perfect candidates

for teacher leaders who may serve as collegial network leaders in schools (Schlichte et al., 2005).

In addition to collaborating on issues related to the curriculum, some teachers provide online commentary on governmental grants and initiatives that affect education. Social media platforms allow teachers to interact and opine in a way that is unprecedented. Teachers now have the opportunity to think with fellow educators, who have diverse sources of information and fresh insight, in such a way that the dialogue constructs new, shared and deeper understandings of current issues and directions in education. Teacher voice is not monolithic and it is important to include all of the many voices and opinions that make up the teaching profession. As an indication of teachers' will to engage in policy, Rizzolo and Behrstock-Sherratt (2015) highlighted the sudden growth in an organization named "The Badass Teachers Association," with 20,000 members on Facebook, an online social networking site. The meteoric surge in membership in both formal and informal teacher voice organizations and fellowships seems to indicate the teachers seek to participate in collegial networks that stress increased teacher voice, information sharing and an open discussion of new roles for teachers.

In this shifting landscape, teachers unions, such as the National Education Association (NEA) and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), the traditional collective voice for their teacher members, are working hard to expand their focus, beyond the traditional bread and butter issues of salary and benefits, to elements of teaching and learning. The NEA, for example, created a site called "C.C. Better Lesson" where lessons are designed and shared by master teachers from every grade level in English Language Arts, Literacy and Math (National Education Association, 2014). Such online engagement

and sharing opens the doors of classrooms across the United States to allow teachers everywhere to access the work of master teaching colleagues (Busser & Long, 2014). The AFT launched a site named “Share my lesson,” a resource, “by teachers, for teachers” (American Federation of Teachers, 2012). On this site, teachers present their lessons in full detail for their colleagues’ use. Members of both the NEA and AFT can also become involved with the Teachers Union Reform Network (TURN), a network of teachers that affirms collaboration, student achievement and an expansion of the work of unions to move beyond the negotiation of contracts and pay scales to include a focus on instructional issues and the teaching profession (Teacher Union Reform Network, n.d.). The swell of teacher voice has been rising as new technologies create opportunities for teachers to share what they know and take charge of their own professional destiny. Teachers enjoy a diverse array of options if they choose to engage with colleagues as collegial network leaders.

### **Teacher Leaders as Change Agents**

Teachers are transformational leaders in their classrooms when they change the very nature of the way their students learn. Transformational leadership makes followers into leaders who are motivated to accomplish a great deal. Bolkan, Goodboy and Griffin (2011) applied this notion to college teaching to examine how teachers could create the kinds of classroom environments where students would be intellectually stimulated and emotionally supported in an atmosphere of empowered learning. The authors proposed that teachers who displayed “intellectually stimulating behaviors” (p. 340) would be able to create a classroom in which students would be intrinsically motivated to think and learn. Their findings revealed that students who work with such transformational teachers move

beyond surface learning that is motivated by external demands to dig deeper into work that responds to inner interests and yearnings.

When teachers show leadership in their classrooms by stirring up intellectual yearnings and modeling thinking behaviors, they are inspiring “agency” in themselves, their colleagues and their students. Bray (2011) defined “agency” as one’s ability to contribute as an individual to influence personal networks. Agency, therefore, is both personal and political because individuals work in networks that affect individuals and groups. The behaviors that surround agency frequently involve the sort of risk taking that enables individuals to open themselves up to new experiences and challenges (Bray, 2011). Teacher leadership requires agency because it involves new learning and often promotes social change. Teacher leadership values collaboration that seeks equity and justice among adults (Chapman, 2009). Furthermore, for teacher leaders to be change agents for others, they must become a change agent for themselves, creating a path of credibility that expands beyond the personal to a network of peers. Teacher leaders need to rely on their own abilities and they must be willing to cope with challenges and risks as they listen to the feedback given to improve practice (Burgess, 2012).

Teacher leaders may grapple with broader social justice issues that play out in their classrooms. In a study based at a public university, Larraby and Morehead (2010) observed that in order for teachers to become change agents who advocate for justice, they must become leaders who are action oriented, reflective and willing to speak up even when more powerful people try to mute their words. The authors suggested that educators need space and reflection to challenge their mindset around issues of sexual inequality in order to help all of their students thrive. Teachers demonstrate this type of leadership by creating

opportunities for providing safe spaces where people of many different backgrounds can get to know each other and interact (Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network, 2009). Students in a masters program in education journaled their reflections after participating in a workshop on culturally responsive teaching and LGBT issues. Findings indicated that workshop participants were sensitized to their students' use of derogatory language and were more likely to reach out to administrators to promote a social justice focus in the classroom (Larraby et al., 2010).

There are times, however, when school administrators may not support emerging teacher leadership, despite its contributions. Eargle (2013) studied Social Studies teachers working in an isolated rural high school whose teacher leadership grew as a result of a university-school partnership that sought to improve the field experience for pre-service teachers. The project invigorated an existing program to foster teacher leadership based on a model of reflective practice, scholarship and collaboration. Reflective practice encourages teachers to stand back from their practice to think about their own teaching, ask questions and learn from colleagues (Cirocki, Tennekoon & Calvo, 2014). Mentor teachers in Eargle's study were charged with modeling the best instructional strategies for their student teachers and with embodying teacher leadership principals. As a result, participating teachers found that demonstrating best practices improved their own teaching and that teamwork among department colleagues was improved by continuous reflection. Unfortunately, however, administrative role expectations failed to change as teachers transformed their practice (Eargle, 2013).

Transforming oneself as an educator, therefore, may improve student learning and professional capacity, but it also shakes up prevailing structures that have been built with



top-down authority and traditional roles. Nervous administrators used to conventional teacher behaviors may get worried when transformational teacher leaders become change agents in their schools, but an important part of a leader's job is engaging staff and community around school goals (McTighe & Wiggins, 2007). Furthermore, in schools with a healthy school climate, teachers know that they can make a positive impact on their school (Cohen, McCabe, Michelli & Pickeral, 2009).

### **Teacher Leaders as Bridges Between Policy and Practice**

Teachers hone their craft in the classroom, but they need sound policies that support their best work with students (Natale et.al. 2013). An emerging force of teacher leaders is entering the world of policy with the mindset that teachers know what is best for students (Coggins, Peske & McGovern, 2013). Teacher leadership competencies may be described in terms of instructional leadership, association leadership and policy leadership. When teacher leaders engage in policy leadership, they develop actionable plans that may inspire the field into action via targeted communications to specific stakeholders (The Center for Teaching Quality et al., 2014).

This work involves the teacher leaders' ability to build relationships and to play a role in the creation of policy that works in practice. Teachers' professional learning is characterized by an ability to collaborate, beyond a "contrived collegiality," with a clear focus on student learning that invites challenge and debate (Owen, 2014, p.59). The policy work that emerges from dynamic professional networks recognizes the real world issues that teachers confront, both within their own practice and in the lives of the students they teach (Coggins et al., 2013).

Teacher-run schools are places where teacher collaborative expertise drives the entire school experience and results. In Milwaukee, schools that work as teacher cooperatives or nonprofits have focused on a purpose driven cooperative leadership model built around a variety of themes such as project-based learning, traditional curricula or serving gay and lesbian youth (Hawkins, 2009). Decisions are made in these schools by consensus and teachers working within them may perform administrative roles, community outreach or act as a lead teacher. The roles teachers take on vary, depending upon the needs of the school and the teachers' talents or interests. Teacher-created policy often focuses more on building school culture than on achievement as measured by conventional metrics such as standardized tests, especially because the schools are interested in helping students who have additional needs that cannot be measured by tests (Hawkins, 2009). On the other hand, an extensive network of charter schools named the Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP) began with two teachers' vision and has emerged into a powerful system that focuses on student achievement (Tuttle, Knechtel, Nichols-Barrer & Resch, 2013). In teacher-run schools, teachers bridge policy and practice because teachers' practice involves student contact and decision-making. Reimers (2014) suggested that schools shift their focus away from 20th Century business models that are hierarchical to ones that creates systems that recognize the collective knowledge of both teachers and students.

In schools run by traditional leadership structures, however, teachers have also found ways to use their educational experience to transform policy, particularly in the area of teacher evaluation. In Tennessee, for example, in 2010, 50% of a teacher's evaluation was to be based on school-wide data drawn from work in math and language arts. Memphis arts teachers, when faced with proposed metrics that they felt did not appropriately measure

the impact of their instruction, began to collaborate on what they believed would be a better evaluation plan. Davison, a Tennessee music teacher, convened with colleagues to draft a blind peer review arts portfolio assessment called “The TN Arts Growth Measure System” that they thought would truly capture their students’ progress (Duncan, 2010). The teacher leaders met with officials at the Tennessee Department of Education, along with other stakeholders and gradually created a pilot evaluation system using the teachers’ work (Davison, 2012). Instead of standing by and allowing the state to move forward with a problematic evaluation tool, these arts teachers demonstrated striking leadership by effecting policy change that would allow them to design strong student assessments that directly connected to their teaching.

World language teachers, similar to their arts colleagues, wanted fair evaluations based on their content area expertise. Unfortunately, when evaluating administrators lack knowledge of the field of instruction, they are left with little recourse than to focus on observable classroom routines. Brown and Crumpler (2013) suggested that peer feedback and evaluations should form part of multiple measures used to determine the effectiveness of world language instructors. The authors cited examples where world language teachers were able to gain insight about their teaching practice from a trusted group of expert peers. Peer coaching allows teachers to build a more collaborative and collegial school culture (Koch, 2014). The use of a model of peer evaluation, even when it was used as a formative measure assisted world language teachers to develop a fuller picture of students talents and skills as well as their areas of greatest need (Brown & Crumpler, 2013). Once again, one can see that the expertise of teacher leaders can shift policy and practice from a top-down

to a more teacher-led model. When properly ignited and supported, teacher leadership is a powerful vehicle for school transformation (Chapman, 2009).

State departments of education recognize the contributions of teachers to public policy and practice. The Massachusetts Department of Education compiled a guide of “District Determined Measures” that outline the numerous district-created measures available to teachers including portfolios such as those used in the Tennessee model, work sampling and performance assessments (The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2013). Such measures are sometimes commercial, but others are teacher-crafted evaluations, designed to authentically measure student success and diagnose areas of growth. Clearly, teacher expertise is needed to judge how well students are performing, especially when such measures are used to judge educator effectiveness. Neumann, Jones and Webb (2012) stressed that teachers are the key actors who must decide what is meant by instructional practices instead of allowing instruction to be defined by those outside of the profession. Teaching, the authors assert, is a political activity that should not be controlled by those outside of the field, or even by administrators who are most often trained as managers more than as instructional leaders. Instead, teachers must use their full array of leadership skills as well as their understanding of how schools work to inspire democratic systemic change.

Although many teachers are involved with designing excellent student programming and evaluation, the notion that the movement to include teacher voice in the decision-making process is going far too slowly prevails. The National Education Association Representative Assembly voted to ask Arne Duncan, the U.S. Secretary of Education, for his resignation, based on his policies on teacher evaluation and high-stakes

testing. The NEA urged the teachers they represent to speak out against politicians and businesses that increase their wealth and power by subjugating teachers through the use of accountability measures labeled as reform (Strauss, 2014). Teachers, not outside experts, have the expertise to lead the transformation of their own profession (DeBose et al., 2012). Furthermore, an analysis of the world's highest performing nations demonstrated that teachers should be the source of professional learning and knowledge. The social nature of this collaborative work turns the hierarchical structures of school models upside down (Lieberman, 2010). Teacher leadership begins in the classroom, where best practice emerges from shared reflections, analysis of data and careful development of tools that help students learn best. In this way, policy is not a far-flung ideal or a draconian mandate, but is a big-picture tool designed to improve teaching and learning for students.

### **Summary**

Teachers who work in communities with common values and a clear purpose are able to use their skills and talents in schools. Sergiovanni (1994a), DuFour (2004) and Lieberman (2010) provide insight into how teachers develop vibrant and collaborative school cultures. Problems of practice for such educators offer opportunities to take charge of professional learning to lift student achievement. Teacher leaders, therefore, become key actors in schools that are improved by their working expertise in a wide variety of roles.

The literature indicates that teacher leaders are thinkers and researchers who engage in deep reflection, action research and professional collaboration on current practice. Studies find that teacher leaders are also collegial network leaders who disrupt the isolation so prevalent in teaching by organizing face-to-face and virtual opportunities for collaboration and professional improvement. In addition, teacher leaders act as change

agents who empower students to engage in transformational educational experiences that challenge their perceptions about themselves and others. Finally, the literature has indicated that teacher leaders serve as bridges between policy and practice because the policy they create directly stems from the real-life issues they confront in the classroom every day. Understanding how teacher leadership manifests in schools, what its successes and challenges might be and recognizing its potential impact on student success, present rich opportunities for study.

### **Implications**

A study on perceptions of highly recognized teachers about approaches to teacher leadership might offer relevant resources for professional development and could serve as a starting point for teacher leader reflection. In addition, the project that emerged from this study could assist boards of education and school leaders who want to create a climate for teacher leadership in their districts. An examination of a portrait of teachers who are successful at teacher leadership, despite adversity, struggles with administrators or school system protocols, may accelerate the work of building teacher leadership in a school or district.

After examining the literature, it was evident that teachers serve in numerous roles in schools including teachers who serve as action researchers, professional development coordinators, collegial network leaders and strong advocates for the profession in the realm of policy. These roles and responsibilities expand on the classroom expertise that enables teacher leaders to gain the trust and respect of their colleagues. Arising from shared values and goals (Sergiovanni, 1994a), teachers create communities that work together to improve teaching and learning. Empowered communities of educators are part an emerging view of

leadership that “suggests active involvement by all individuals at all levels” (York-Barr & Duke, 2004, p. 255).

The stories of teachers who were successful at overcoming the systemic and personal obstacles to teacher leadership offers the field insight into how to increase teacher leadership, solve problems when they arise and empower practitioners with strategies that have proven useful. The lessons learned from teacher leaders highlighted in study were used as the basis for a professional learning and leadership training experience for New Jersey school districts that wish to foster teacher leadership. Key themes from the study and examples of the diverse roles that teachers take on in schools served as a point of departure for planning discussions and professional development activities. Potential participants in such professional learning could be New Jersey teachers who would like to develop their own capacity as teacher leaders, New Jersey school administrators who want to foster teacher leadership and boards of education who want to hire the kind of leaders who understand and support teacher leadership. Professional learning activities could be offered in virtual, face-to-face or hybrid formats, thus extending the reach to additional participants.

Organizations such as the New Jersey Chapter of the National Network of State Teachers of the Year, the New Jersey Education Association, the New Jersey division of the American Federation of Teachers and the Center for Teaching Quality may be willing to fund a professional learning experience that supports the development of teacher leadership by offering funding, space for discussions, and access to organizational magazines, newsletters, blogs or networks. The development of professional learning modules based on the study’s findings offers teachers the opportunity to learn about teacher

leadership by hearing about the work that teachers are doing in their schools and contexts. Furthermore, information about the kinds of support and school culture that fosters teacher leadership is useful to teachers, districts and organizations who are interested in developing teacher leadership.

### **Summary**

Exemplary teachers have expertise that can be useful to “improve the culture and instruction in schools,” but many highly recognized teachers leave the classroom because their professional growth is stunted due to a lack of opportunities to use their learning and skills (York-Barr & Duke, 2004, p. 261). Many early career teachers say that teaching lacks sufficient career pathways for them to remain in the profession (Pennington, 2013). Nevertheless, when teachers attempt to expand the contours of their roles in schools, they disrupt hierarchical patterns that expect them to focus exclusively on the job they were hired to do – teaching. Widespread interest in new roles for teachers, however, from national teachers’ unions, the U.S. Department of Education and teacher voice organizations present an opportunity to rethink teacher identity, professional possibilities and enhanced roles.

In order to recognize the collective intelligence of their teachers, school leaders must have the eyes to see the talent in front of them. Schools with enough organizational competence (Sergiovanni, 2004) to create the educational spaces for professional learning that involves teacher collaboration, innovation and deep problem solving (DuFour, 2004) can do a better job of helping teachers use their abilities to help students learn. In such schools, teachers may collaborate in communities of practice where the artifacts of their work, such as their written reflections and potential solutions to school issues and concerns,



are available to the community (Lieberman & Pointer-Mace, 2009). These open educational spaces and communities disrupt a culture of isolation that has been prevalent in teachers' work.

In order to better understand how teachers bring their best abilities to schools or fail to do so, this study will focus on 10-12 highly recognized New Jersey teachers who have been named New Jersey STOYs or CTOYs. New Jersey's 21 counties provide the opportunity to draw potential participants from urban, suburban and rural school districts that provide a rich variety of contexts for teacher leadership. Every potential participant will have gone through a public vetting process that recognizes the individual teacher as exemplary. In addition, once a teacher has been named an NJSTOY or NJCTOY, he or she is likely to receive numerous professional development opportunities as well as increased access to policy makers and legislators, all of which expand the experience and capacity of these teachers (Kajitani, 2013).

There are opportunities in schools for some teachers to take on teacher leadership roles (Chapman, 2009; Lujan & Day, 2010; Taylor, Yates, Meyer & Kinsella, 2011; Larabee & Moorehead, 2010). Some reflective practitioners lead action research and professional collaborations. Other teacher leaders energize virtual and face-to-face collegial networks driven to improve schools. Some teacher leaders may reach out to policy makers and legislators to provide these public servants with insight into public issues from the on-the-ground perspective of classroom teachers. Teacher leaders may also collaborate with peers, students and the community to create powerful social change and awareness in a way that is often inspirational.

Studies cite examples of teachers with diverse roles and teacher identities (Vetter, 2012; MacNaughton & Hughes, 2009) along with cases of others who have the will and skills to effect change, but struggle in schools that are not conducive to either adult learning or teacher leadership (Stewart, 2014; Lieberman & Miller, 2004). This study will seek the perceptions of highly recognized New Jersey teachers about approaches to teacher leadership to capture a portrait of ways teachers succeed at expanding their reach in schools as well as to understand the obstacles they may encounter along the way. In so doing, the study has the potential to shed light on the lived experience of teacher leaders as they attempt to create a professional life that matches their talent, to inform school boards who want to create a culture to support teacher leadership and to assist teacher leaders in their creation of a strategy for success.

## Section 2: The Methodology

### **Introduction**

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

Qualitative researchers try to make sense of phenomena in order to understand how people have ascribed meaning to them (Merriam, 2009). In this study, I sought to capture the perceptions of teacher leaders as they reflect and understand their world. The research design I selected for this study was a qualitative case study that collected data through interviews, responses posted on an online discussion board, and a focus group that allowed for document analysis (Creswell, 2009). A case study is a bounded system that allows for a variety of qualitative paradigms (Hatch, 2002). A case study design allowed me to deeply explore an authentic and current context in rich detail (Yin, 2009). Furthermore, case studies offer the researcher high levels of conceptual validity, the opportunity to derive new variables that emerge from the study and with fresh eyes, and the occasion to begin understanding the deep and complex relationships that exist among current phenomena (George & Bennett, 2005). Case studies focus on process more than outcomes.

Furthermore, research is a deep process of ongoing discovery that allows insight to emerge rather than seeking to confirm or disconfirm a specific variable (Merriam, 1998).

In this study of highly recognized teachers about approaches to teacher leadership, I explored a contemporary phenomenon that lived in the real-life context of schools. By using a case study design, I was able to discover emerging themes and patterns that fostered a greater understanding of teacher leadership. The primacy of the research

question from which my investigation proceeded is affirmed by Yin's (2009) research. The research design of this study was derived logically from the following research questions:

1. How do Teachers of the Year perceive teacher leadership?
2. What are the perceptions of recognized teacher leaders about how they use or might use their leadership skills while remaining as teachers rather than transitioning to administrators?
3. What are some roles of teacher leaders in schools?
4. What are the skills, knowledge and dispositions that teacher leaders most value?
5. What are the perceptions of recognized teacher leaders about what aspects of school culture support teacher leadership?

Answers to these research questions spanned multiple contexts and teacher perceptions that revealed complex webs of information requiring careful analysis. The research questions framed the study by helping me facilitate deep and rich conversations with participants. In this way, I understood how teachers experienced a variety of roles in schools, what skills and abilities they needed to be able to accomplish those roles, and what sorts of school cultures worked best to support teacher leaders. As teachers shared their perceptions, the barriers and supports that they encountered as teacher leaders were revealed. In this way, I was able to understand the process of meaning making experienced by these teacher leaders as they interpreted their experiences (Merriam, 2009).

I examined multiple qualitative methodologies as possibilities for this study; however, I chose a case study design as the most appropriate to the specific nature of the study. Ethnography was not chosen as a method because researchers using this methodology examine a group which shares a culture via scientific fieldwork, note taking,

and observations in order to understand how the participant group derives meaning from their relationships and interactions (Dharamsi & Charles, 2011). Therefore, ethnography was not a suitable methodology for my study because I wanted to understand the complex phenomena of teacher leadership as it lived in a variety of contexts. Grounded theory, a type of research that seeks to derive a general theory, did not suit this project because data collection gathered detailed information on perceptions of highly recognized teachers about approaches to teacher leadership. Phenomenology, a method that seeks to identify the “essence of human experience,” was not appropriate for this study because highly recognized teachers come from a wide variety of contexts and stages of their career (Creswell, 2009, p. 13). Case study, therefore, emerged as the superior method for this study because it shed light on how highly recognized teachers expand or fail to expand their roles in schools.

### **Participants**

Sampling procedures allow the unit of analysis to be selected from among numerous possibilities (Merriam, 2009). Participants included New Jersey teachers who are or have been NJSTOYs or NJCTOYs and have taught for at least 3 years. In order to access potential participants, I requested that New Jersey Council of State Teachers of the Year, the New Jersey Education Association, and the New Jersey County Teachers of the Year organizations send an email to all New Jersey STOYs and CTOYs. The email explained the study and invited New Jersey teachers who have taught for at least 3 years and who have attained the honor of being named a New Jersey STOY or CTOY to consider participating in this project study. The outreach email explained the scope of this project study and described the time and effort requirements associated with the three forms of data

collection: a 1 hour interview conducted via video conferencing, a 6-week online discussion board, and a focus group. In addition, all study participants were informed that I would use ongoing member checking to ensure that the data collected would reflect their lived experiences. In other words, they were asked to verify and validate my interpretations of the data. Member checking allowed me to ask participants for feedback on “emerging findings” (Merriam, 2009, p. 217). Checking to make sure that data are not misinterpreted is essential to ensure that participants “recognize themselves” in the researcher’s analysis (Merriam, 2009, p. 217).

Communities are places where people gather to construct meaning (Sergiovanni, 2005). Thus, as a researcher, I strove to establish trust and a strong researcher-participant relationship with deep respect for the community of teachers I was researching. I welcomed participants into a comfortable exchange so that they would be more likely to feel open to sharing their perceptions with me. In addition, I assured participants, with both words and gestures, that I was listening to their ideas and lived experiences carefully. I looked at them with focus and attention and indicated interest and respect with my words and body positioning. In order to demonstrate sufficient respect for the social experiences and lives of participants, I reflected deeply on how my gender, race, age, and personal experience could influence the rapport that I created with each participant (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). When I interviewed participants, I was careful to notice how their language, verbal hesitations, and willingness to share might be telling me important information that should be captured in my notes. When I took notes, I made sure that I noted the observations about what the participant was saying or doing, not what I interpreted them to mean by their words or actions. If a participant, for example, began to move in the chair, I did not

conclude that the participant was restless, but I simply noted the movement. In the same way, when a participant made a statement, I did not rush to conclusions about the meaning of that statement, but transcribed exactly what was said in the most accurately depicted context I could describe. This ongoing practice of deep listening while note taking reflected the most complete picture of what I saw and heard, increasing the likelihood of building “a complex, holistic” view of participants’ lived experiences (Cresswell, 1998, p. 15).

The Walden University Institutional Review Board has clear guidelines (Walden University, 2014) for the maintenance of ethical standards in research. I did not begin research for this project until I received Walden IRB approval (IRB # 02-04-15-0235320). These IRB guidelines directed the way I protected study participants. I helped participants understand how and when data were to be collected. Times set aside for interviews were kept, honoring the participants’ schedule and the sacrifice they made by participating in the study. My tone was always professional and appreciative in order to maintain cordial and respectful communications. In addition, I considered ethical issues such as making sure that participant identities were not disclosed, and that propriety and proper conduct were evident at all times throughout the study (Creswell, 2009). I was not working with an at-risk or vulnerable population, but I made sure to protect participants’ identities and professional status by eliminating all identifying descriptions of people and places in my narrative. Because my entire study drew data from an identifiable population of highly recognized teachers in New Jersey, I coded the data by assigning pseudonyms to the participants and kept the code locked. I informed participants that all data collected would be stored securely for at least five years. In order to protect participants, both directly and indirectly, I eliminated all participants’ names and contact information from the research

notes and records. Risks to professional status, personal distress, and psychological harm were minimized at every stage in the study. Furthermore, I ensured that recruitment for the study was not coercive and that my role as a fellow New Jersey State and County Teacher of the Year did not put undue pressure on potential participants to be part of the study.

An email sent to potential participants included the deadline date for when a response indicating interest in participation was required. If potential participants wished to phone me to clarify any aspect of study, they were able to do so since the outreach email included my email and phone number. Interested participants sent me an email that included their contact information. Once the deadline date arrived, I selected the first 12 interested participants from the group of self-selected potential candidates. Once a participant group was chosen for the study, I sent the 12 individuals chosen an informed consent form to review, sign, and return to me by email. Once 12 individuals sent me their signed informed consent form, I sent an email to the two volunteers not selected to become part of the study, thanking them for their interest and letting them know that the participant group has been formed. I made sure to communicate the decision to those not selected by email in a way that respected the dignity of volunteer study participants, and that justified their being excluded. Furthermore, even after participants signed an informed consent form and began the study, I made them aware that they could discontinue their participation at any point without risking damage to the researcher-participant relationship or professional status.



### **Data Collection**

Data collection must be an organized and thoughtful activity that allows the researcher to collect and analyze data at the same time (Merriam, 2009). Emerging data helps the researcher understand what has been discovered as well as to indicate possible new directions for data collection. The analysis, therefore, is ongoing and the researcher must make decisions about what is important to pursue as the data are being collected. Data were generated from the recordings and transcriptions of rich participant responses that emerged from interviews, participant responses to six questions posted weekly on the project study's discussion board, as well as from notes and recordings that captured participants' comments during the focus group. Transcriptions, notes, online comments and recordings from participant interviews, online discussions and the focus group were transcribed and printed and stored in locked cabinets as well as on locked computer files, with participant identity removed.

As I collected data, I assigned each participant a pseudonym. I created files identified by the pseudonym on the file label. As I worked, I took notes in a notebook that was later underlined and color coded as I started to discover particular themes. These notes were then typed, so that I would later be able to use find and search tools in Microsoft Word, to pull out specific search terms from the document when I engaged in data analysis. Using a reflective journal helped me to think about the process of data collection and about how I might improve the practice based on lessons learned from the interviews, online discussions and focus group. As data were being collected and stored, I also kept a research

log indicating when interviews or online discussions would take place with notes about individual participant's schedules. This thoughtful data collection process allowed for the kind of continual reflection that fostered insights and questions that improved the quality of the process as the study developed.

Since I am a New Jersey state and county Teacher of the Year, my role as a researcher was clearly outlined, disclosing to participants that I was interested in their perceptions about approaches to teacher leadership. I demonstrated this by using open questioning techniques, without leading questions, that allowed participants the think time they need to fully express themselves. I reassured participants that their responses would be de-identified and stored in a secure locked cabinet and that the discussion board contents would be eliminated online at the conclusion of the study, after responses had been printed, stored and locked. Even though participants were assigned pseudonyms for all written interactions among group members, first names were used for the focus group. At the beginning of the focus group, therefore, I reminded participants not to refer by name to their school districts or to colleagues. In this way, study participants felt more comfortable sharing deep and relevant information without the fear that they would be traced or harmed professionally. Furthermore, I reminded participants that they should only share what they were comfortable sharing with me or with the group. Though I knew all of the study participants from professional settings, I helped them understand that their responses and information would be kept secure and de-identified. Furthermore, participant responses to questions reflected the lived challenges and opportunities of their own school settings that did not relate to shared experiences.

I collected data from three sources to ensure that I would have sufficient data to uncover emerging themes and participant perceptions about approaches to teacher leadership. The first data I collected were drawn from 1-hour interviews. Interview questions (Appendix B) explored participants' perceptions about approaches to teacher leadership and helped me get a strong sense of each participant's lived experience within their individual educational context. Interviews were scheduled at the mutual convenience of both researcher and participant and took place online in a videoconference. During interviews, participants shared their perceptions of teacher leadership in an open, relaxed yet serious manner. Before each interview, I made sure that the participant was comfortable and could hear well. I recommended that he or she get a beverage to drink, as the conversation would last an hour, with my role limited to questions and brief checks on understanding. To ensure that I understood what participants were sharing, I would make comments like: "What I am hearing is..." followed by a brief synopsis of what I understood the participant to be saying. I would stress that participants should "push back" on my interpretation if it did not reflect their intentions. This allowed the participant to say at times, "No, what I meant was....," thus allowing him or her to clarify, expand or change direction with a response. Working via videoconference provided a comfortable setting, because each participant found a familiar, private place to talk. Some worked in home offices or a guest room, out of reach of family and professional distractions. Most interviews took place at 8:00 p.m., though three participants opted to have their interview take place early on a weekend morning. Allowing participants the opportunity to fit the interview session into their lives, without having to ask them to travel, may have supported the fact that 100% of participants were able to keep their interview appointments with me.

The second data that were collected were 6 weeks of participants' responses to online discussion board questions (DBQs) that served to deepen my understanding of participants' perceptions about the study's research questions (Appendix C). The online discussions also gave participants the opportunity to interact and share their thoughts in writing, thus offering me a potentially more nuanced reflection than might have emerged from oral comments. To host the discussions, I created an account with edWeb, a free educational tool for educators (Schmucki, 2015). The site edWeb is designed to connect educators in a virtual community. It hosts webinars, chats and interest specific communities with threaded discussions. Before I created my participant community for the discussion board, I made sure that I could create a group that would only be visible to participants and not to the public. I set the privacy settings to "private" and therefore created a cyber space that was visible to me and to participants, but not to the other educators on edWeb. Another concern I had was the user name of participants and their photo. I made sure to instruct participants to sign up for an account on edWeb with their pseudonym for themselves and their district. I gave participants a first name and allowed them to choose a surname. In addition, there was an opportunity to create an "avatar" that would pop up during conversations, rather than an actual participant photo. I asked that participants search for an image that would be appealing to them. Setting up the group to secure privacy took 2 weeks after I had received the informed consent forms because each participant needed different degrees of tech support to make sure that confidentiality was maintained. Once all 12 participants had activated their account with pseudonyms for self and district, I initiated the focus group discussion.

Each week, on Thursday, I posted a question that participants answered and reflected upon (Appendix C). As a virtual facilitator, I read the posts every day and summed up what I was hearing by quoting the participant and making a statement about how I was interpreting what I was reading, to offer participants the chance for member checking. In the week #2 discussion, for example, after several participants had discussed the greatest obstacles to teacher leadership, I commented:

Dave wonders how school culture can be “constructed, fed, maintained, and perpetuated” and he shares stories of his own district’s experience with a superintendent who created a “power wielding, distrustful culture” that has “bred lowest common denominator styles of leadership” where “teacher leadership was anathema.”

By summarizing and quoting participants, I kept the conversation active while making sure that my inferences and juxtapositions were accurate. All participants interacted each week with each other and discussions were focused and insightful. Furthermore, participants clearly had read each other’s posts and they responded to comments in a way that demonstrated respect and experience.

The third data that were collected were drawn from a focus group (Appendix D). A focus group allowed me to listen carefully to the participants’ reflections and interactions around topics emanating from the research questions. The focus group took place online via videoconference, which allowed us to hear and see all members of the discussion. When participants would speak, their facial images would cover the screen, yet all of the other participants who were listening could also be seen in small windows at the bottom. Once again, use of this technology allowed participants to organize their space at home to

maximize comfort and privacy. As participants shared ideas throughout the discussion, the other participants waited respectfully for each other to finish their comments before adding their own. The focus group questions kept participants on track so that meaningful data could be captured from this conversation. In my reflective journal, I wrote:

Though participants were eager to share their views in the focus group, I noticed that they behaved slightly differently in a group than they did with the individual interviews, with some behaving in a more or less outgoing manner than when they were when speaking to me alone.

This observation captured the need to use three forms of data collection to gather member perceptions since a participant might have responded more favorably to one of the forms of data collection. Allowing participants the opportunity to write out their answers to questions on the discussion boards, to participate in an interview and in a focus group, offered them a variety of ways to communicate their perceptions.

These data are appropriate to case study in the qualitative tradition because rich conversations and captured perceptions in individual interviews, online discussions and a focus group provided participants' insights into their experience. High interest topics encouraged strong interactions and discussions that provided additional data about participants' perceptions. Furthermore, these data offered me a rich entrée into the experiences of participants. The data collected provided a view into participants' challenges and successes with teacher leadership as well as to provide concrete examples about approaches to teacher leadership in a variety of school contexts.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis is the process by which the researcher organizes the collected data to be able to arrive at findings (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Sorting through and interpreting data can be a daunting task, but once data saturation was reached, it was important to tackle the data systematically to discover emerging themes and perceptions and to make sense of what I captured (Creswell, 2009). Once I completed the interviews, I listened to the interview recordings and transcribed them, while reflecting upon the connection to the research questions. Hearing the interview again offered the chance to hear participants' perceptions without distractions, allowing a greater focus on their words. Discussion board questions and responses were printed and organized according to the discussion board question that responses were answering. Next, I listened to and transcribed the focus group discussion. Even though I printed and stored transcriptions in a locked cabinet, it was working with the word documents that facilitated organization and analysis.

Once I finished an interview and audio recorded and transcribed it, I emailed the transcript to the participant for member checking to ensure that what I wrote reflected the participant's perceptions. Similarly, when I wrote my reports of the online discussion board activity, I sent copies to each participant for member checking. Finally, when the focus group concluded, I transcribed the audio recording and shared it with all participants via email. Member checking can increase the study's trustworthiness and credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Young (2010) suggested the researcher remember that there are three "lenses" to keep in mind when member checking, the self, or researcher, the participant and the external reader (p. 1105). Member checking, therefore, involved a negotiation of

meaning with participants that emerged from the captured perceptions. The researcher must understand that the lens used, when interpreting and analyzing data, may change the inferences and findings. This is why it was of great importance to include participants in this ongoing process of member checking so that the accuracy of what was captured could be affirmed and trust could be build and maintained throughout the study (Croly, Clarkson & Blackwellm, 2006). Member checking was an ongoing process that continued as I began to interpret participants' perceptions and the study's themes emerged. When participants received my transcriptions, reports or summaries, I invited them to edit by deleting words, phrases, summaries or inferences that they believed were inaccurate. In addition, participants were invited to add to my notes if they believed that something that they would have wanted to include was missing.

Data were analyzed through an open coding process that allowed me to examine the data to discover categories and units of meaning (Moghaddam, 2006). Essential themes that flowed through the conversations and documents were identified and captured. Such themes more deeply revealed the worlds and practice of participants as they emerged from their perceptions, struggles and triumphs. Careful data analysis allowed me to create a portrait of the teaching profession by capturing the voices and the deep and diverse contexts of these recognized educators. All patterns, relationships, and themes, described as findings, evolved as the date were coded by themes, based on the frequency of appearance in the transcriptions, recordings and notes. Data from the 3 data sources were organized under these thematic categories. In this way, I was able to triangulate the data as overlapping comments, words and perceptions emerged.

Once themes emerged, I created an organizing framework of themed categories on a



grid that helped me to categorize the emergent data and connect it to the research questions, which served as guide throughout the process. As I proceeded, I continually reflected upon how participant comments answered the study's problem that New Jersey teachers who are recognized at a state or regional levels struggle to use their professional knowledge in their schools and districts in roles other than teaching and that New Jersey State and County Teachers of the Year find that colleagues and administrators are at a loss as to how to appreciate or use their newfound skills and experiences. Data were also highlighted on word documents by colors that aligned to the research questions. The five themes captured participants' perceptions; struggles and triumphs as they negotiated the workplace to best use their talents and abilities to improve schools. The themes drawn from the data were not static, by any means, because different forms of data collection (interview, online discussion, focus group) evoked new themes to consider. These three forms of data collection, personal observations and reflective journal logs allowed me to triangulate data as I uncovered recurring patterns and themes.

Outlying or disconfirming data were included and analyzed as vital information related to perceptions of approaches to teacher leadership. Some data, for example, did not fit into any category or theme, but were relevant to the study because of the way my understanding of the research questions was deepened by powerful examples to the field. Finally, a variety of procedures that addressed the accuracy of the data including member checks and triangulation ensured that findings reflected participants' perceptions. Transcripts of interviews, online discussions, the focus group, researcher logs and samples from the reflective journal provided the data I analyzed to arrive at findings.

## Findings

In this section of the study, I discuss the patterns and trends that emerged in the data I collected. In qualitative case studies, the researcher observes and analyzes trends that have emerged from collected data (Harding, 2013). I identify five findings in the order that corresponds to the research questions and the problem that prompted this study. I then illustrate the findings with examples and comments that were captured in the three forms of data collection. When I refer to the 12 participants in the study, I use pseudonyms to share their words and perceptions to illustrate the findings that emerged from the data.

The problem that prompted this study was that New Jersey teachers who are recognized at a state or regional levels often struggle to use their professional knowledge in their schools and districts in roles other than teaching. Research questions provided an organizing framework to capture patterns, relationships and themes about the perceptions of highly recognized teachers regarding approaches to teacher leadership. The research questions are listed below:

1. How do Teachers of the Year perceive teacher leadership?
2. What are the perceptions of recognized teacher leaders about how they use or might use their leadership skills while remaining as teachers rather than transitioning to administrators?
3. What are some roles of teacher leaders in schools?
4. What are the skills, knowledge and dispositions that teacher leaders most value?
5. What are the perceptions of recognized teacher leaders about what aspects of school culture support teacher leadership?

These research questions formed the basis of interview questions (Appendix B), discussion board questions (Appendix C) and focus group questions (Appendix D). The following findings were evident in all three forms of data collection.

The first finding indicated that teacher leaders are individuals who galvanize collegial support for school improvement efforts by exercising diplomatic role-defying behaviors in schools.

Participants perceived teacher leadership as working within a school environment to further the educational process. In their interviews, participants consistently noted that teacher leaders perceived a school need and then would set to the task of finding a solution. At times, however, participants were shocked at their own behaviors. Words like “fearlessness,” and “audacity,” frequently appeared in all forms of data collection, along with one participant’s characterization of the teacher leader behavior as “tree shaking.” Participants agreed that teacher leaders’ desire to take action is frequently inspired by a request by teachers or administrators solve a problem. Participants stated that this pressing problem is what moves teacher leaders to step out of their roles, rather than a personal need to seek power or status. In her interview, one participant stressed the notion that teacher leaders often take on these new roles and responsibilities without having a very clear idea about a systematic way to solve the problem at hand. She said that “with teacher leaders, I think it’s not letting the how are we going to do it stop you from asking if we are going to do it. The details don’t get in the way until you have to work out the details.” In interviews, however, participants stated that it is sometimes terrifying to act, to step out of one’s comfort zone as an exemplary teacher. Nevertheless, when students or colleagues experienced a great need, Dave explained that, “the fearlessness was greater than the fear.”

The ability to step out of one's regular role to help colleagues use their talents to improve schools, participants note, seems to emerge from wondering "why" or better, "why not?"

Camille said:

Honestly, I think my greatest asset as a teacher leader is that I don't see myself as a teacher leader. What I do best is ask questions. I don't ask them in a manner that insinuates revolt or insurrection, but instead in a manner that says (I hope) "please tell me more," or "why would we need to do it that way?"

Anne said that she saw herself as an "accidental activist who planned a perfectly good career and all of a sudden, something happened." Every study participant agreed that teacher leaders are activated as leaders through a compelling desire to oppose perceived injustices, rectify issues and clarify confusing mandates for colleagues. All participants agreed that when teacher leaders see issues in a larger context, they are able to quiet personal fears and obstacles to motivate themselves to serve the greater good.

What emerged repeatedly, especially in interviews, was the notion of an ethical center. In every interview, I asked planned questions, but for the last question, I asked all participants to speak to an aspect of teacher leadership that they believed I had missed or that they wished to discuss in more detail. In 10 out of 12 interviews, when responding to this open-ended question, it was clear that participants observed that teacher leaders moved from an ethical center and focused on student learning. Words and phrases like: "service," "servant," "mission," "right thing to do," and "the children are counting on us" appeared repeatedly in transcripts. Dave stated, "Teaching clearly has an ethical orientation embedded in the practice." James added that teacher leaders work to "lead grassroots

movements in their districts, or circumvent the system through some other form of activism.” Lucille said:

I offer my services at every opportunity. I assert myself in places where I'm not invited. I have become the pushy loudmouth I never wanted to be. But I've done these things only because I believe I can effect change.

Participants' stories, as teacher leaders, are the stories of educators who serve students and school communities. In order to achieve the goals they want to accomplish, participants stated that they do not work in isolation. Instead, in all forms of data collection they narrated ways that they regularly break down the siloes of classroom spaces to engage colleagues in important school improvement work. Teacher leader participants agreed that often such collegial leadership is done best without an official title. They stated that colleagues have accepted their offers of help, information and service because they come from a fellow teacher, rather than from an administrator with the power to evaluate them. In message board discussions, participants shared that they readily connect with their peers because, as Sarah said, “they always take the conversation back to the heart of education, the student.” Kim added that the classroom is where her success emanates from because “it is in the classroom that learning occurs.”

After galvanizing support from colleagues, participants stated that they frequently have begun to lead initiatives before receiving official approval from administrators for their actions. Ellen shared:

I typically begged forgiveness for any of my initiatives if I was questioned about not getting permission. As long as I based every decision on "was this good for kids," I didn't worry about the consequences for me or what others thought. Part of

leadership is having the confidence to do what you believe is right.

Nevertheless, participants agreed that their work would not be successful without establishing a “go between” relationship with administrators and teachers. Participants stated that they must cultivate the trust of both teachers and administrators in order to achieve their goals. Despite participants’ abilities to inspire teaching colleagues to action, their responses, as captured in the interview data transcripts described a collegial road that is often bumpy, on the way to a shared goal. Camille stated:

As teacher leaders, you are seen as not quite this and not quite that by classroom teachers and administrators...if you're not in the trenches, if you're not grading, wiping noses, dealing with tears, the inability to go to the bathroom when you need to, with the pressures and demands of the classroom, then you're a teacher, but you're not a teacher like ME.

Highly recognized teachers perceived that teacher leaders often live a lonely existence because they, as Maggie said, “are not in the same boat (as colleagues). Period. To be perfectly honest, it has felt a little lonely being a teacher leader.” Despite this loneliness for work that has no official recognition or title, teacher leaders are motivated to empower colleagues to further the educational process. They step forth to act on goals, often without a clear plan, as they build morale among colleagues to work towards common goals that improve schools.

The second finding was that teacher leaders use their talents in the classroom by creating and adopting excellent classroom strategies and curriculum, energizing work for underserved students and helping colleagues collaborate for student success as the core of all school improvement efforts. Study participants agreed that school improvement efforts

must center on student learning. Teacher leadership begins, Henry stated, “in the classroom as we model leadership with our students.” Words like “instructional impact,” and “commitment to the children,” “the real goal of education,” “students as the *raison-d’etre* of education,” and “solving problems in the classroom,” coupled with the notion that teachers will, as one participant said: “go hours and hours outside of contract requirements,” to create the kind of classroom experience that “students count on me for,” as Lenny said. Participants cited numerous examples about ways that they led efforts to modify and improve curriculum for children. Anne, for example, shared a passion for “incorporating literacy strategies into content-area curriculum,” and Henry stated that he makes sure to “integrate knowledge and apply new ideas cross curricularly.” Henry further illustrated this story by describing his conversation with the building administrator:

Your way of fixing this reading deficiency is not going to work. I know better than you about this situation. I cannot sit back and let an initiative continue that doesn't help children; I cannot stand back and let that happen.

Maggie discovered that the students who could most benefit from learning Shakespeare were not the ones getting exposed to his plays. Rather than adhering to the notion that only highly accomplished students should study Shakespeare, Maggie explained:

I seek out at-risk kids and I see who the frequent fliers are in the main office, kids in special ed programs. It is only once they are in the room, that they realize what bounty Shakespeare has to offer. They understand Shakespeare better than academically motivated students.

This teacher leader's active and innovative approach to course development helped to increase student participation in a Shakespeare program, in the course of a decade, from 10

to 100 students. Such commitment to children is echoed in all participants' comments about how student learning drives their practice as teacher leaders.

Throughout all forms of data collection, participants stated that "collaboration" was the preferred vehicle for teacher work. Participants claimed that colleagues, "worked best in this environment," because teachers had the opportunity to "talk amongst themselves" and "solve problems." Teacher leader participants stated that they created Professional Learning Communities as a space for shared work. Dave stated that "brainstorming" allowed "people to work collaboratively." In Sarah's school, collaboration took the form of what she called a "Humanities Café" where 14 out of 20 invited colleagues "got together instead of having a standard PD, sharing coffee and treats, sitting in a circle". Kim spearheaded an "Ed Camp" form of professional development, totally built on teacher expertise and presentations. Study participants all agreed that tapping into teacher talent and experience is a good way to collaborate for student success.

Many study participants, however, expressed frustration that their own talent had the opportunity for more development than that of their peers because their status as highly recognized state and county teachers of the year had won them a plethora of off-campus professional learning opportunities. Furthermore, each one of the 12 participants expressed a desire to share such learning with peers and with their administrators to improve practice and increase institutional information. Participants explained that having the opportunity to participate in professional learning and collegial networks outside of their district and state had opened their eyes to new ways of approaching teaching. Upon their return to their districts, participants immediately wanted share what they had learned by providing training for their colleagues. Maggie offered an example: "I never knew about restorative



justice and I was really excited about it,” she said, “but my administration thought that the discipline methods they were using were just fine so they weren’t interested.” Study participants wanted to expand their colleagues’ learning by creating presentations and learning for them. In some cases, participants stated that they received strong administrative support for these efforts, but in others, their expertise had to be shared through informal helping networks since schools did not welcome or see a need for their acquired expertise. Nevertheless, with or without administrative support, all participants found a way to convene faculty around common concerns to develop action plans about what mattered most for students.

The third finding was that teacher leaders improve schools as mentors, curriculum writers, lead teachers, professional learning community facilitators, professional development presenters, technology integration experts, parent and community partners, committee chairs, student activity advisors, professional network leaders, policy experts and union leadership. Teacher leader participants cited numerous examples of a wide variety of roles they played in schools, in the community and in the larger policy context.

The following table (Table 1) lists roles that were cited in data collection, along with key words, phrases and quotes that further illustrate participant roles. Quotes included are participant statements taken from interviews, message boards and focus group discussions. Participants used the word “outside” 42 times in all forms of data collection, most frequently using the word when referring to activities that occurred “outside” the classroom or district. Teacher leader participants added that the expertise they gained through outside professional development, organizations or exposure to initiatives, influenced their perspective and practice within their roles as teachers and expanded their

identity beyond the classroom. In fact, all 12 participants' discovered that, as they learned from educators outside of their communities, they were more energized to dedicate themselves to institutional improvement. Participants collectively wondered, as was evidenced by frequent comments, why hybrid roles to incorporate their growing expertise were so difficult to find in schools.

Participants stated that their commitment to students, communities and colleagues was not limited by the borders of their classroom walls, but instead, it was the classroom that drove them to learn and grow in order to solve tough problems, gain additional vantage points, strategies and skills. Participants stated that the most difficult school-based problems compelled them to seek out likeminded educators as partners through professional organizations and networks. Teacher leaders further stressed that technology had assisted these efforts to expand their professional networks beyond the classroom and the communities they served.

Table 1

*Study Participants' Roles*

Role	Description of roles
Mentors	New teacher and peer support; clarify evaluation; share expertise; coach to early service teachers; "Throw open the door of the classroom to model great strategies."
Curriculum writer	Pilot new curriculum; revise curriculum; develop resources; 21 <sup>st</sup> Century alignment; classroom-based approach; "move from a culture of 'no' to a culture of 'let's try.'"
Lead teachers	Bilingual committee; share subject expertise; help develop resources; provide evaluation support; translate new initiatives to staff; encourage teachers' participation.
PD presenter	Literacy coach; offer classroom as "learning laboratory;" "focus on adult learners;" help teachers improve instruction; give colleagues "time to think and practice;" "As a P.D. presenter, I'm cheap;" share expertise.
Parent Partners	School as center of the community; provide family relief in natural disasters; guide town plans and celebrations; Kiwanis club speeches; parades; "close-knit community that preaches family, good people."
Committee chairs	School Improvement Grant coordination; Curriculum; leadership; technology; homework; evaluation; professional development; bilingual; Department of Education; testing; TEDx committees; "attending just about every meeting and joining or being appointed to every committee in school, people were glad I was filling the gaps."
Activity advisors	Sports coach; Human Rights Club; Gay-Straight Alliance; Environmental Club; Hip-hop; Poetry out loud; Theater Director; Literary Magazines; Technology club; Class Advisor; "anything I could do to help the kids I wanted to be involved."

(Table continues)

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Role	Description of roles
Professional	Connecting to like-minded educators; collaborate with teachers from other districts; connection with professional mentors; national networks of highly recognized teachers; “Going outside of the district or profession helps me grow.”
Policy experts	Ensure that policy is driven by classroom realities; engage in national policy networks; Twitter conversations; advocacy; “utilizing teachers’ knowledge, passion, expertise to impact policy;” “If someone tells you something stupid as a policy, you just can’t accept it.”
Union leadership	Negotiations; consensus building; galvanize support for initiatives; peer mentorship; assist evaluation rebuttals and change; climate surveys; “shift in how we do business.”

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Table 1 indicates that teachers worked hard in a multitude of ways that improved schools and served students. Participants stated that as they increased their skills and knowledge, they sought innovative ways to expand their reach and roles.

Teacher participants, however, expressed frustration with finding time to fit their expanded roles into a busy day. Dave said that schools needed: “some kind of fixed, expected structure.” Many participants indicated in their responses that hybrid roles would allow teachers to use their talent to improve schools. Dave added that: “Teachers are operating from this point of being with students and knowing what’s going on in the classroom, but then they are also providing guidance to the larger conversation that is going on school wide.” Ellen noted that teachers better assist in school improvement efforts when they are given enhanced roles because “many teachers are overwhelmed by the complexity, volume and intensity of their role in a school and district. Teacher leaders provide the bridge within these roles. Teacher leadership is the ultimate transformer in the reforming.”

In an interview, Kim echoed the comments that many teacher leader participants had made during message board discussions when she said: “hybrid roles are the gold standard” that provided schools with “the mortar between the bricks.”

The fourth finding was that teacher leaders value their knowledge and expertise, strong interpersonal skills, big picture thinking, willingness to take professional risks and a penchant for deep caring that drives their work for school improvement. Lively discussions in focus groups and message boards indicated that teachers yearn and demand to be recognized for their hard-won knowledge and expertise. Many participants repeated the comment, “I know what I’m doing,” when referring to content-area expertise and knowledge of students’ developmental needs, as well as the unique characteristics of the communities they serve. The kind of knowledge that teacher leader participants most valued also included knowledge of self, which helped them recognize their own weaknesses as well as their rich talents. Lenny stated that teacher leaders have learned to “take charge of their own professional learning to add to their instructional bag of tricks.” In multiple interviews, participants stressed that they learned, to “throw open their doors” to “steal” or “harvest” the ideas of their most trusted colleagues. Barriers of age and experience were overcome as Lucille shared the story of fruitful co-teaching with a younger colleague with whom she shared: “equal power.” Responses gathered in interviews indicated that teacher leader participants valued their own knowledge and expertise as well as that of their colleagues.

All participants cited strong interpersonal skills as an essential part of the teacher leader tool kit. Participants employed compassionate listening strategies to learn about their colleagues’ worries and obstacles to improved performance. The word “listen” appeared 45

times in all forms of data collection when questions about valued skills were being discussed. In addition, words and phrases like “active listening,” and “knowing when to speak and when to listen” were stressed frequently in discussion board exchanges and lively focus group conversations. Another vital interpersonal skill, cited as important in discussions, was “diplomacy.” Bee said that diplomacy was vital for teacher leadership to exist in school contexts where administrators possess the official power to grant teachers the support and space to use their talents well: “you have to warm the people up who are going to empower you. You have to get them to open up a space for you to go in and get power you don’t have.” Maggie added a colorful description of why diplomacy matters. She said that she was a “whack-a-mole,” referring to a popular amusement park game that features a toy mole with a protruding head that must be hammered down with a mallet to win, because she stood out among her peers and could potentially be beaten down. To subvert this possibility, she learned to use diplomacy. She said:

Diplomacy is far more important than I ever imagined. I’m the whack-a-mole that is stuck up and I get my fair share of whacks so it is important to me that I handle it with diplomacy and grace. I had to cultivate this skill because I frequently operate on gut.

In addition, all study participants stressed the need for demonstrating compassion and empathy in interactions with colleagues and community stakeholders. Listening, asking questions and basing school action plans on school needs, rather than on a desire for professional gain, were crucial interpersonal skills noted time and again in all forms of data collection. In fact, the word “serve” and “service” appeared repeatedly in discussions. Ellen said that teacher leaders are individuals who: “really have a servant’s heart and move to the

forefront at the moment because they see a need for a challenge and they want to do something positive about it.”

Furthermore, in lively discussions, teacher leader participants noted that they also valued a willingness to take professional risks. Words and phrases like, “being brave,” and “speaking up,” “being willing to stand up,” and “not play it safe” appeared frequently in interview transcripts. Camille stated the need for the risk-taking behaviors of teacher leaders: “Over the years, we have created a culture of teacher subservience and anxiety that teachers ask permission to do nearly anything outside the confines of their classrooms. Teachers need to take more risks and be confident in their decisions.” Henry advised that fellow teachers should “start shaking their schools.”

The ability to look at school improvement from a wide-angle lens was frequently cited by teacher leader participants in the data collection. Participants repeatedly used the words, “seeing the big picture” when referring to ways they see their leadership efforts. This big picture thinking is, as James said, “essential to the long term success of people, programs, purpose and passion in our schools and districts.” Dave said that such awareness is something, “that is cultivated” and “takes curiosity, being a genuine listener, and having the tendency to understand the totality of a situation rather than hunker down just in your own piece of a situation.” All participants brought up “big picture thinking” in interviews, focus groups or message boards, demonstrating that this ability to focus on what is best for the community is a highly valued characteristic of teacher leader participants. Bee bemoaned the “mounds of paper work that can be meaningless in the big picture.” This “big picture,” all agree, is hinged on what is best for students. Sarah explained that, “when our conversations stay focused on the students and learning, they become rich, fruitful, and

empowering.” In their interactions, teacher leader participants agreed that this big picture is intimately connected to what will always take them back to the heart of what brings them into schools, “back to that joyful place,” as Anne said, where paper work and tedium are directed at purposeful work designed to improve schools and help students learn.

Teacher leader participants made it clear, in interviews and discussions, that teachers’ work is centered on deep caring. Dave, who came from a family of teachers, grew up surrounded by stories of social justice, service and “a personal ethic” that initially drew him into the field. When referring to this ethic, he stated: “if you have the power and ability to make things better, it’s not something you should do, it’s something you have to do.” The kinds of skills that are needed for such ethical work are, “empathy, patience and discipline – not disciplining students, but self-discipline – long hours, failure after failure and being self aware of what brought you into it.” Furthermore, as Sarah stated, “Parents of my students trust me to do the right thing for my students. There is no teacher leadership without the students.” Kim, shared, however, that deep caring takes a toll on one’s energy, but that this is inevitable, “Being the squeaky wheel, tends to put us outside the rank and file, yet we are not management. We opt for this position, so somebody’s crazy here. I don’t just teach, I am a teacher; it’s who I am.” Throughout all forms of data collection, words and expressions like, “giving back;” “empathy;” “care;” “compassion;” and above all, “service” were frequently cited. James said: “a good teacher has a service mentality, to make things better, to be there for my kids.” Teacher leader participants’ stated that their work was fueled by this penchant for deep caring. Anne stressed that educators’ work is purpose driven, emanating from one’s spiritual and psychological center: “Everyone has to remember their purpose. That involves going back to their individual centers - daily. When



I say it spiritually feeds me -- I don't mean dogma. I mean my soul.”

The fifth finding was that teacher leaders thrive in school cultures with leaders who respect their expertise, ideas and professional leadership and who give them opportunities to continue their professional learning, networking and knowledge sharing with colleagues. The most frequently cited word in all forms of data collection was “culture,” which was cited 109 times. Teacher leaders indicated in their statements that school culture mattered and that some cultures offered them the “wings to fly,” in their school improvement efforts, but, as Lenny said, other school cultures “clip these wings by failing to allow teacher leaders the space, support and opportunities they need to use their talents well to serve their districts.

Teacher leaders indicated, in all forms of data collection, that they needed to work in cultures that respected teacher leaders’ expertise, ideas and professional leadership. Bee described a school administrator, who would put up his hands when he saw her arrive, saying: “Please! No more new ideas,” while Anne told of a school leader who actively walked in the opposite direction when he would see her approaching. Lucille described her experience with administrators who politely, but firmly refused her offers of expertise, preferring to use instead paid professional service providers. Participants’ responses stated that they worked, as Dave said, in a “culture of accountability” that was “rooted in politics and profit and imposed existential angst.” Other participants, said that they worked in what Lenny called a “handshake culture,” where administrators delighted in teacher leadership, trying to support it in any way they could. These participants attributed their strong success as teacher leaders to working in districts where school leaders noticed and embraced their talents and will to serve.

Table 2 captures a summary of characteristics and illustrative quotes that teacher leader participants used to describe school cultures that support and fail to support their teacher leadership. Given the high focus on school culture as an important basis for deploying teacher talent, Table 2 describes two possible extremes that teacher leader participants have experienced in their work in schools. In the data collection, it was typical for any given participant's school to possess some, but not all of the characteristics of cultures that support or failed to support teacher leadership, except in the cases of 3 out of 12 of the participants, where the damaging cultures included many of the negative characteristics noted below.

Table 2

*School Cultures that Support and Fail to Support Teacher Leaders*

Cultures that support teacher leaders	Cultures that fail to support teacher leaders
High-trust environment	Low-trust environment
Teacher leader autonomy	Micromanagement
Purpose-driven work	Useless tasks bulk of work
Asking "why" or "why not" is a school norm	Obedience, fear of retribution is school norm
Shared leadership	Top-down leadership
Meaning, big picture thinking, reflection	Lock-step obedience
Appreciation of colleagues' talent	Toxic; power wielding
Relationships are valued	Drama; gossip
Teachers volunteer readily	Teachers "run out of the door" at 3:00
Teachers lead important initiatives	Rigid hierarchy of administrative roles
Going to work and feeling valued is the norm	Going to work is "heading into battle."
Culture of "let's try that."	Culture of "no"
Everyone is doing what they can for students	Belief that school problems are "someone else's."
"Teachers' doors are flung open"	Teachers "toil in obscurity"
Collaboration is the norm	Teachers keep ideas private
Teacher discussions at a round table	Teachers sit and are lectured
Teachers are encouraged to network outside of district	Teachers are discouraged or prohibited to seek outside of district opportunities
Teacher leadership and recognition celebrated	Teacher leadership and recognition ignored or mocked

Participants also described how school cultures were transformed when teacher leaders galvanized collegial support to make significant changes that converted their schools into places where relationships began to thrive so teachers could use their talents for students. Kim said that teacher leaders who are “exhausted by politics and culture... can outlast and transform damaging cultures.” In animated discussion board conversation, participants enthusiastically urged their colleagues to “be part of the change” whenever possible, unless the school culture was one that “devalued teachers at every turn.” Camille shared that “you must work your hardest to improve the place you are in, even though some days, it's really hard for me not to consider looking for greener pastures myself, but it's my responsibility as a crusader for education to do what I need to do rather than what I might want to do.”

Teacher leader participants who worked in cultures that supported the good use of their talent reported that they felt greater energy to serve the districts. Furthermore, the majority of participants agreed that not being permitted to engage in out-of-district professional development and networking was a persistent obstacle to their teacher leadership. Participant comments also indicated that schools that were most supportive of professional learning were able to find ways to mine such learning for the good of their communities. In other districts, participants reported that administrators perceived their desire to leave campus for conferences, workshops and professional networking opportunities as unrelated to providing the direct instruction they were hired for. In addition, participants indicated in comments captured in the data that some administrators manifested “professional jealousy,” an attitude that these participants claimed thwarted the

administrator-teacher collaboration they had hoped for. When referring to such obstacles, Henry stated that, “sometimes there is a pebble in your way and other times the Rock of Gibraltar.” The high frequency of statements about “positive” and “toxic” school culture, in all forms of data collection, attests to how much participants value supportive cultures where teacher leadership can thrive.

### **Discrepant Data**

Teacher leader participants generally agreed that the heart of their work could be found serving as teachers or instructional coaches while deploying their talents in a wide variety of hybrid roles. Discrepant data revealed, however, that five out of 12 participants saw a natural progression from teacher leader to administrator or to other educational roles. Some participants urged that teachers leave the classroom to become administrators so that school administrators would have the perspective of a teacher who teaches staff in “a larger classroom.” In an email sent during the member checking of findings, Anne said that: “while I appreciate and recognize that most teacher leaders do not need to transition to administration, some have to! This paradigm will never shift if accomplished teachers don’t join the ranks of administration at a greater rate.”

Lenny said, in a private email during member checking, that there seemed to be some “admin bashing” in the discussion board and that this “was only one part of the puzzle.” In his experience, it was essential for “egos to get checked at the door” to ensure strong cooperative cultures where administrators and teacher leaders might serve as partners. Lenny added that when both administrators and teachers “get in a room and hammer out things like coaching programs, PLCs and proper schedules”, then school improvement efforts would certainly emerge. On the other hand, Lucille stated in an

interview that her school administrators welcomed her many offers of assistance to underserved students and struggling colleagues with comments like, “Great, you know what you’re doing - please help!”

Some data, however, that did not fit into any category, stressed the need to bring teacher leadership back into schools to serve students. Bee noted, for example, that many highly recognized teacher leaders often focus on getting laws or budgets passed to allow for and support teacher leadership. She suggested that “there are so many places that teacher leadership can be utilized to transform schools without waiting for a law to be passed or a budget.” Bee stated:

When I think about what could be accomplished with a cadre of eight teacher leaders in my district— holy cow —who could support new teachers by mentoring, by designing new curriculum or by helping early-career teachers to be more successful in their evaluation by coaching them - there’s just so much!

Bee added that a “spotlight should be shone a little bit more on the possibilities of teacher leadership where you don’t have to go to Washington D.C. or the Department of Education, but instead, “you can make a difference right now.” These outlying or disconfirming data were also included and analyzed as vital information related to perceptions of approaches to teacher leadership. Discrepant cases were noted as they emerged and were later examined to see if there was important information or any patterns contained in these atypical cases. In such cases, I scanned the literature to see if there was additional information from the field that added to my analysis of these cases.

### **Evidence of Quality**

The organized data constituted a case study database (Yin, 2008). After all data were gathered and analyzed, I triangulated the data, comparing the diverse data points to see if the themes that emerge were accurate and representative. By analyzing the data systematically, I was able to feel confident that the study's findings were indicative of participants' perceptions about approaches to teacher leadership. Participants responded differently to the three forms of data collection.

First, I conducted interviews with individual participants through online videoconferencing. All participants chose to be interviewed at home in settings of their own choosing that were personal, private and comfortable. I allowed participants ample time to think and answer questions. I used verbal probes during the interviews as a formative process of rephrasing what I heard each participant say to check for understanding. In this way, participants had the option of redirecting my thinking and amending their statements. All interviews were recorded so that I could later transcribe them, allowing me the chance to listen to the participant's words once again and to read those same words in print. I performed this process after each interview, before conducting another participant interview. In this way, the act of listening to the participant's words and perceptions, along with my own recorded paraphrase and questions, allowed me the chance to record my perceptions in my reflection journal. In the first interview, for example, I noticed that my questions and paraphrases were too long and that sometimes, I would inadvertently cut a participant's comments short. In the next interview therefore, I corrected this behavior and forced myself to give participants more time to figure out a response or to extend their statements. This resulted in richer and more complete responses.

Second, the discussion board discussions offered participants a space to reflect deeply, with plenty of time, to discussion board questions that were drawn from the study's research questions. Each week for 6 weeks, I posted a question and participants responded to it and to each other, using pseudonyms for their own names and districts. I read responses every day and recaptured what I understood as the gist of participants' comments along with participants' quotes, to allow them the chance to read what I understood from comments as a form of ongoing member checking.

Third, the focus group, held online through group video conferencing, allowed participants the chance for lively interaction and discussion. Participants all chose to speak with me from a home setting, where they were comfortable and could speak privately about their perceptions. In this context, I ensured that my voice was that of a facilitator, who limited her comments to restatements, questions and the clarification of the points that participants made. I kept the group on topic with their answers, but this group of highly recognized teachers needed little guidance to share deeply and sincerely about their professional lives and experiences. Once again, checking for understanding was vital because I stated the gist of what I understood and I allowed time for participants to correct my conclusions or restatements.

Different forms of data provided me with diverse responses to the research questions that allowed me to capture recurring themes across all forms of data, which were analyzed through open coding. The process I used to triangulate the data involved comparing the discussion board responses to questions (Appendix C), which were prepared individually and at leisure, to the interview (Appendix B) and focus group question (Appendix D) response data. I observed that responses were parallel, as themes emerged

from all forms of data collection. When participants consented to participate in the study, I ensured that I would use member checking. For member checking, I reached out to participants to confirm that what I had written, inferred and reported is what they meant to say or share. Participants were invited to edit, add to or delete content that they believed did not reflect their lived experiences and perceptions about them. I sent all participants my initial findings and asked them to see if what I had inferred from my data collection depicted their perceptions and experiences. I wanted to make sure that what I had understood reflected participants' worlds. This process of member checking increased the credibility of the findings and interpretations. As a result of member checking, several participants offered me written analysis of these shared findings, thus providing additional data to analyze and include in the study.

By using a variety of procedures that addressed the accuracy of the data, including member checks and triangulation, I ensured that findings reflected participants' perceptions. Transcripts of interviews, online discussions, the focus group, researcher logs and samples from the reflective journal provided evidence of data collection and the necessary reflection leading to data analysis.

## **Conclusion**

By capturing the perceptions of teacher leaders as they worked to improve schools and their professional practice, I addressed the five research questions. Research questions were related to participants' perceptions of teacher leadership, the roles teachers take on in schools, the skills, knowledge and abilities that teacher leaders value most and ways that school culture supports or fails to support teacher leadership. In this section, I examined the five research questions in light of the findings:



1. How do Teachers of the Year perceive teacher leadership? In finding 1, I indicated that teacher leaders are individuals who galvanize collegial support for school improvement efforts by exercising diplomatic role-defying behaviors in schools. Participants noted that teacher leaders are individuals who collaborate with peers by stepping beyond their roles, as teachers to spur changes that schools and students need. Teachers of the Year perceive teacher leadership as typified by individuals who are both diplomatic and audacious when it comes to volunteering to lead or organize necessary school efforts.
2. What are the perceptions of recognized teacher leaders about how they use or might use their leadership skills while remaining as teachers rather than transitioning to administrators? In finding 2, I indicated that teacher leaders use their talents in the classroom by creating and adopting excellent classroom strategies and curriculum, energizing work for underserved students and helping colleagues collaborate for student success as the core of all school improvement efforts. To illustrate finding 2, teacher leaders gave numerous examples of the ways that they advocated for students who need the right reading program or the opportunity to read Shakespeare or experience differentiated learning opportunities. Teacher leaders use their best talents in the classroom by taking on leadership that improves the learning environment for students in the schools where they serve.
3. What are some roles of teacher leaders in schools? In finding 3, I indicated that teacher leaders improve schools as mentors, curriculum writers, lead teachers, professional learning community facilitators, professional development presenters, technology integration experts, parent and community partners, committee chairs,

student activity advisors, professional network leaders, policy experts and union leadership. Teacher participants shared a plethora of roles that teachers take on (Table 1) that range from union leadership, policy work to club advisors. This finding gives strong examples of ways that teacher leaders may use their leadership skills as teachers who advocate for the kinds of system improvements that benefit their students.

4. What are the skills, knowledge and dispositions that teacher leaders most value? In finding 4, I indicated that teacher leaders value their knowledge and expertise, strong interpersonal skills, big picture thinking, willingness to take professional risks and a penchant for deep caring that drives their work for school improvement. Participants shared key information about how they accomplish their work in schools when they reflected on practice in conversations and discussion postings. Finding 4 captures the most important aspects of these processes and habits of mind that allow teachers to move from a view of teaching as exclusively classroom based to one which includes thinking about how schools work and what kinds of obstacles prevent them from getting better. Participants agreed that teacher leaders are those who look at the big picture and then take risks by crossing the threshold of their colleagues' classrooms to suggest potentially risky collaborations. Such teacher leaders succeed at their work by cultivating strong interpersonal skills that allows them to create relationships that foster collaboration and trust. Finding 4 highlights the penchant for deep caring that teacher leaders exemplify which fuels their desire to work with others to improve schools.

5. What are the perceptions of recognized teacher leaders about what aspects of school culture support teacher leadership? In finding 5, I indicated that teacher leaders thrive in school cultures with leaders that respect their expertise, ideas and professional leadership and who give them opportunities to continue their professional learning, networking and knowledge sharing with colleagues. Participants in this study expressed that school culture was a key factor that supported or failed to support their success as teacher leaders. Data were captured that illustrated what school cultures make it easier for teachers to thrive as teacher leaders and what sorts of cultures make it hard (Table 2). School cultures where teachers freely collaborate and have the time to do it, where their professional growth and networking is noticed and used and where teachers understand that they are valued as expert practitioners support teacher leadership.

I designed a professional development (PD) project based on the findings to foster and support teacher leadership. I learned that teacher leaders are independent yet collegial professionals who are dedicated to serve children in their school improvement efforts. In addition, in this study, I discovered that school culture has a pivotal role in supporting teacher leadership. I developed the PD for teachers who are interested in developing the skill set of teacher leaders to effect positive change in their schools. I designed the PD in order to create awareness of teacher leadership, develop participants' skills and offer teachers the tools to take on diverse roles in schools and to encourage administrator-teacher discussions about finding joint solutions to school problems. Current findings captured how highly recognized teachers perceived teacher leadership. A review of the literature about teacher leadership gathered the insights of scholars who study teacher leadership to deepen

the studies' findings. In the project design, I drew information from the findings and the literature review to provide teachers who yearn to become teacher leaders with the appropriate knowledge and support to do so.

## Section 3: The Project

### **Introduction**

This qualitative study captured the perceptions of teacher leaders in a case study design. Findings revealed what skills, knowledge, and abilities teacher leaders value most as well as what school cultures are best for fostering teacher leadership. The following section outlines a project based on the genre of professional development. This project can be used to assist teachers, who yearn to expand their leadership roles, in understanding teacher leadership and how they might grow professionally to expand their roles in schools. I provide a description of the project goals, rationale, implementation, potential barriers, potential resources, and supports to assist districts who would like to use this project or create a similar one to effect social change through teacher leadership. I include a review of the literature to deepen and expand my study's findings and critical components. Finally, I discuss the evaluation of the project to offer a framework for reflection on the project's success and possible improvements or changes.

### **Description and Goals**

#### **Description**

This project is a 3-day PD for teachers who want to use their professional knowledge in expanded roles in addition to teaching. I created this project based on study findings that indicated that teachers would like to connect their talents and interests to school improvement efforts in ways that are recognized and supported. In this section, I outline the purpose and goals for the project. The overarching goal for the PD is to equip teachers with the knowledge and skills that will assist them in using their abilities in ways that serve students by expanding their roles in schools in professionally satisfying ways.

Furthermore, each day of the program will have a distinctive purpose along with additional goals.

During the first day of the PD, I will present teachers with an overview of teacher leadership, including the skills and habits of teacher leaders, along with the roles they play in schools. Teachers will learn strategies to foster a school culture that supports teacher leadership. On the second day of PD, I will engage each teacher in a self-assessment to determine potential areas of strength for leadership contributions. I will also assist them in identifying and improving upon their skills in understanding and negotiating the power structures and priorities present in schools. On the third day of the PD, I will facilitate intentional action planning that connects to teachers' strengths. Participants will learn to create actionable goals, to develop a communications strategy, and to collaborate with administrators in scenario-based discussions. At the end of the session, participants will learn to use charts to plan successful implementation. This active planning and reflection will support successful approaches to teacher leadership. I will use the goals for the PD to help me structure a significant learning experience for teachers who yearn to become teacher leaders.

### **Rationale**

The problem that prompted this study was that New Jersey teachers who are recognized at state or regional levels often struggle to use their professional knowledge in their schools and districts in roles other than teaching. Sergiovanni's (1994a) notion of community, Lieberman's (2010) focus on ways that teachers can learn from each other, and DuFour's (2004) powerful work on professional learning communities provided a conceptual framework for this study that led me to develop a professional development

project. Professional development seemed a perfect way for me to share information with teachers to open them up to their own expertise and that of their colleagues. Furthermore, the project genre was chosen because by engaging in PD, adult learners have the opportunity to use new information to solve problems that relate to their experience, social roles, and motivation (Muresan, 2013). The PD was designed using the principles of andragogy that focus on the way adults prefer to connect their learning to lived experiences and contexts in order to find immediate use for such learning and experiences (Knowles, 1970; Muresan, 2013). In order to create PD modules that keep the adult learners' needs in mind, PD facilitators take on the role of coaches who engage participants socially by helping them to "achieve their personal and professional goals through learning, self-awareness and behavior change" (Lubin, 2013, p. 52). Though coaches often work with individuals rather than a group, project workshop sessions were created that incorporated protocols that maximized opportunities for participants to share important information about their lives and work. Session leaders may pause the workshops at key junctures to ask questions that will allow participants to provide information about their own contexts to drive the session.

Similarly, I designed PD modules based on an analysis of data drawn from interviews, online message boards, and a focus group that revealed patterns, relationships, and themes about the perceptions of highly recognized teachers regarding approaches to teacher leadership. I created the PD to address the study problem by incorporating current findings into a series of collaborative activities, scenario-based discussions, and information building work. I drew the content from the individual session modules from what participants in the study indicated were important aspects of becoming a teacher

leader. Teacher leader role charts (Table 1), information on cultures that support and fail to support teacher leadership (Table 2), and the five findings provided the informational core of the PD for both discussion and collaboration.

I developed slide shows to frame and inform the PD sessions, to provide participants with logistical information, and to guide the learning plan for each session. The slides include powerful examples of the practice of teacher leaders, and were designed to assist participants in thinking through their own practice and beginning to forge their teacher leadership identity. Participants receive a printed copy of the slide show to serve as a place to take notes, jot down questions, or reflect. In addition, the slide show is projected to the front of the room on a screen. In this way, the slide show deck is also a handout. In specific cases, a given slide will indicate a site with useful readings or information, such as the resources provided by the National Network of State Teachers of the Year (NNSTOY) and the American Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association, on teacher leadership. The NNSTOY site organizes resources by subtopics related to teacher leadership and is a good place for teachers to pursue follow-up learning post PD. In addition to these examples, participants will be encouraged to share their favorite tools, resources, and insights with the group.

Tools used to analyze participants' potential as a teacher leader and the culture of their schools were drawn from the U.S. Department of Education's Teach to Lead (2015) site where PD participants can download these assessments at no cost. Some teachers may need additional technical support to access online materials or some may prefer paper copies, which will be offered. Furthermore, in order to build community and relationships



among participants, PD protocols that foster sharing and reflection are used, particularly during the first and second day.

These protocols were drawn from my personal experience as a Washington teaching ambassador fellow from 2011-2015. During that time in DC and in subsequent years, I participated and led a variety of government outreach programs that used protocols that gathered community voices by allowing participants to bring their own experiences and needs to meetings (J. Rico, personal communication, May, 2012). I observed that such open-space protocols were useful for capturing the concerns and expertise that participants brought into the room.

On the other hand, teacher participants of facilitator centered PD often complain that trainers of these sessions speak at teachers, but do not offer them the chance to interact and share expertise and thinking (State teachers of the year, personal communications, 2015). The PD series developed for this project, therefore, is designed to help participants understand what teacher leadership is by sharing examples from the study on the first day of PD. The second and third PD day, however, offer increasing amounts of time for open-space experiences in which participants are encouraged to think deeply about their own context, needs, and expertise as educators.

### **Review of the Literature**

A review of the literature helped me to connect teacher leader participant reflections to the literature on teacher leadership. I searched scholarly literature with key words such as: “teacher leadership,” “andragogy,” “transformational learning,” “professional learning,” “professional development,” “professional learning communities,” “school culture,” “school climate,” and “teacher collaboration.” The review of the literature

deepened my findings and allowed me to capture the following critical components that emerged from the findings and research.

1. Teacher leaders galvanize collegial support for school improvement.
2. Teacher leaders collaborate with multiple stakeholders.
3. Teacher leaders expand roles and use their expertise in schools.
4. Teacher leaders understand their schools as organizations.
5. Teacher leaders improve school cultures.

In the following sections, I will elaborate on key research related to these critical themes.

Scholarly studies helped me to expand and deepen this study's contribution to the field.

### **Teacher Leaders Galvanize Collegial Support for School Improvement**

Schools have leaders who operate in formal roles such as superintendents and principals. Teacher leaders, however, often achieve recognition and organizational credibility with peers and students through demonstrated expertise (Lai & Cheung, 2014). Leadership that illuminates the best practices of teaching and increases collegial participation in all aspects of school decision-making is typical of the work of teacher leaders (Lai & Cheung, 2014). In a qualitative study of seven Maine schools, Fairman and Mackenzie (2014) found that teacher leaders were motivated to engage their colleagues in school improvement efforts that focused on student learning by modeling a professional attitude, sharing their work with peers, coaching and collaborating with colleagues, and finally, by spending time to advocate for important changes by working with multiple stakeholders, both within the district and outside of it, to accomplish school improvement goals. Teacher leaders, the study found, were able to galvanize such collegial support by

“breaking down the barriers of teacher autonomy and apathy, and prodding their colleagues to take risks and change practices” (Fairman & Mackenzie, 2014, p. 69).

Whether one calls such barrier breaking actions “role defying” or simply role expanding, teacher leaders are not stopping their actions at the walls of their traditional classroom spaces, but rather are reaching out to colleagues to challenge their practices in order to expand learning opportunities for the students they all care about (Fairman & Mackenze, 2014). The leadership of teachers who figure out how to step beyond their roles to affect the success of schools is directly connected to the desire of such teachers to continually learn and renew their practice (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). As teacher leaders grow as professionals and seek to contribute more to school improvement efforts, increased collaboration with administrators and other stakeholders is warranted. In a study spanning 47 states that focused on how administrators and teachers perceived teacher leadership, administrators valued personal attributes “such as open communication with the principal, creative problem solving, collegiality on campus, organizational skills, and respect for teachers” even more than the teachers who participated in the study did, though both groups agreed that such skills were important to teacher leaders (Mills, Huerta, Watt, & Martinez, 2014, p. 157). Diplomacy is an important attribute for teacher leaders who seek to forge connections and build trust to accomplish goals to lead colleagues in schools. The research indicated that administrators value such diplomacy and personal characteristics in teachers (Mills et al., 2014). Personal characteristics are an important part of the teacher leaders’ tool kit because in order to accomplish school improvement goals, teacher leaders benefit by learning to advocate with school stakeholders to acquire the resources, professional learning, and financial and human support that they need (Berg & Souvanna,

2012). In a multiple case study that examined teacher-designed educational innovations, teachers indicated that they often needed the support of administrators and stakeholders to facilitate and implement positive school changes (Stam, Miedema, Onstenk, Wardekker, & TenDam, 2014).

### **Teacher Leaders Collaborate with Multiple Stakeholders**

Teacher leaders can learn to enhance their work for students by fostering collegial efforts to serve students. School leaders are sometimes tempted to employ external consultants who offer fancy technology-infused presentations to staff (Guskey, 2014). Instead of seeking such expertise from outside providers, teachers may organize their own professional learning around student success, professional practices and the kinds of supports and skills they need to get the work done. The collaboration that drives such professional learning should be characterized by work that is focused on accomplishing important goals, but which also includes the views of those that dissent from the group (Fullan, 2001). Professional learning communities, therefore, involve careful planning that is focused on student learning and includes a wide range of collegial ideas.

Including a diversity of perceptions in the professional learning community, however, may be thwarted by the group's desire to find a shared educational vision. Sometimes, having a shared group vision may stifle the free expression of ideas by unwittingly imposing a kind of group think (Watson, 2014). When groups insist, for example, that there is one vision and set of values, members may not feel comfortable voicing the kind of dissent that makes a professional learning group a vibrant community. As group members become socialized to the norms of the group, they are less likely to add new ideas because of the overriding sense that consensus is preferred. In such cases,

reflective dialogue is an important professional tool because it assists teachers to consider diverse perspectives. When adults actively think together about their context, they learn to consider many points of view as they adopt an open attitude that welcomes new perspectives (Lambert, 2003).

Sharing data to guide educators' instructional decisions may also provide common ground for professional learning communities to think together. In 2010-2011, the state of Delaware required all of its teachers to participate in professional learning communities for 90 minutes, as a part of the state's U.S. Department of Education's "Race to the Top" grant (Farley-Ripple & Buttram, 2013). During the designated PLC time, teachers analyzed data, discussed practice, planned instruction and facilitated a team focus on increasing teacher effectiveness to improve student learning. The theory of action for the Delaware grant implementation team included an understanding that such teacher effectiveness is social in nature. One principal, cited in the study, indicated that it was important for him to support a culture where collaborative processes are highly valued (Farley-Ripple & Buttram, 2013). In addition, an analysis of the Delaware program found that administrators assisted teachers by scheduling time to collaborate and by providing access to data. Despite the fact that fulfilling the requirements of state mandates created professional learning communities in districts across the state, grant participants recognized that it takes relevant and consistent local work to sustain such school improvement efforts (Farley-Ripple & Buttram, 2013).

### **Teachers Expand Roles and Use their Expertise in Schools**

Findings for this study illuminated the many roles that teacher leaders take on in schools. From mentoring early career teachers or struggling colleagues to advocating for the teaching profession through unions or educational policy, teachers serve students and

schools in a wide variety of ways. Nevertheless, teachers often work in a “cage” that is created by the “routines, rules, and habits that exhaust teachers’ time, passion and energy” (Hess, 2015, p. 3). Hess found that teacher leaders, whom he calls, cage-busting teachers, have learned that it is important to move beyond discussions to engage in actions that matter at the school level (Hess, 2015). After interviewing hundreds of teacher leaders, Hess found that teacher leaders tend to take concrete actions that focus on the problems that need solving in schools. Teachers who accomplish such goals are very clear about the authority they wield because it flows from their expertise as classroom professionals. Teachers know a great deal about day-to-day teaching and learning, the way that evaluation systems work and what measures falls flat in schools. Successful teacher leaders learn how to raise their concerns by bringing forth solid evidence to make a case to the right people in schools to get things done. Hess recommended that teachers help administrators say “yes” by speaking up when their expertise is needed and that they avoid professional jealousy by recognizing the contributions of peers and understanding the schools’ power relations while exercising patience and building trust with colleagues. Most of all, Hess insisted that teachers shun the perception of being locked in a professional cage by actively creating better schools with their efforts and expertise (Hess, 2015).

Some teacher routines, rules, and habits may emerge from the teacher education experience. In a study on how 161 pre-service teachers in Pakistan perceived their potential for teacher leadership, researchers asked participants if they possessed the following characteristics of teacher leadership: an openness to the perspective of others, optimism and the ability to regulate their emotions, strong interpersonal skills, instructional expertise and interest, an openness to learning and the ability to collaborate and take initiatives. Findings

revealed that teachers believed that their teacher education better prepared them to teach proficiently than to take initiatives. Researchers recommended that schools of education exert additional efforts to prepare candidates to feel more prepared to lead initiatives in schools (Nudrat & Akhtar, 2014).

Snoek & Volman (2014) studied the transferability of teacher leadership competencies to the work place in a participant group of two cohorts of graduates of a Master's program that was focused on teacher leadership. Participants in this study were eager to apply their knowledge to concrete tasks and goals. One said: "The atmosphere I've created in my classes, I want that outside the classroom too. We've discussed it within our team and they were eager." (Snoek & Volman, 2014, p. 95). Out of 16 graduates from the program, 6 acquired new roles in schools that used their leadership training, but 10 reported that there was no change in their positions at school, either formally or informally. Nevertheless, supervisors of 13 of the participants stated that they could see the results of the program through a variety of school improvement efforts undertaken by graduates (Snoek & Volman, 2014). This perceptual gap, between how supervisors and teachers evaluated the transferability of teacher leadership competencies, seems to indicate the need for additional reflective dialogue.

In schools where participants took on expanded roles, teachers and the administrators had developed a reflective partnership where a discussion of new roles and opportunities to engage in school improvement was a topic of continual administrator-teacher dialogue. Nevertheless, even in these high transferability schools, two participants left their districts 6 months after graduation because they felt a lack of support and recognition. In schools with a low level of transferability of teacher leadership

competencies, participants indicated feelings of isolation, no change of roles beyond teaching and little time for teachers to meet and reflect with colleagues. Snoek & Volman made 3 recommendations to increase the level of transferability of teacher leadership competencies:

1. The development of “strategic partnerships between formal and informal leaders.” (Snoek & Volman, 2014, p. 99)
2. More opportunities for teachers to meet, to reflect and collaborate with peers.
3. The development of “strategic sensitivity” in teacher leaders, that helps them to change the organizational climate to make the transfer of teacher leadership competencies more likely (Snoek & Volman, 2014, p. 99).

Teacher leadership, the research indicates, is not only about developing competencies that teachers can use in expanded roles to assist in school improvement, but it may also exist in schools where school leaders with formal roles benefit from engaging in reflective dialogue with teachers who wish to lead.

### **Teacher Leaders Understand their Schools as Organizations**

Teacher leaders possess big picture thinking that enables them to see their schools as organizations. Kazan and Gabor (2013) opened an article on writing program administration leadership by referring to the marauder’s map from J.K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* series. The magical map displays all of the people in the school community in real time as they relate to one another. Harry Potter, the main character of Rowling’s series, uses the map “to maneuver in an increasingly complex environment while developing his own powers to do good” (Kazan & Gabor, 2013, p. 135). Though teachers do not possess this magical map, they can learn to better understand how to analyze the power structures



in schools where they work. Mapping power relationships is something that requires thoughtful awareness of the relationships, roles and positions in schools (Kazan & Gabor, 2013).

Teachers may gain useful insights about how to understand their schools as organizations from the research literature. Bolman and Deal (2014) analyzed organizations as cultures and outlined four perspectives or frames of organizations with their corresponding metaphors: “structural (factory), human resource (family), political (jungle) and symbolic (temple or theater)” (p.344). The authors claimed that using multi-frame thinking helps one understand organizations better because it allows an analysis of situations from a variety of perspectives. Furthermore, Ingersoll stated that schools “are social institutions akin to small societies whose purposes are in important ways like those of another institution – the family” (Ingersoll, 2009, p. 11). The changing world of work, with flattened hierarchies and multicultural workers connected virtually around projects and teams, is also reflected in the emergence of nontraditional family structures (Benko, Anderson, & Vickberg, 2011). Organizational leadership, once envisioned as a ladder where one climbs up step-by-step in a systematic manner, reflects an outmoded view of organizational leadership that might be replaced with the image of a lattice; a structure that exists in three dimensions and has no limits (Benko et al., 2011). The lattice metaphor seems to reflect a wider distribution of teacher leadership roles, rather than the formal positioning of a few leaders at the top of a ladder.

### **Teacher Leaders Improve School Cultures**

Teacher leader participants in this study repeatedly emphasized the importance of working in school cultures that support their efforts. In addition, many teacher leader

participants were able to improve school cultures through personal and collaborative efforts. In a study of how to attract and retain top talent to teach in high-needs schools, Auguste, Kihn, and Miller (2010) found that teachers valued a good working environment and strong school leadership more than having better salaries. In another study that focused on ways that countries with high performing systems prepare teachers and school leaders for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Schleicher (2012) found that school leaders are tasked with creating school cultures that foster collaboration. Teachers in systems with supportive school cultures demonstrated a high degree of teamwork by sharing ideas and resources and challenging each other's assumptions. Varlas (2013) emphasized that when one thinks of educational reform; the conversation should not focus on the effectiveness of teachers. Instead, the focus should be on the creation of effective systems, within which teachers have strong induction programs, mentoring and the kinds of supports that allow them to engage in reflective practice.

Teacher leaders may also improve school cultures through labor-management collaboration. Unions and educational associations and the teachers they represent may be seen as adversaries of boards of education and school leaders, especially in districts with divisive contract negotiations. Nevertheless, success stories from districts around the country have demonstrated that this paradigm may be shifting (Futernick, McClellan & Vince, 2012). Reports from districts that have successfully engaged in labor-management collaboration indicate that fostering respectful relationships and strong informal communication, sharing meals outside of school and providing advance notice for meetings are factors that help to build a strong school culture of collaboration (Futernick et al., 2012).

Fullan (2011) discussed the notion of the *wrong drivers* in education reform. He suggested that strategies that focus on reforming the work of individual teachers with an emphasis on accountability, individual teacher and leader quality, technology and fragmented strategies are likely to fail if they are not coupled with what he calls *effective drivers*. Fullan said, "...the key to system-wide success is to situate the energy of educators and students as the central driving force." (Fullan, 2011, p. 3) In order to accomplish this, Fullan suggested that effective drivers are teacher motivation, a culture of continuous improvement and collective work. Fullan's description of school cultures echoes the perceptions of this study's highly recognized teacher leader participants, who stressed the need to work in or to create schools with cultures that support their collaborative school improvement efforts.

### **Conclusion**

A review of the literature adds the voices of scholars to this study of teacher leadership, helping to shed light on ways teacher leaders understand their schools as organizations whose culture they seek to improve. Furthermore, teacher leaders use their interpersonal skills and penchant for caring to organize their peers to collaborate on professional improvement that fosters student success. The scholars whose work was reviewed for this study support the notion that teacher leaders are individuals who reach out beyond the confines of the classroom's walls to build relationships and work with multiple stakeholders for the good of children and the school. Nevertheless, the literature also indicates that there is work to be done in the area of teacher education and in building the kinds of systems in schools that truly support teacher leadership.

## **Project Description**

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

School districts are places that seek to serve students' educational needs. By offering the district this PD series, I will assist teaching personnel to discover ways to expand their roles and reach beyond the classroom to help students succeed. In order to implement this project, I will need key resources. The administrator of the school district that hosts the PD will be asked to allow teachers time to participate in the program, preferably when they are under contract before the summer vacation. I will hold PD sessions in school classrooms or in conferencing space, using either a portable school-issued projector to project session presentations or a smart board, if one is available. I will request that photocopies for handouts and colorful paper for name tents be provided, using the school budget for materials.

### **Potential Barriers**

Schools are places that have competing priorities, and the administrators and the teachers' union may have different plans for tapping into human resources that may not allow implementation of this project the first time it is proposed. Furthermore, some teachers may not be familiar with the term teacher leadership and may be reluctant to participate in an activity that may appear to ask them to do more work without additional compensation. To pave the way for fruitful conversations and the creation of a first cohort of teacher leaders, I will offer "lunch and learn" opportunities for colleagues that will be presented as informal and open learning conversations during a regularly scheduled lunch hour. Similarly, I will have conversations with the administrators and union representatives

to share information about how schools and teachers are benefitting from teacher leadership opportunities to help them envision how this PD would be useful to the district.

I plan to ask the school administrator for funds to purchase meals and snacks for the participants' working lunch. If the school administrator is not able to provide lunch, I would request that teachers bring their own lunch or that the parent teacher organization or a local business offer food and refreshments as a gift to the faculty. Furthermore, space for meetings may be at a premium as districts hold many meetings and offer many student-learning experiences. If the project is approved and scheduled, however, I will have to reserve rooms early in the year by working with the proper administrative offices that will ensure a professional place to host the sessions.

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

Planning for implementation of the PD will take place during the academic year. This planning will include the superintendent, the assistant superintendent and the teachers union and me. The details of the proposed timeline are shown on Table 3:

Table 3

*Proposed Timeline*

Date	Task	Person	Deliverable
September/October	Plan meetings	Administration, board and union representative	Program announcement
November	Design key participants components of outreach	Researcher	Email outreach to
December	Craft and submit volunteer responses	Potential participants	Emails
January	Select first 25 participants	Committee	School email announcement
February	Plan board of education presentation	Researcher, board representative	Slide show highlighting PD
March	Coordinate time and place for student discussion	Student leaders, researcher	1. Lunchtime discussion on leadership 2. Discussion on TL initiative
March - June	Plan online network	Researcher, participants	Online teacher leader platform

**Roles and Responsibilities of Student**

My responsibility and role will be to organize all meetings, facilitate communication between stakeholder groups and present all workshops for the PD. The district administrators and the teachers' union are important partners that can contribute to the success of this initiative. For this program to be successfully implemented, I will create a positive outreach experience that helps all stakeholders feel included in the planning. Furthermore, I will use strong facilitation skills that will allow the concerns and priorities of each group to align enough so that support for this project can be generated. Even

though I will have a well-planned professional development program, stakeholder support is essential for implementation. I recognize that I will ask for employee time, institutional space and collaboration when educators and districts may have other concerns and priorities. I will have to ensure that I present the project as an important vehicle for school improvement efforts that relates directly to the work of the district. In this way, my role will be that of a partner to all stakeholder groups.

### **Project Evaluation Plan**

#### **Formative Evaluation**

Formative assessment is a useful tool to help gauge progress towards learning goals (Wiggins, 2012). In order to provide participants with opportunities to give feedback on the progress they are making in the workshops, I will invite them to reflect on what worked best for them and what may have been lacking in the sessions. These formative assessments will take the form of exit tickets that will ask for a quick response to a key question related to the workshop goals, a narrative response written on an index card, a vote or a simple physical response like a thumbs up or down. Some workshops involve voting on the most important themes that emerge from discussions and will be charted on large pieces of paper placed around the room.

All formative assessments used in each session are included in workshop presentations, notes to the facilitator or handouts. Besides written feedback that participants will provide to me in sessions, I will be sure to ask “open-ended and provocative” questions (Hargraves, Gipps & Pickering, 2014, p. 317) that will help me understand how well participants are grasping the important ideas and skills that I present. At the end of each session and at the end of each day, I will have the chance to review these participant

reflections to ensure that I am connecting what is happening in the sessions to the participants' lived experiences, professional learning desires and interests. In this way, I will gather data through formative assessment that I will use to reteach or redirect the learning to best help participants achieve their goals.

### **Summative Evaluation**

In this project, I will use summative evaluation to measure how well workshop participants have achieved PD goals (Perera-Diltz & Moe, 2014). At the end of the PD, participants will be given the first three sections of the same self-assessment that they took on the first day of the program (Center for Strengthening the Teaching Profession, 2013) to use as a tool to measure growth. Questions on the self-assessment pertain to the participant's ability to work with adult learners, collaborate, communicate and have knowledge of content and pedagogy. Since I did not seek to increase participants' knowledge of content and pedagogy, I will not ask them to complete this section of the self-assessment for a second time. Participants may find it valuable to understand their depth of knowledge of content and pedagogy to deepen their professional practice so I will ask that participants retain both the first and the second self-assessment to use as benchmarks for ongoing progress. Participants will measure and understand their skills, habits and dispositions as a teacher leader by using the self-assessment. For the summative assessment, I will distribute a handout that asks participants to respond to six narrative questions:

1. Please explain ways that you believe you can be a teacher leader.
2. What are the skills, habits and dispositions that you feel will be most useful to you as a teacher leader?



3. What is the school improvement project that you would like to work on this year?
4. What are some barriers to your success and how do you plan on overcoming them?
5. What was most useful to you about this 3-day professional development program?
6. What recommendations do you have to improve this program?

This summative evaluation will be useful to evaluate how the participants' competency level changed as a result of the PD, which is an important aspect of assessing participants' individual achievement (Pellegrino, 2014). The answers to the six questions, therefore, will serve as an end product that I will analyze to glean rich information about how to build future workshops to develop teacher leaders.

### **Overall Evaluation Goals**

Evaluation methods, both formative and summative, are directly aligned with PD goals in order to assist the participants to transform themselves into stronger and more able teacher leaders who can more directly participate in the meaningful work of school improvement. Teachers who participate in the PD will be able to understand what teacher leadership is and how they can best use their skills and interests to help them to improve their own school. I include formative assessment in every session by building into the workshops the opportunity for participants to create written reflections, complete exit tickets, respond physically to conversations (thumbs up or down, raised hands) or to vote for the topic of greatest interest in a group discussion. When the participants complete the PD, I will provide them with the first three sections of the self-assessment that they took at the start of the program in addition to six narrative questions. Participants will retain their

self-assessment, but I will collect the narrative responses as a summative assessment in order to discover whether or not teachers perceive that the sessions have been useful to them on the path of becoming teacher leaders. The evaluation process itself is part of the professional development training as it engages the teachers in ongoing reflection about how the program has increased their awareness of teacher leadership, but more directly how teachers can increase their reach as teacher leaders in the schools and districts they care about. I will use the overall evaluation goal as a guide to assess whether or not teachers perceive that they have increased their ability to serve more confidently and effectively as teacher leaders in schools.

### **Key Stakeholder Groups**

When I created this PD, based on the findings from this study, it was clear to me that teachers work in communities that have multiple stakeholders and that it would be necessary to include those stakeholder groups in conversations and planning related to the project. Participants for the PD will be district teachers who will participate in all 3 days of the program and a group of volunteer administrators who will participate in one session on the third day only. In the timeline planning, I include key community stakeholder groups of teachers, administrators, union leaders, the board of education and students. Union leaders, who are also teachers, may be present in the participant group if they respond to the outreach for participants, but they will not be a separate category of participants. Students and board of education members will be informed about the program and involved in discussions about its themes, but they will not be included as program participants. I indicated in the timeline for project implementation when the stakeholder groups will be invited into the planning and implementation process.

**Teachers.** The core group of participants for this PD will be the first 25 teachers who self select to participate in the program. The only additional group will be administrators who volunteer to participate in a scenario-based conversation on day 3. The focus for the program, however, will be to transform this group of self-selected teachers into a community of teacher leaders who can take action individually or in concert to improve their school. Teachers who volunteer to participate in the program may teach at any grade level or in any subject area, but some may continue to work together, as a cohort. Reflective tools, shared information and action planning with colleagues may prove useful in their ongoing teacher leadership efforts.

**Administrators.** The superintendent and the assistant superintendent as well as the school principals, will form part of the administrative team that will be crucial partners to the success of this program. I will include district administrators in the planning and implementation discussions. Furthermore, in recognition of the importance of this group, I will invite administrators to volunteer to participate in a scenario-based conversation on the third day of the program. Perhaps this conversation will help participants to discover ways to jointly solve programs and look at issues from multiple perspectives to envision a greater partnership. Study participants indicated that school cultures with an adversarial climate make it difficult for teachers to lead. During the PD, district administrators and teachers have the opportunity to participate in cross-role, scenario-based conversations that focus on how stakeholders collaborate to improve schools.

**Union leaders.** Unions are a collective voice for teachers in the district. Union support is an important part of helping me to develop potential participant trust and interest in the program. I will strive to help union leaders see this effort as part of the shared work

and goals of both teachers and administrators, because without union support, teachers may be far less likely to volunteer to be part of the program cohort. Teacher leadership is a notion that is widely embraced, but by inviting the local union leadership into planning conversations, I will help assure them that the goal is to provide professional development that will be of high value to teachers and to the students they serve in their local context. By recognizing the union as the professional association for district teachers, I include them in the process of offering district teachers opportunities for growth and renewal through the PD.

**Other stakeholders.** The board of education, parents and the district's students are important allies in the creation of a successful program. I will make a presentation at an open meeting of the board of education to help them to understand how teacher leadership efforts can benefit our district's students. Parent teacher organization leaders regularly participate in the open meetings of the board of education so I will reach out to all district parents by presenting to the board at a public meeting. Students will also learn about the overall notion of leadership through a lunchtime conversation called "Conversations about leading," that will start with the question, "What is a leader?" and will ask students to participate in a conversation about how they are leaders, either formally and informally. By approaching teacher leadership as a system-wide change, I will include all stakeholder groups.

## **Project Implications**

### **Social Change Implications**

When teachers understand their own ability to transform the schools they work in and they have acquired the skills to do it, they become agents of social change. In this

study, an analysis of the data has helped me to reveal key findings that can have a strong impact on how teachers understand their own skills, habits and dispositions in order to lead change in their own schools and districts. Through my research, I have learned that teacher leaders have characteristics, talents and tendencies that help them to expand their practice into roles that extend beyond the classroom to energize school improvement, both as individuals or as teachers working in collegial groups. I also learned about how school culture supports or fails to support teacher leadership by capturing the lived experiences of participants who have shared how they have transformed their schools into the kinds of places that will foster the passionate work of teacher leaders. Furthermore, by taking these findings and using them as the basis to build a PD for teachers who yearn to be teacher leaders, I am able to assist teachers in their journey to transform the schools they care about. Table 1 contains a list of the many roles that teacher leader participants in this study have stated are important to them in schools. By sharing these examples with teacher participants in the project, I assist teachers to seek out expanded teacher leadership possibilities in their own school context, either by imitating the roles they see or by recognizing teacher leadership work that they are already involved in. I will use the sample roles in discussions with project participants to help them to understand how they can use what they are good at and care about to help their schools and the children they serve.

Teacher leadership may significantly affect the lives of individuals or it may change the way systems function. Sometimes, these changes take the form of an improved literacy experience for a single first grader that resulted from the work of teacher leaders who used their expertise to select the best reading program. At other times, one may observe system-wide changes like the creation of hybrid teacher leader roles in a district. Katzenmeyer and

Moller (2001) suggested that there is potential for teacher leadership when teachers wake to their own power, ability and expertise to improve schools.

### **Importance of the Project to Local Stakeholders**

This project has potential importance to local stakeholders because I will offer it to the district where I currently serve as well as to other districts that may be interested throughout the state of New Jersey. The district where I am employed could benefit from this PD because there are seven schools led by one superintendent, one assistant superintendent, seven principals and a team of subject-specific coordinators. There are five elementary schools, one middle school and one high school. I serve in all five elementary schools and part of my job description is to help teachers take on greater leadership for school improvement, specifically in the area of student talent development. I serve students as a gifted and talented specialist, but I also coordinate many enrichment activities to students with a full spectrum of student abilities, in order to help them develop their talents and interests. I work with teachers who advise clubs and also with grade-level groups to help them create more project-based and constructivist learning opportunities and differentiated instruction. This PD could provide an important opportunity for teachers who yearn to be teacher leaders to develop awareness and skills. I have already reached out to the union representatives in the district's five elementary schools as well as to the district's principals, with the full support of the administration to do so. The project that I have developed as a result of this study's findings could prove to be of immediate use to district leadership and teachers.

In addition, other districts have contacted me in New Jersey to help them create more collaboration and interest in professional development among their teachers. District

administrators report that teachers have become overwhelmed and disheartened by the strong accountability atmosphere and the evaluation demands that are evident. Some teachers have responded by working fewer hours, collaborating less and closing the door of their classrooms. It is interesting to note that many of the attributes of school cultures that fail to support teacher leadership, are evident in these schools. I expect, therefore, that this study's findings and the subsequent project that emerged from them will be important to local stakeholders.

### **Importance of the Project in the Larger Context**

In the larger context, I believe that this project has enormous potential for assisting teachers and schools. As I have indicated in the review of the literature, the words *teacher leadership* are used in multiple contexts (U.S. Department of Education, 2015, National Board of Professional Teaching Standards, 2014) and initiatives. The *Teach to Lead* program is both an outgrowth of the U.S. Department of Education's R.E.S.P.E.C.T. project, initiated in 2011 (U.S. Department of Education, 2011) and the work of 84 organizations that have signed on as supporters of *Teach to Lead* (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). This national-level teacher leadership work is interesting to me because I have observed a growing understanding among policy makers that the true and important work of teacher leadership must happen in the field, in the classrooms and schools of this nation. When I formed part of the U.S. Department of Education's teaching ambassador fellowship team, fellows traveled the country to facilitate conversations about teacher leadership. During these sessions, many teachers asked when federal help would come to assist them with their plans for the implementation of teacher leadership. The fellowship team consistently responded that the real changes had to occur at a local level and not at the

national level. During these discussions, teachers realized that the work of teacher leadership emerges from local contexts in order to serve local school improvement needs. Ambassador Fellows further highlighted the idea that teachers could expand the reach of their work by connecting with teacher leaders, either virtually or at professional conferences, from a diversity of geographical regions to grow as professionals and lead their own educational movement. The fact that diverse organizations with very different political affiliations have signed on as supporters of the *Teach to Lead* initiative is indicative of the massive efforts of teachers around the country whose ideas about teacher leadership seem to have been heard by policy makers and the leaders of major education organizations.

In New Jersey, I am part of the New Jersey Council of State Teachers of the Year and am active with them in planning teacher leadership initiatives. The group envisions itself as a teacher leader *think tank* that can provide expertise to local districts, state and other states to increase teacher leadership efforts. I am also a member of several education boards, both at a state and national level that will allow me to have the opportunity to foster communication, awareness and support for teacher leadership initiatives. In addition, I have several presentations planned for this fall to share this study's initial findings and to lead conversations about how these findings may be useful to teachers in the state, region and nation.



## Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

### **Project Strengths**

This project's strengths directly relate to the research and analysis of findings. Sergiovanni (2004) discussed the "organizational competence" that would be necessary in schools for the "collective intelligence" of teachers to flourish (p. 4). DuFour (2004) observed that teachers must coordinate their efforts and strategies to serve students. Lieberman (2010) pointed out ways that teachers have expanded their roles in schools, using their talents and passions to improve student learning and transforming school cultures. Though the transformative work of teacher leaders, schools can become the organizationally competent places that Sergiovanni (1994b) envisioned and that DuFour (2004) recommended. Lieberman's (2010) focus on seeing teachers' daily work as important, professional, and public is exactly what I am striving to accomplish in the PD that emerged from this study's findings. As a result of the PD, teachers will have the opportunity to become part of a community of learners who focus on improving their practice and leading important school improvement initiatives. I have designed the sessions to increase awareness of teacher leadership, to help participants understand how their own talents and skills can be useful to school improvement efforts, and to assist participants as they draft strong implementation plans. Participants will also gain a strong awareness of the importance of their collegial relationships as they create teams that can accomplish school goals. The greatest strength of this project, therefore, is that it will enable participants the opportunity to improve their professional life by creating a more satisfying and effective educational experience for themselves, their colleagues and the students they serve. In this

way, this study may contribute to the body of knowledge that recognizes that teaching is important, professional, and public work.

### **Project Limitations**

The chief project limitation rests in securing the support of multiple stakeholders in schools. I have designed this project to help unleash a wealth of teacher talent in schools to support students, but also to enliven the interests and passions of the talented teachers. I believe that by offering willing teachers new roles and opportunities to use their abilities in an unending series of projects and programs, they will remain engaged in important work for many years. Nevertheless, I recognize that simply providing a school or district with a strong and well-researched plan may not be enough to ensure program success.

Killion (2011) discussed the need for teacher leadership at every level in schools. Nevertheless, schools have organizational cultures that may either provide a strong or weak climate for teacher leadership (Gumuseli & Eryilmaz, 2011). It is possible that leaders who operate in a top-down hierarchy, for example, would not look kindly upon the work of teacher leaders who may be seen as a disruptive and unwelcome force. Educational leaders are primarily interested in student and institutional success, but just as in every profession, some leaders may be more involved in political struggles for scarce terrain (Bolman & Deal, 2003). Furthermore, teachers who yearn to be teacher leaders may find that their peers do not encourage teacher leadership work. The project, therefore, is limited to schools where the leaders and teachers are open to supporting the development of teacher leadership. Nevertheless, in order to reach schools that do not immediately support such teacher leadership development, teacher leaders who are trained in the PD sessions may

expand upon their school work by creating regional networks or meetings where teachers could empower themselves with awareness and skills to bring back to their schools.

Another project limitation is that it may be difficult to document evidence of successful teacher leadership that may emerge as a result of the PD. I will offer cohort participants an array of options that will help them share their success through presentations at district meetings, professional organizations' subject-specific national and state conferences, the yearly conference for the teachers' union, or presentations at community centers. Nevertheless, the excitement felt at the end of a PD may be hard to maintain as teachers return to their daily responsibilities. In order to foster an ongoing spirit of collaboration in an atmosphere of trust, I will suggest that program members organize social activities with food and refreshments, on or off campus, throughout the year to foster the experience of participating in a professional network. In order to extend the feeling of community, I will highlight the success of the teachers who complete the teacher leadership program and I will encourage others to do so. Furthermore, I will support program graduates to foster teacher leadership among their peers who may be interested in participating in future PD series.

### **Recommendations for Alternate Approaches**

#### **Alternate Approaches to the Problem**

In the project limitations outlined in the previous section, I indicated that this project would be difficult to implement in schools with administrators who do not welcome teacher leadership, or in schools with a negative collegial culture where teaching peers may see those who yearn to be teacher leaders as threats or outliers. For such situations, an

alternate approach to the problem was needed to provide professional development and networking opportunities to teachers who yearn to become teacher leaders.

### **Alternative Definitions of the Problem**

The definition of the problem that prompted this study was to reveal how teacher talent can best be used to assist in school improvement in New Jersey schools, both in and out of the classroom. I worked with a participant group of 12 highly-recognized teachers in New Jersey who had demonstrated, prior to their involvement in this study, that they were committed and active teachers who passionately and consistently used their talents to create beneficial changes at a local and state level. The data that were captured as a result of three forms of data collection indicated the many ways that they created such change in their local contexts. In the project that emerged from this study, I support the development of teachers who have already demonstrated their talents as teacher leaders as well as the yearning of teachers who have the potential to serve, but who may not have taken on school improvement responsibilities outside of the classroom setting. By participating in this project's PD, such teachers who may never have had the opportunity to serve as teacher leaders learn to use their talents in schools in both small and large ways. Some teachers may have toiled within their classrooms, remaining unrecognized outside of their subject area or grade level due to their quiet personalities. Educational leaders may not notice the success, struggles, and need for support of some teachers, leaving them to work alone and unnoticed. Therefore, two alternative definitions of the problem for this study are as follows:

1. Reveal ways to highlight the positive work of teachers in schools.

2. Reveal ways to create out-of-school online and local networks of teachers who want to learn more about teacher leadership.

These alternative definitions of the problem align with the problem that prompted this study because all problem statements are written to reveal how teacher talent can best be used in schools. These two alternate problems, however, address that the participants in this study were already recognized exemplary teacher leaders and that teachers who could potentially benefit from the results of this study may work in schools with cultures that fail to support teacher leadership or with colleagues who are not immediately interested in becoming teacher leaders.

### **Alternate Solutions to the Local Problem**

Teachers who work in settings where they do not have the opportunity to develop teacher leadership may benefit from alternate solutions that address their needs. Such solutions are designed to engage groups of teachers who may have less awareness of teacher leadership, and to support school leaders who do not yet understand why fostering teacher leadership would be of value. Alternate solutions are a good way for the researcher to recognize that teachers work in many different settings that present unique challenges.

**Ways to highlight the positive work of teachers in schools.** When schools are not accustomed to highlighting the work of individual teachers or groups of teachers, there may be few avenues for showcasing positive outcomes. In such a setting, teacher leaders could develop partnerships with local philanthropic organizations such as the Masons or Rotary that may be interested in offering teacher excellence prizes that would require evidence of student products and teacher reflections. In addition, public organizations like the local library often have art displays or exhibits where one could organize an exhibit of teachers'

work with students that could include meetings with the teacher who could be called a Creative Director for student artists. In addition, the student products could include a variety of subject areas to indicate what student success looks like in painting, essays, social justice initiatives, sports films, chess competitions, and peer leadership. The idea would be to include many artifacts of teacher and student success to highlight.

Furthermore, the exhibit could be a multimedia one that showcases student films and clips of successful classroom moments. Such an exhibit would not require the approval of the school administrator, but the school administrator could certainly be honored as a leader of such teacher initiatives. Hopefully, this type of event would foster a mutual acceptance in the school or district about the exciting opportunities of teacher leadership that can lead to school improvement. Similarly, the local press could be invited to feature student and teacher success in articles that relate to a wide variety of student and teacher initiatives. Good press can be useful to help the public pay attention to what is working in schools and to provide parents with information that will fuel their ability to voice support of teacher leadership initiatives and programs.

Within the school itself, there are also small but significant ways to support the growth of teacher leadership. Informal lunch-and-learn groups could be created to share ideas about pedagogy or information about projects, to introduce best practices, or to read and discuss articles that highlight the issues teachers care about. Teachers could be invited to participate during their free time to share their concerns and work together on professional learning and projects. Even in schools where teacher leadership is not supported by administrators or peers, informal communication and collaboration in small

groups of likeminded peers may serve to develop the kind of community that would be more likely to showcase teachers' success.

**Ways to create out-of-school online and local networks of teachers.** With the rise of social media, teachers are not limited to the collegial parameters of their school or district. Many professional organizations offer teachers the opportunity to post lessons and to share their expertise. Teachers may seek out the resources contained online, but they may not be able to connect with the teacher down the hall. An alternative solution to the problem could be the creation of a private online group focused on the topic of teacher leadership. Educational tools that are available free of charge, such as those provided by organizations such as edWeb (Schmucki, 2015), allow teacher leaders the opportunity to share blogs, chats and resources to improve their practice. In addition, teachers could invite fellow teachers from their school into these online communities to help foster the development of small teams of developing teacher leaders at the local level.

In order to provide teachers with the opportunity to also meet in person, *meetups* could be organized through the online group that could include get-togethers in local restaurants or attendance at educational conferences or lectures. Furthermore, the online environment provides teacher leaders with access to tools to organize videoconferences or webinars that deal with a topic that has been important to the group. Virtual meetings can also be hosted through online meeting tools, when personal meetings prove difficult to organize. Teachers, therefore, who yearn to become teacher leaders, but who do not work in schools where such leadership is fostered, will have access to opportunities to develop their teacher leadership and receive needed support when these alternate solutions are offered.

### **Scholarship, Project Development, and Leadership and Change**

In my quest to identify how New Jersey teachers can assume leadership roles within their schools, I gathered data from and developed findings with teachers who are vested in promoting teacher leadership. As a New Jersey teacher, I have observed colleagues engage in high levels of teacher leadership in expanded roles, at the same time as I viewed other educators struggle to use their talents in multiple settings.

I yearned to capture and understand the factors that made it possible for some teachers to succeed and satisfactorily use their abilities to help students learn and schools improve at the same time as other teachers could not. I expected to learn what professional and personal strategies teachers used to continually learn as professionals and to keep inspired in their daily work. I also wanted to understand how teachers managed workplace problems that could include difficult colleagues or school administrators who did not readily support the ideas they dreamed to implement. I was eager to engage in the research process because I trusted that it would equip me with the scholarly tools that could help me lift up the voices of teachers so that their perceptions and experiences could be captured through my work.

As a scholar, I had to learn to moderate my enthusiasm for the subject and to ground myself in the research process. I thought that the problem was significant, but I needed to learn whether other scholars would affirm these ideas in their research. The scholarship of Sergiovanni (1994a), Lieberman & Miller (2004), and DuFour (2004) offered me a lens through which I could interpret what I was reading in an expansive review of the literature. Their ideas on community, on the importance of teachers' work



and on ways to initiate practices that foster continual learning offered me a hopeful vision for teaching that inspired and framed my scholarship throughout the study.

When I selected the participant group of 12 highly recognized New Jersey teachers, I was anxious to begin to collect three forms of data. Within a week, participants volunteered for the study and I could begin to schedule individual interviews and to initiate the online discussion board conversations. During this time, I kept a reflective journal to help me understand my work as a scholar and to learn from each experience. After I listened to my first taped interview, I entered into my journal:

Today's interview was very exciting and I found the participant open to sharing. I have to say, however, that I talked too much at key moments in the process. Instead of allowing the participant to have enough time to process, I jumped in with a question and then awkwardly pulled back to allow her to speak. Next time, give the participant more time. Be quiet!

Notes like these helped me to maintain awareness in the interview process so that the lived experiences and perceptions of my participants could emerge from the data collection.

After I had completed the fourth interview, I noted my progress in the journal:

I notice that I am improving in my ability to create space for the participant to respond in the interview. Today, it was very hard because the participant needed more processing time than I might have thought, but waiting was well worth it.

When I allowed for time, the participant shared deep and important perceptions for the study.

I found that learning about what the participant needed from me as a researcher was empowering because I realized that with my increased skills, I could offer participants a

better opportunity to share their experiences and insights. My success as a researcher, therefore, was intimately tied to my ongoing learning through the research process.

### **Reflective Analysis about Personal Learning**

Once I gained skill as an interviewer, my confidence and energy grew. I began to see that the world appeared to be filled with potential data that I could capture in my daily conversations in both formal and informal settings. It is almost as if the world lit up in a new way that I had never experienced. When I went to a gas station, for example, I would consider whether anyone had captured the lived experiences of workers in such a job. When I visited an airport, I noticed that custom officials had detained an elderly Arabic speaking woman wearing a *hijab* scarf. As a result, I yearned to learn about the lived experiences of individuals of diverse cultures in U.S. airports. Over time, I learned to observe these events with interest and joy, while reminding myself that my deep focus had to be on my study. I strove to curb my enthusiasm so that I could transform myself into a dispassionate collector of data, driven by a desire to learn what the data would indicate upon analysis. I realized that there would never be time in my life to collect all of the potentially interesting data, but that if I could focus on data collection within my study, I could expand upon my abilities to embark on other well-researched projects in the future.

### **Growth of Self as a Scholar**

As I expanded my skills, I began to identify myself as a researcher. I stated in conversations, “I am a qualitative researcher” instead of simply saying, “I am doing a doctoral study.” I noticed that I began to identify with the habits of mind that I perceived researchers possessed. This led me to consume and analyze research with interest, collect data systematically and use analytic skills to discover findings in hundreds of pages of

transcribed data. Participants in the study, for example, wrote answers to questions posed to them during a 6-week period that were detailed, well written and informative. I printed out the pages from the website that hosted the private message board discussions, along with the interview and focus group transcripts. Altogether, I collected over 200 pages of data to analyze, which seemed quite daunting. My overriding sentiment, however, was to honor my participants' significant offerings of time by paying careful attention to their words as important data. I had to ensure that I would see the patterns that emerged from their words and that I would keep any potential bias in check. As I approached the data as a researcher, I discovered the findings by noticing how participants repeated and emphasized key ideas and insights in all forms of data collection. I learned that through careful analysis, the narration of people's lived experiences and perceptions might yield important findings.

### **Growth as a Practitioner**

The research that I conducted for this study had a profound effect on my growth as a practitioner. The first effect was directly noted in my teaching of fourth, fifth and sixth grade gifted and talented students. My professional responsibilities include developing programming for students identified as gifted in five New Jersey elementary schools. Almost immediately, I saw that the work I was doing as a doctoral researcher was having an impact on my teaching. I created a unit called, "The Journey of Research", through which I helped students frame research questions and make a plan to review the literature available to them, collect data and make a report of findings. I explained how qualitative research differs from quantitative research and what a mixed-methods approach might look like. Students understood these concepts immediately, and a few embarked on their own studies. One student, a sixth grade girl, completed a study she called "Perceptions of Sixth Grade

Students on Learning”. Her study involved a survey and a series of 10 student interviews that she taped and transcribed, assigning pseudonyms to all participants. I then taught her how to discover findings that she reported to peers and to her teacher with a slide show presentation. I was thrilled to note the way that having an interview script helped her to succeed in the kinds of social interactions that she might have previously found awkward, given her shy and quiet disposition. By using the script, she was able to ask the same questions to a variety of students. The participants seemed to feel important as well and were riveted to her presentation when the study concluded.

The second effect on my practice may be noted in my work with teachers in my school district. My job responsibilities involve working with teachers to assist them to support students through differentiated learning. I am also in the process of developing teacher leadership opportunities with one of the district’s principals. The research I have done as a part of this study has been immediately useful for presentations and information to support teachers. Furthermore, I am often asked to speak to groups of teachers outside of the district. In this capacity, I have been able to speak from a research-based perspective as I shared my insights. During one of these times, I was invited to a focus group run by a Washington D.C. organization to talk about how teachers perceived their opportunities to grow and learn. My grounding in research and in this study clearly informed my words and the power of my perceptions during that meeting.

### **Growth as a Project Developer**

Designing a project for this study gave me the opportunity to offer teachers a way to become teacher leaders. By creating a PD, I offered teachers a way to understand teacher leadership, to reflect upon their own talents and to learn to use these abilities to engage

with other teachers in school improvement activities. In order to accomplish this, I needed to reflect upon what the findings indicated was necessary for teachers to succeed as teacher leaders. I observed that problem solving and planning skills were crucial to their development, as well as learning how to engage with multiple school stakeholders in their local setting. I also needed to recognize that teacher leaders demonstrate a penchant for caring and that the work that I hoped to accomplish in the 3-day professional development experience needed to focus on what teachers themselves cared about in order to be successful. I learned from the study's findings that what drives successful teacher leaders is an ability to think of the big picture. In my professional development project, therefore, I sought to help teachers envision the school as a place with multiple relationships where they need to create alliances and communicate their dreams and plans to others who might be inspired or compelled to assist them in their work.

As I designed the project, I recognized that I needed to remember that the target group of participants would be composed of teachers who may not have ever been recognized for their efforts, but who desired to expand their reach in schools to accomplish important work. This project represented for me a chance to offer such teachers the awareness and skill-building opportunities that they may not have had the chance to gain in their regular setting. Groups of teachers such as the highly recognized New Jersey teachers I studied are provided with numerous opportunities to learn, to present to peers and to experience recognition in local, state and national settings. Many teachers, however, are rarely given the chance to see the field of education from outside of their local lens and they may not have understood how to use their talents effectively in the workplace. As a project developer, I have grown in my ability to think of the world through these teachers'

eyes as I have learned to use this study's findings to effectively frame the content of my project.

### **Reflection on the Importance of the Work**

The New Jersey Education Association (2013) reported that morale among teachers is low because of increased public scrutiny of teachers' work. Such low morale is a factor that drives teachers from the profession, but Ingersoll and Smith (2003) suggested that teachers with greater access to teacher leadership opportunities might continue to serve as educators. This study is important, therefore, because I have drawn findings from the perceptions of highly recognized educators who have worked in New Jersey classrooms in a wide variety of roles. These participants have experienced a plethora of classroom issues, have worked with a diversity of colleagues and have been committed to ongoing professional learning. Educators with such experience and public recognition are expert practitioners who have worthwhile lessons to offer the field. This study could raise morale among teachers who may be empowered to actively form their own meaningful networks of colleagues at the local level. Such communities of energized teachers may create school improvements, guided by their own experience and research instead of enacting changes made by others who may not know or appreciate their world. In this way, teachers may create local changes with a far-reaching effect because the lives of their students, the members of their professional networks, and the communities may benefit from their work in schools. If this study can help teachers understand that what they do each day is important and that their best thinking about school improvement matters and can help create institutional changes, then it will have far reaching importance at a local, state, and

even national level. Networks of teachers are not limited to school buildings and towns, but can connect through virtual communities, writings and presentations at conferences.

Sometimes a potential teacher leader may be stirred into action by hearing important information at just the right time. One participant in the study, Henry, told me about a life-changing experience. He attended a conference where the keynote speaker asked the teachers in the audience to go forth and lead. “It was like I was given permission to lead,” Henry recounted. Shortly after, a disaster in Henry’s district created the opportunity for educators to band together with other stakeholders to assist the community. Henry connected the mandate to lead with a clear local need that drove him into action and to inspire others to do so. Similarly, current findings may inspire teachers to figure out ways to collaborate and lead in their communities. The project that emerged these findings can assist teachers to gain the awareness and skills to become teacher leaders in their own contexts. Some teachers may experience the need for external motivation and permission to lead in much the same way as the participant needed the words of the keynote speaker to spring into action as a teacher leader.

When I reflect upon the importance of this work, I am struck by the way that empowering information and professional learning can transform one’s practice. By creating a cadre of teacher leaders through the PD, I will be transferring the learning I have gleaned from current findings into the modules that build skills and offer time to plan important school changes. Once the first cohort of teacher leaders has graduated from the program, additional programs may be offered that provide improved and powerful learning to other groups of teachers. First cohort graduates can take on the reins of leadership and can provide the training for subsequent sessions. Similarly, the workshop modules may be

offered online through webinars and virtual meetings that allow screen sharing, virtual discussion and presentations. Such networks currently exist and are not limited to a geographic area, but may extend to international educators in diverse settings. In this way, the project could become a global one that has the potential to assist teachers to learn from and be inspired by colleagues who live and work in many different contexts. As I reflect upon the importance of this project, I envision its potential impact on the lives and experience of the educators who would like to expand their professional practice, but who need support to do so.

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

This study adds to the literature about teacher leadership in which researchers describe the need for teachers' work to be collaborative, empowered and respected (DuFour, 2004; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001; Killion, 2011; Lieberman, 2010; Sergiovanni, 2004). By drawing my findings from 12 highly recognized teachers in New Jersey, I have captured the insights and school stories that describe the daily struggles, achievements, dreams and habits of mind of these educators. When I analyzed the data and revealed the five findings, I designed a PD to assist teachers who yearn to become teacher leaders by expanding their professional opportunities.

### **Potential Impact for Social Change**

Social change can happen, one relationship at a time, as individuals empowered with just the right information improve their practice. By listening to teachers and respecting their expertise, the researcher can gather important information and lessons to share with others who may benefit. This study has given me the vehicle to gather data, to analyze it for its most important findings and to create a professional development program



that can directly transfer this information to teachers who want to become teacher leaders. The recipients of these findings and learning modules are subjects themselves with lives and learning experiences they can share with the communities that will be formed as a part of the professional learning cohort. Each participant in the PD will bring to the program a lived context and a set of perceptions, just as the original study participants contributed to the research from their vantage point. Though I began the study with a focus on the problem that prompted the research, I had no idea what learning and insights the study participants would share. As the study progressed, I was moved and fascinated by the depth of knowledge of the participants. Their expertise and insight created the core learning of this research study. Similarly, each cohort of participants in subsequent PD series will be composed of educators with their own personalities and life stories who will come together as a unique community of learners.

It was particularly important, therefore, to design activities that could assist participants to increase their awareness of how to improve their collegial relationships as they learned to understand and direct the expertise of their peers. Because of this, I focused on offering a variety of open-space protocols, discussions and action planning activities in the sessions. As the researcher in a project designed to understand and build teacher leadership, it was essential to empower professional learning participants instead of imposing a top-down experience upon them. I wanted participants to understand the characteristics of teacher leaders, while learning how to become teacher leaders themselves. The potential impact for social change, therefore, may occur at an individual, organizational and societal level as teachers transform their personal practice, act in their settings and influence other teachers through in and out-of-school networks.

### **Methodological, Theoretical and Empirical Implications**

This study has important methodological, theoretical and empirical implications because the problem that prompted it focused on ways to expand the roles and use of teacher talent in New Jersey schools. The potential solutions to this problem have emerged from the experiences and insights of New Jersey teachers, supported by scholarly research. The methodology used in this study allowed me to create a system of direct communication with highly recognized teachers in individual interviews, focus groups and message boards. This provided participants with multiple opportunities to reflect upon the research questions and to offer their perceptions through three forms of data collection. Using a qualitative study design for this study was the best approach to gather these perceptions in order to learn what participants, who had been publically recognized for their teaching expertise, believed was important about teacher leadership.

The conceptual framework of this study was based on Sergiovanni's (1994a) understanding of schools as places where teachers can create an ethic of caring within communities that do meaningful work together. DuFour (2004) offered insight on ways that teachers thrive in collaborative cultures and Lieberman (2010) helped me to clarify how schools can become places that highlight and support teachers' skills and talents. I consistently analyzed emerging data through this lens as I strove to understand how to discover ways to foster teacher leadership in schools. Theoretical implications from this study indicate that analyzing schools as communities and teachers as members of these communities can yield important findings. For example, if one analyzed schools as businesses with a focus on deliverables, but without the inclusion of data about how the

teachers live, relate and work, one might fail to reveal the important driving forces that teacher leader participants suggest are core to their work.

The empirical implication of this study suggests that teachers are good sources of information about their practice and expertise. Furthermore, researchers can capture these lessons through carefully analyzed data, guided by a conceptual framework that focuses on schools as communities and teachers as human beings who are working within a web of relationships. The data have indicated that teacher leaders are focused on driving school improvement in ways that the current school systems may not support. In order to succeed with their goals, however, teacher leaders have found ways to work with colleagues and to sometimes disrupt the traditional hierarchy to improve schools. The empirical implication of this study suggests, therefore, that additional studies that capture teachers' insights and experience may prove useful to teachers and to school systems that wish to better use teacher talent in schools. Such studies could provide additional examples of effective practice and skills that teachers can use as models for their own professional learning and for school systems that wish to support such professional growth.

### **Recommendations for Practice and or Future Research**

The field is rich with opportunities for future research that focuses on capturing the expertise and experience of teachers. The findings of this study indicated a wide variety of roles that teacher leaders offer schools, ways that teacher leaders use their interpersonal skills and how their desire to serve and care influences their daily work. Additional studies that focus on personalized professional learning programs which offer teachers ways to develop the specific skills they need to take on new roles, may be useful to potential teacher leaders. Furthermore, research that is focused on schools as communities may shift

the conversation about educational reform from a focus on educational accountability, to a focus on how the human beings in schools are driven to work to help their students succeed (Fullan, 2011). Additional research about the impact of school climate and culture and on ways that it supports or fails to support teacher leadership could expand on this study's findings by capturing more evidence from the field about how teacher leaders respond to their settings. Finally, research about how teacher leadership may impact student learning could help the public understand and support efforts to increase teacher leadership.

Participants in this study consistently indicated that the reason it is important to develop teacher leadership is to maximize the opportunities that schools can provide to students by using the talents and abilities of every single educator in the building. Research, therefore, that captures data revealing ways that teacher leadership influences the academic experience of students could be significant.

### **Conclusion**

Teacher leadership describes a professional path for teachers that will allow them to serve in many useful roles in schools (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). In this qualitative case study, I invited 12 highly recognized New Jersey teachers to share their perceptions about approaches to teacher leadership. As I gathered data and later analyzed them, I strove to make sense of the phenomenon in order to understand how participants ascribed meaning to it (Merriam, 2009). Although the professional growth of teachers has been an important topic for many national educational organizations, this study focused on ways that teachers have driven institutional improvement through teacher leadership (American Federation of Teachers, 2014; National Education Association Foundation, 2012; National Network of

State Teachers of the Year, 2014; New Jersey Department of Education, 2014d; U.S. Department of Education, 2012).

The problem that prompted this study was that teachers who are highly recognized at a state or regional level often struggle to use their professional knowledge in schools. When I collected and analyzed the data, I discovered important lessons that participants shared about solving problems, creating strong relationships and overcoming organizational obstructions. I analyzed the data, guided by the five research questions, to uncover findings that captured participants' perceptions of (a) teacher leadership; (b) leadership skills; (c) teacher roles in schools; (d) skills, knowledge, and dispositions necessary for teachers; and (e) school culture influences on teacher leadership. This study is significant because it reveals teachers' descriptions of ways they have used their talent to solve problems and innovate in schools. Teachers who are aware of strong examples of peers who use their skills and talents to improve schools may be inspired to forge a similar path in their local context. Furthermore, PD participants practice collegial reflection and action planning to create meaningful impact in their own schools. The collective products of the PD participants, therefore, make an important contribution to the field because they provide evidence of ways that teacher leaders contribute to institutional change.

When schools are recognized as organizations where teachers are respected as thinkers and problem solvers (Westheimer, 2008), schools may be transformed into places where a culture of professional inquiry is the norm. Current findings point researchers to the schoolhouse within which many educators yearn to support their students with research-based practices and the time necessary to fully develop their skills and abilities.

Schools that foster leadership focused on promoting student learning are best at tapping into the talents of educators (Killion, 2011).

The 21<sup>st</sup> century is a time of rapid changes and challenges when students who graduate from schools of education must be prepared to respond with innovative solutions and discoveries that improve the human experience. This calls for a new generation of thinking teachers who are drawn from the ranks of the most talented university graduates.

Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity or it becomes the practice of freedom, the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world (Freire, 2000, p. 34).

Teacher leaders who are empowered to deal critically and creatively with their students and schools provide new futures and bright prospects to school communities.

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## Appendix A: Teacher Leadership Intensive

**Goals:** In this 3-day PD, teachers are provided with the knowledge and skills that will assist them to use their abilities in school improvement efforts. Teachers learn about teacher leadership, find ways to tap into their strengths and interests, increase their skills, negotiate school power structures and plan for positive social change in their own school context. The trainer will use reflection, collaboration and guided conversations to help teachers find ways to use their talents to drive school improvements in ways that make sense, are meaningful and feasible in their educational setting.

**Learning outcomes:** Teachers will be able to identify the skills, knowledge and dispositions of teacher leaders in order to seek opportunities to better use their talents and abilities, while effectively understanding and negotiating potential barriers to the deployment of teacher leadership. Teachers will understand how they can tap into their interests and skills to take on a diversity of roles in schools. Teachers will engage in a self-assessment that will help them understand their skills as a teacher leader. Teachers will develop smart goals and a communications strategy. At the end of the PD, participants will develop a personal plan for teacher leadership that takes into consideration participant skills, interests, a proposed time line, a proposed budget and designated stakeholders who may be interested in collaboration.

**Target audience:** 25 K-12 teachers, who have volunteered to participate, will be the target audience for this project. On day three, a group of volunteer administrators will be invited to participate in a one session featuring a mixed-role conversation, based on participant generated scenarios.

**Components:** The PD will be divided into the following topics that will help guide participants to accomplish their goal of becoming a teacher leader in their own school and context:

Day 1: Teacher Leadership 101: an introduction to teacher leadership

Day 2: Teacher Leader Talent Development

Day 3: Action Planning – allies, timelines and implementation

In order to plan the professional development project, the five findings served as a guide to illustrate how highly recognized teacher leaders approach teacher leadership. The project was designed to assist teachers, who volunteer to participate in the PD, to gain an overview of teacher leadership, an understanding of the array of skills, habits, dispositions needed for a teacher leadership role as well as to foster a deeper understanding of the power relationships and school cultures that may have an impact on one's ability to improve schools. Finally, since findings indicated that teacher leaders are strong action planners who use organizational skills to achieve goals, the third day will include action planning and project management information and tools.

Each day's activities are organized with trainer notes followed by slide shows for each session. The slide shows contain all of the links, information and logistical details needed for the trainer to run the session. Participants will receive a hard copy of the slide show; an electronic version and they will see the slides projected at the front of the room. Formative assessments are embedded in the slide shows and links to self-assessments are provided for a pre and post assessment. In addition, narrative questions used for a summative self-assessment are provided in the trainer notes for day 3. The following charts

outline the time, topic and methods used for each day of the professional development program:

### Day 1

#### Teacher Leadership 101: An Introduction to Teacher Leadership

Time	Topic	Method
8:00 – 9:30	What is a teacher leader?	Presentation handout discussion
9:30 – 11:00	Never say: “I’m just a teacher!” the roles teachers play in schools	Paired discussion on roles presentation of sample roles role stations (teachers choose roles to explore) exit ticket: I’m a teacher who teaches and + role
11:00 – 12:00	Working lunch	Cards at tables with guiding questions
12:00 – 1:00	What about me?	Introductory lecture self-assessment of teacher leadership skills, knowledge and dispositions. discussion (pair and full group)
1:00 – 2:30	What’s school culture got to do with it?	Presentation handout – school capacity tool discussion
2:30 – 3:00	Closing Session	Reflective writing discussion/town hall

**Day 2**

## Teacher Leader Talent Development

Time	Topic	Method
8:00 – 9:30	Lessons from teacher leaders: what are the skills, habits and dispositions that teachers value most?	Presentation/handout rotate through stations
9:30 – 10:30	What skills and abilities do I value?	Guided conversation: open-space KIVA protocol
10:30-11:30	The Cage Busting Teacher	Presentation Handout
11:30 – 12:30	Working lunch	Video clips from bad t.v. teachers
12:30 – 1:30	Hogwart's map	Participants reflect on school relationships
1:30 – 2:30	Speak as the spirit moves you	Open mic sharing around guiding
2:30 – 3:00	Written reflection	Classical music Presentation

**Day 3**

## Action Planning – Allies, Timelines and Implementation

Time	Topic	Method
8:00 – 9:30	Creating social change, one plan at a time: creating SMART goals	Presentation writing SMART goals
9:30 – 11:00	Communications: crafting communications strategies action planning and networks to effect change	Handout/presentation discussion

11:00 – 12:00	Working lunch: Allies and Blockers: how to create teams	Role play Action Plan -allies for personal network planning
12:00 – 1:00	Building collaborative strategies: discussion of scenarios a teacher leader/administrator scenario based activity	Mixed-role small group action planning and discussion
1:00 – 2:00 action plan.	Charting your success	Participants create
2:00 – 2:40	Summative Evaluation	Self-Assessment: Six questions narrative
2:40 – 3:00	Circle closing	Participants share: “I am a teacher leader...”

### **Trainer Notes for Day 1**

#### Teacher Leadership 101- An Introduction to Teacher Leadership

The trainer will attend to the following tasks at the beginning of the first Session, before the presentation:

- Welcome participants and explain that this is a three day professional development program that will help them learn about teacher leadership, identify their own interests and strengths and leave on the third day with a concrete plan to assist with school improvement in their own context. Explain that the first day will include more information about teacher leadership and the study and that subsequent days will be more tailored to the individual needs and interests of participants.
- Write down the group norms on chart paper:
  - Treat and listen to others with respect
  - Bring a positive attitude to our learning

- Be concise when speaking – stay on topic
  - One person speaks at a time
  - Be honest and speak from experience
  - Keep cell phones on silent – use only for emergencies
- Ask the group if these norms work for them and if they would like to add others. If there is consensus about the need for additional norms, include them on the chart.
  - Inform participants that they should feel free to drink water or use the rest room as needed in addition to breaks that seem necessary throughout the day. .
  - Once norms are established, begin session one.

### **Sessions 1 – 6**

Please remember that the slide shows are simply a frame for the day's activities. The trainer will be in a presentational mode for a small part of the day, but the slides are used as pre-populated white boards that help provide vital information for participants to engage in the workshops.

- All relevant information for participants will be contained on the slide shows and the handouts of the presentations that the participants will receive during each session. Some participants will prefer to work from their computers and will receive electronic copies of the slide shows.
- Be responsive to participants and notice when they are tired and need a break, assigning a bathroom or stretch break as needed throughout the sessions as well as being respectful of participants' individual needs.



- Links to the music and to the online assessments will be bookmarked on the computer that to use for the sessions and also listed in writing at the front of the room.
- Distribute paper strips, index cards and markers to the five round tables in the room. Provide an additional table for materials to use for the organization of materials and a stool to use for resting, when not presenting.
- The presentation/handouts clearly indicate when each type of material will be needed for the sessions. Review each slide deck at the beginning of the day to ensure to have all materials in place.
- Place a box at the front of the room to collect formative assessment products at the end of sessions
- Slide shows are found for sessions 1-6 on the following pages of the appendix:
  - Session 1: What is a teacher leader, page 167
  - Session 2: Never say, “I’m just a teacher,” page 174
  - Session 3: Lunch and learn, page 184
  - Session 4: What about me? Self assessment, page 186
  - Session 5: What’s school culture got to do with it? page 186
  - Session 6: Closing session, page 190

Presentation and Handout (Day 1, Session 1)

What is a Teacher Leader?

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"Within every school, there is a sleeping giant of teacher leadership which can be a strong catalyst for making change."  
  
(Katzenmeyer and Moller, 2001, p.2)

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Turn and talk

- What does this mean to you?
- Why is the giant sleeping?
- What kinds of changes need to be made?

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### Why now?

- Increased accountability
- Higher expectations for all students
- Teachers can provide critical human resources to improve schools (Curtis, 2013)
- An NIEA survey of members found that 70% said that morale was worse than it had been in many years (Jandoli, 2013).



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### Next generation teachers seek...

- Increased opportunities for participating in decisions
- Positive school culture
- Professional opportunities for professional development and use of technology
- Fair and differentiated pay
- New roles and responsibilities



(Behrstock & Clifford, 2009)

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### What's the problem?

The problem is that many teachers often struggle to use their professional knowledge in their schools and districts in roles other than teaching (Teacher leadership exploratory consortium, 2012).

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## Why now?

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- Higher expectations for all students
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## Teacher Leader initiatives

- Graduate programs and certificate programs abound (Walden, 2014; Johns Hopkins, 2014; Rider College, 2014)
- Teacher as leader has extended into the policy world through the creation of many fellowships and teacher voice organizations (Pennington, 2013)
- US Dept of Education RESPECT initiative
- US Dept of Education Teach to Lead Initiative

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## Teacher Leader Model Standards

- May, 2008 – a group of educators researched the leadership roles that teachers take on.
- Their work led to the "Teacher Leadership Exploratory Consortium."
- The group developed Teacher Leader Model Standards
- The goal? To "stimulate dialogue."

(Teacher Leadership Exploratory Consortium, 2012)

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The Teacher Leader Model Standards consist of seven domains describing the many dimensions of teacher leadership:

- Domain I: Fostering a Collaborative Culture to Support Educator Development and Student Learning
- Domain II: Accessing and Using Research to Improve Practice and Student Learning
- Domain III: Promoting Professional Learning for Continuous Improvement
- Domain IV: Facilitating Improvements in Instruction and Student Learning
- Domain V: Promoting the Use of Assessments and Data for School and District Improvement
- Domain VI: Improving Outreach and Collaboration with Families and Community
- Domain VII: Advocating for Student Learning and the Profession

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### Teacher Leader Standard Activity

- Each person has 7 paper strips with the Teacher Leader Model Standards printed
- Please take 3 minutes to read the list and choose the 2 standards you connect to most
- There are 7 tables in the room, each one with a standard on a raised card.
- When I ring the chime, go to the table with the standard you feel you exemplify or would like to exemplify.
- If someone is at the table, begin a conversation with the person(s) about how you exemplify this domain or why you are drawn to working on this domain. Ask them to do the same.
- If nobody is at the table at all, there are reflection cards on the table and pencils that will allow you to have a reflective journaling experience on the same topic.
- We will spend 10 minutes talking about the standard. Then, I will ring the chime again and you will visit your next table.
- If there was nobody at the first table and you wrote a reflection and then there is nobody at the next table you choose, go to your third choice so that you have a chance to speak to someone.

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### Perceptions of Teacher Leadership

- \* My doctoral research project, in the spring of 2015, captured perceptions about approaches to teacher leadership from highly recognized New Jersey teachers.
- \* I used interview, focus group and message boards to learn about their lived experiences.
- \* 5 findings emerged from this qualitative case study.

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### Findings

1. Teacher leaders are individuals who galvanize collegial support for school improvement efforts by exercising diplomatic role-defying behaviors in schools.
2. Teacher leaders use their talents in the classroom by creating and adopting excellent classroom strategies and curriculum, emerging work for underserved students and helping colleagues collaborate for student success as the core of all school improvement efforts.
3. Teacher leaders improve schools as mentors, curriculum writers, union leaders, lead teacher, professional learning community facilitators, professional development presenters, technology integration experts, parent and community partners, committee chairs, student activity advisors, network and professional organization leaders and policy experts.
4. Teacher leaders value their knowledge and expertise, strong interpersonal skills, big picture thinking, willingness to take professional risks and a penchant for deep caring that drives their work for school improvement.
5. Teacher leaders thrive in school cultures with leaders that respect their expertise, ideas and professional leadership and who give them opportunities to continue their professional learning, networking and knowledge sharing with colleagues.

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## Goals for our 3-Day PD Experience

- Knowledge and skills
- Use your abilities in ways that serve students by expanding their roles in schools
- Professional satisfaction

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## Goals

- Day 1 goal: Learn about teacher leadership, including the skills and habits of teacher leaders, along with the roles they play in schools and strategies used to foster a school culture that supports teacher leadership.
- Day 2 goal: Self-assessment; learn needed skills to understand and negotiate the power structures and priorities present in schools.
- Day 3 goal: To facilitate action planning that connects to teachers' strengths. Learn to use charts to plan successful implementation. Plan and reflect!

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## Learning outcomes

### Learning outcomes:

- Teachers will be able to identify the skills, knowledge and dispositions of teacher leaders as they learn to negotiating potential barriers to teacher leadership.
- Teachers will understand how they can tap into their interests and skills to take on a diversity of roles in schools.
- Teachers will engage in a self-assessment that will help them understand their skills as a teacher leader.
- Teachers will develop smart goals and a communications strategy.

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### In the end?

At the end of the 3-day session, you will develop a personal plan for teacher leadership!



YEARNINGS



ACTION

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### Reflection



- During the next 5 minutes, write down what you hope to take away from this 3-day experience.
- During the next 3 days, there will be ample time to reflect and share your thoughts with others.

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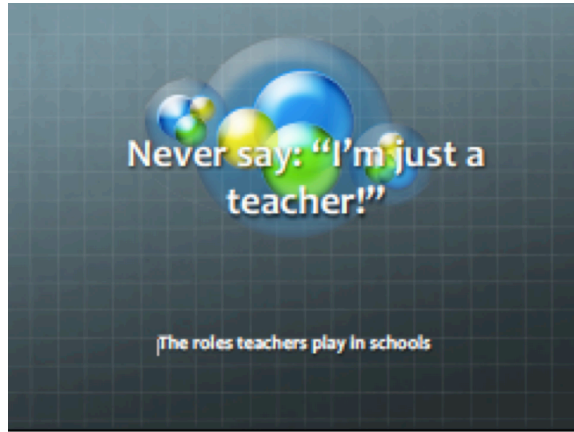
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Never say: "I'm just a teacher!"

The roles teachers play in schools

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### Our plan for the session

- Review of what participants are seeking in this professional development experience (slide created based on participant feedback from session # "What is a teacher leader?")
- My presentation of sample roles from study
- Your personal reflection, notes, adds, deletes
- Paired/group Discussion on roles
- Role Stations (teachers choose roles to explore)
- Close: I'm a teacher who teaches and + role
- Exit ticket: session reflection for presenter feedback

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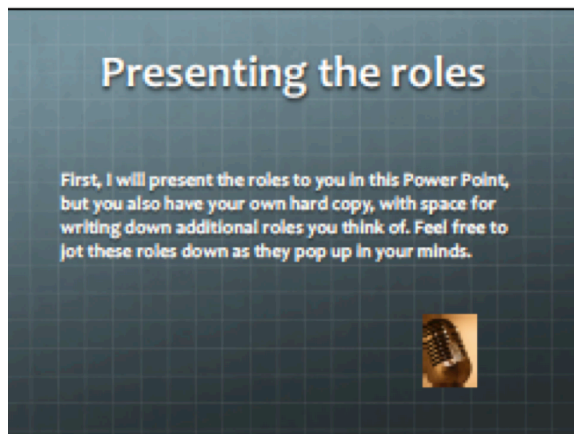
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
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### Presenting the roles

First, I will present the roles to you in this Power Point, but you also have your own hard copy, with space for writing down additional roles you think of. Feel free to jot these roles down as they pop up in your minds.



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## Crossing out the roles

Next, you will have the chance to ~~cross out~~ any roles that do not interest you or suit your talents, skills or dispositions right now.

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## Then, we'll discuss briefly

- 👉 With one person
- 👉 With a small group

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## We will always remember our goal!

The point of our time is not just to learn how other teachers work, but how you can develop your own teacher leadership.



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### Sample Teacher Leader Roles

The following roles were drawn from a study capturing perceptions of highly recognized teacher leaders in New Jersey (Woods-Murphy, 2016).

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### Mentors

- New teacher and peer support
- Clarify evaluation
- Share expertise
- Coach to early service teachers; "Throw open the door of the classroom to model great strategies."

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### Curriculum writer

- Pilot new curriculum
- Revise curriculum
- Develop resources
- 21<sup>st</sup> Century alignment
- Classroom-based approach
- "Move from a culture of 'no' to a culture of 'let's try.'"

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## Lead teachers

- Bilingual committee
- Share subject expertise
- Help develop resources
- Provide evaluation support
- Translate new initiatives to staff
- Encourage teachers' participation

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## Professional development presenters

- Literacy coach; offer classroom as "learning laboratory"
- "Focus on adult learners"
- Help teachers improve instruction
- Give colleagues "time to think and practice, try things out"
- "As a P.D. presenter, I'm cheap;" share expertise from national organizations

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## Technology integration experts

- 21<sup>st</sup> Century learning
- Model "fearlessness" when learning new technologies"
- Run the school television station
- Help teachers grasp that "the (tech) train has left the station."

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## Parent and community partners

- School as center of the community
- Provide family relief in natural disasters
- Guide town plans and celebrations
- Kiwanis club speeches
- Parades
- "Close-knit community that preaches family, good people."

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## Committee chairs

- School Improvement Grant coordination
- Curriculum
- Leadership
- Technology
- Homework
- Evaluation
- Professional development
- Bilingual; Department of Education
- Testing
- TEDx committees
- "Attending just about every meeting and joining or being appointed to every committee in school, people were glad I was filling the gaps."

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## Student activity advisors

- Sports coach
- Human Rights Club
- Gay-Straight Alliance
- Environmental Club
- Hip-hop
- Poetry out loud
- Theater Director
- Literary Magazines
- Technology club
- Class Advisor; "Anything I could do to help the kids I wanted to be involved."

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## Professional Networks

- Connecting to like-minded educators
- Collaborate with teachers from other districts
- Connection with professional mentors
- National networks of highly recognized teachers
- "Going outside of the district or profession helps me grow."

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## Policy experts

- Ensure that policy is driven by classroom realities
- Engage in national policy networks
- Twitter conversations
- Advocacy
- "utilizing teachers' knowledge, passion, expertise to impact policy"
- "If someone tells you something stupid as a policy, you just can't accept it."

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## Union leadership

- Negotiations
- Consensus building
- Galvanize support for initiatives
- Peer mentorship
- Assist evaluation rebuttals and change
- Climate surveys
- "Shift in how we do business."

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## Now, look around the room

- You will see newsprint with the roles listed on the walls
- You will also see blank sheets of newsprint to add roles that you believe are missing from this sample list

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## Choose 5 roles

- Each of you have 5 colored circle stickers. Please place them on the roles that interest you the most. This is how we will see what roles interest the group the most.

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## Top 5 roles

- Because we cannot explore all roles equally, we will choose the roles that participants have voted as the most interesting/important/relevant.
- May I have a volunteer to count the roles that are the top roles on each sheet? Thank you!
- The top roles for today are (1, 2, 3, 4, 5).
- I will add them to this Power Point.
- Can I have a volunteer to write these roles down on the name tents on 5 tables.
- Once we do that, go to the table that interests you the most. Got? We will switch tables three times.

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## Closing

- We have just had a “speed dating” experience with some possible teacher roles.
- To close, I’d like you to stay where you are and round robin with your table mates, saying, “I am a teacher and a teacher leader who + (add a new role).”

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## Exit Ticket

- Please take one of the index cards on the table and write down the most useful thing you learned during this session and something you wish you had learned or a recommendation you might have. Please give this to me by placing them in the tray at the front of the room. This will allow me to make our sessions more responsive to your needs.

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## And remember...

.....Never say, “I’m just a teacher!”

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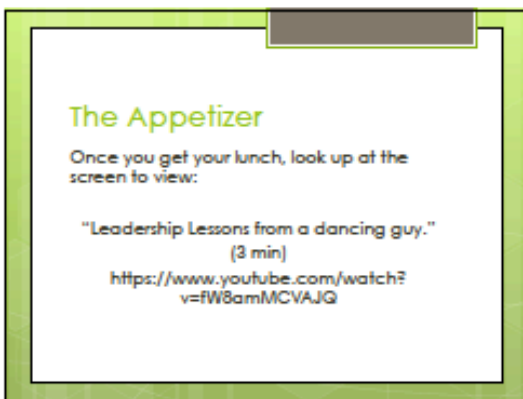
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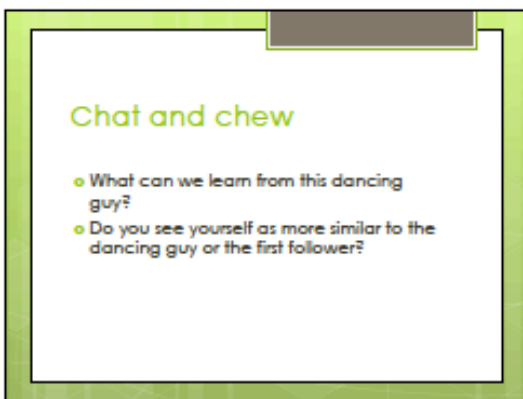
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**Main Course**

While you are eating, share a story of your favorite or most influential teacher. How did he or she connect you to learning or open up the door to opportunities for you?

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**Dessert**

For desert, here is a video called "True Leader"

I wonder if you ever feel this way?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oLIGPj8FB3I>

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### What about me?

What about me? Self Assessment of teacher leadership skills, knowledge and dispositions.

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### Plan

Teacher leaders build trust and learn to work with adults.

- Today, we will do a self assessment that has been prepared by "The Center for Strengthening the Teaching Profession" (2013)
- We will self assess and then share our major surprises and take aways from the process

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### Areas of Self-Assessment's Focus

- Working with Adult Learners
- Collaborative Work
- Communication
- Knowledge of Content and Pedagogy
- Systems Thinking



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The self-assessment is online and can be found at the following web site. Please paste this link into your browser to complete

[http://cstp-wa.org/cstp2013/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/CSTP\\_self\\_assessment.pdf](http://cstp-wa.org/cstp2013/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/CSTP_self_assessment.pdf)

*Please take your time. We will discuss your chief take aways in 20 minutes.*

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### Table Talk

- What area is your greatest strength?
- In what area do you need additional support?



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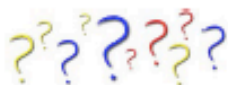
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- At the end of each section of the survey, there is a part called "Additional Questions to Ponder."
- Please choose two questions that you would like our cohort to consider during this 3-day professional development experience. Write them down on the cards provided at the table and pass them into me so that I can try to cover as many of these questions as possible during our time together!

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What's school culture got to do with it?

WHY YOU NEED A POSITIVE SCHOOL CULTURE AND HOW TO GET IT IF YOU DON'T!

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School Culture

- Culture –In this study, "culture" refers to a constellation of variables that affect student success, teacher work and the envisioning and achievement of shared school goals. (Wu, Hoy & Tarter, 2013).
- In this study, culture was of major importance to teachers who yearned to be teacher leaders.

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A key study finding was that...

Teacher leaders thrive in school cultures with leaders that respect their **expertise, ideas** and **professional leadership** and who give them **opportunities** to continue their professional learning, networking and knowledge sharing with colleagues

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### Culture is vital to grow teacher leadership

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The most frequently cited word in all forms of data collection was "culture," which was cited 109 times by participants.

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### Cultures that support teacher leaders

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- High-trust environment
- Teacher leader autonomy
- Purpose-driven work
- Asking "why?" or "why not?" is a school norm
- Shared leadership
- Meaning, big picture thinking, reflection
- Appreciation of colleagues' talent
- Relationships are valued
- Teachers volunteer readily
- Teachers lead important initiatives
- Going to work and feeling valued is the norm
- Culture of "let's try that."
- Everyone is doing what they can for students
- "Teachers' doors are flung open"
- Collaboration is the norm
- Teacher discussions at a round table
- Teachers are encouraged to network outside of district
- Teacher leadership and recognition celebrated

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### Cultures that don't support teacher leaders

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- Low-trust environment
- Micromanagement
- Unfair rules/haul of work
- Obedience, fear of retribution is school norm
- Top-down leadership
- Lock-step obedience
- Toxic, power-wielding
- Drains, gossip
- Teachers "run out of the door" at 3:00.
- Rigid hierarchy of administrative roles
- Going to work is "heading into battle."
- Culture of "no"
- Belief that school problems "someone else's"
- Teachers "sell in obscurity"
- Teachers keep ideas private
- Teachers are and are lectured or presented to
- Teachers are discouraged or prohibited to seek outside-of-district opportunities
- Teacher leadership and recognition ignored or mocked

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### Changing school culture

"Participants also described how school cultures were transformed when teacher leaders galvanized collegial support to make significant changes that converted their schools into places where relationships began to thrive so teachers could use their talents for students." (Woods-Murphy, 2016)

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### School capacity tool

- You may have very clear ideas about whether your district has a culture that supports or fails to support your teacher leadership.
- Nevertheless, it is helpful to use a tool, to analyze school culture (Center for Strengthening the Teaching Profession, 2013).

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Please paste the following link into your browser to find the tool

Retrieved from [http://cstp-wa.org/cstp2013/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/CSTP\\_tool\\_school\\_district\\_capacity.pdf](http://cstp-wa.org/cstp2013/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/CSTP_tool_school_district_capacity.pdf)

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Procedure

- Paste the link into your browser
- Download the PDF
- Convert the PDF into a word document (passwords provided on white board)
- Fill out the capacity tool
- Upload the completed tool to our shared drive

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Quiet Time for your reflection

- Don't write anything now – it is a time for processing and individual reflection.
- Take 10 minutes and slowly walk around the school on your own. Look at what you see displayed, think about it in terms of school culture and priorities. Don't chat right now.
- Come back to your table at the end of 10 minutes to transition to our closing session when we will share in our Town Meeting.

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**Thank you!**

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**Take aways**

Please take 5 minutes to write down your top 3 take aways from today's sessions on the cards provided on the table.



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**Turn and talk**

- Share your top take away!
- Ask your partner a follow-up question to expand the conversation.



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### Town Hall Meeting



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### Everyone up and in a circle (Don't worry! The music from "You are the champions will only play 1 minute)

Now, the microphone is yours. Who will share their top take away first? You cannot give the microphone away until someone takes it. You have to come to the center of the room to get the microphone!



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### See you tomorrow!



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## **Trainer notes for day 2: Teacher Leader Talent Development**

Welcome participants to the second day of the PD that will help them learn about teacher leadership, identify their own interests and strengths and leave on the third day with a concrete plan to assist with school improvement in their own context. Explain that in today's sessions the trainer will tailor sessions to the individual needs and interests of participants.

Notes to trainer for sessions 1 – 7:

- Point to the group norms that were charted the day before
- Once again, the slide shows are simply a frame for the day's activities.
- Review the materials for each session, making sure to include art supplies, markers or chart paper as indicated on the slides for each session.
- Download video clips to the presentation computer and check speakers prior to the sessions.
- Create a playlist for classical music for the final written reflection and save it on the computer to use for the sessions.
- Place a box at the front of the room to collect formative assessment products at the end of sessions.
- Approach participants with an affirming attitude, with strong listening and facilitation skills.
- Slide shows are found for sessions 1-7 on the following pages of the appendix:
  - Session 1: What are the skills, habits and dispositions that teachers value most? Page 194

- Session 2: KIVA – an open-space conversation, page 197
- Session 3: Cage-busting teachers, page 199
- Session 4: Lunch – Lessons from bad movie teachers, page 202
- Session 5: Hogwart's map, page 203
- Session 6: Open-space sharing, page 207
- Session 7: Written reflection, page 207

What are the skills, habits and dispositions that teacher leaders value most?

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**Our plan**

The following skills, habits and dispositions were listed by teacher leaders as important

- This session will help you understand which ones you find most important, which is why they are listed as “I” statements.
- You will rotate through stations focused on particular skills, habits and dispositions
- You will create a “portrait” of your own skills to share with your peers.

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**Walk around**

- Baskets are scattered on tables around the room. Each basket has a different skill, habit or disposition
- Go and choose your top 5 (take the strips!)
- Pick up a piece of large paper on our materials table
- Go to a table and create a collage with your 5 strips and draw an example of how you exemplify this skill, habit or disposition (give examples). You will find glue sticks, markers, various art items for embellishing your image
- Take 25 minutes to do this. In the end, we’ll share at our tables. Art skills are not important! Here are the skills you will find in the following 2 slides!

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I create and adopt excellent classroom strategies and curriculum

I energize work for underserved students

I help colleagues collaborate for student success

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I have knowledge and expertise

I have strong interpersonal skills

I am a big picture thinker

I am willing to take professional risks

I have a penchant for deep caring

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A little classical music and you....



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Our work times

- Time to finish portrait of skills \_\_\_\_\_
- Time to share \_\_\_\_\_



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Let's share at our table



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Our gallery

- When you are done, post your creation on the gallery wall I have created with tape
- We'll leave 5 minutes to view our cohorts' creations!

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**WHAT SKILLS AND ABILITIES DO I VALUE IN MYSELF AND OTHERS?**  
An open-space protocol to tap into the collective wisdom of the group

**KIVA**

- The \*Kiva Process is Native American in origin. It incorporates the following components: sacred ceremonial ground, rule of six, seven generations, capturing the collective knowledge of the group.
- The idea is that there are four directions along with the sacred space above and the sacred space below.

**Our KIVA Council**

- \*Here are 6 chairs for our KIVA Council
- \*May I have 6 volunteers?
- \*Please take your place at the KIVA Council



**The process**

- \*Pass the microphone from person to person. Each person will respond to a question two times– for 60 seconds in the first round and 60 seconds in the second round.
- \*In the second round, the participants answer or respond to something that they heard in round one. Everyone listens in the larger group.

**?**

In 60 seconds, describe a skill, habit or disposition that you value in yourself or others. Give an example of how we might see this skill in action

**Respond**

- \*Now, each of you will respond to something that struck you in one of your KIVA Council member statements.
- \*Take one minute to describe what interested you and why.



### At Tables

- Thank you!
- At your tables, jot down something that you heard that was interesting to you on the index cards provided.
- Someone from the group will volunteer and collect the main ideas of the group on the poster paper on each table.

### Group Vote

- Please attach your group's poster paper to the wall.
- Each of you have 3 sticky dots to "vote" on the most interesting ideas you see on the wall.
- Come up and vote with your 3 dots.

### Discussion

- What do you observe?
- Where are most of the dots? Can someone come and look and report out?
- What does that mean to you about what we value most as educators?
- What does that say to you?
- Closing thoughts?

**CAGE-  
BUSTING  
TEACHERS**

**REAL LIFE STORIES OF TEACHERS WHO  
MAKE A REAL DIFFERENCE IN SCHOOLS**

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**WHAT'S A CAGE?**

According to Hess (2016), a classroom cage is:

"...the routines, rules, and habits that exhaust teachers' time, passion, and energy. The cage is why educators close their classroom doors and keep their heads down."  
(Hess, 2016, p. 3)

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**WHAT'S A CAGE-  
BUSTING?**

"Cage-busting is concrete, precise, and practical. It asks what the problem is, seeks out workable solutions, and figures out how to put those into practice. Cage-busting teachers are less interested in what policy makers or district leaders ought to do than in how teachers can make those things happen."  
(Hess, 2016, p. 216)

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### **CAGE BUSTERS BELIEVE...**

**Actions change culture**  
Teachers have great influence when they learn how to use it  
A focus on "problem solving, precision and responsibility" leads to the best work for teachers and schools (Hess, 2016, p. 216)

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### **AT YOUR TABLE**

**Brainstorm** (someone take notes on chart paper) some difficult scenarios that require solving in schools.  
**List** as many as you can in 10 minutes.  
**When the bell rings, post your chart.**  
**When the charts are posted, come up and vote, with sticky dots, on your top 2 scenarios (choose the hardest ones).**

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### **PROBLEM SOLVING**

**Go and look at the top scenarios that I will mark with a star for your viewing ease.**  
**Choose 1 for your table to examine.**  
**On your chart, write a variety of solutions that a cage-busting teacher might use.**  
**On the bottom, list some obstacles that a teacher who "lives in the cage" might not overcome.**

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**DISCUSSION**

**Presentations of groups  
Discussions**

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## WORKING LUNCH: LESSONS FROM BAD MOVIE TEACHERS

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Grab you lunch, have a seat and in a few minutes, we'll begin...


### Digest & Correct!



We will eat, view these video clips and informally discuss "Corrective Action Plans" for these 4 teachers.

### Teacher #1


John Kimble from Kindergarten Cop



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=esqXGAheSU>

### Teacher # 2

Dolores Umbridge vs. Harry Potter



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gMHqskRY184>

### Teacher #3

In "Song of Bernadette," Sister says Bernadette didn't suffer enough (think of your gifted students)!




<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PY8MWeHse8>

### Teacher #4


Anyone?? Anyone???

Remember Uber Dork? From "Ferris Bueller's Day Off"?



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uhICFdWeQIA>

### Presentation for lunch, (Day 2, Session 4)



If you could go back in time to make a recommendation to one of YOUR teachers, what would it be?


### Presentation and Handout (Day 2, Session 5)

Hogwart's map:  
Can you make it appear?

Some thoughts about building  
collegial teams

#### Drawing a magical map

- In J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter series, a blank parchment reveals all of the people in Hogwarts and their relationship to each other (Kazan & Gabor, 2013).



- What would such a map look like at your school or district?

## Presentation and Handout (Day 2, Session 5)

### Task #1

- Reflect on the different personalities, skills and power roles in your school and group. The table has a stack of images depicting a variety of characters you may recognize to help you think! (Don't mention any colleague's name if one reminds you of him or her!)
- Now, create an individual by combining 3 characteristics (Example: Like a boss + The overwhelmed one + The introvert). The idea is that one person could have all of these characteristics.
- With your table mates, develop a strategy that would help you best relate to this individual in the workplace (finding common ground, tapping into strengths, etc.).
- Discuss ways that you think the strategy might encounter difficulties or succeed.

### The introvert



### Like a boss



### The extrovert



### The pleaser



### The overwhelmed one!



**Presentation and Handout (Day 2, Session 5)**

The organizer



The "all-about-me" one



The complainer



The presenter



The collaborator



The optimist





**Presentation and Handout (Day 2, Session 5)**

The writer



We can go on and on....

Every school has its own cast of characters including you! Each with a unique personality, skill set, stance and goals! How might you understand these personality types and figure out how what **they** need and want matches what **you** need and want for your school and the students you serve?



Task #2

- Now, quietly take a look at the images again and allow them to remind you of the people you work with or yourself. Think about how their personalities and skills might help you accomplish your goal.
- Now, look at these personalities that remind you of colleagues and look at them through the lens of "allies" or "blockers."
- Once that is done, take a piece of blank paper and write the word, "Me" on the left-hand side. On the right-hand side, write down something you would like to accomplish in your school.

Task #3  
Mapping

From the word, "Me" draw three arrows that indicate 3 colleagues (use pseudonyms that make sense to you or draw pictures) who could become allies that could help accomplish or think through your goal because of their personal characteristics, skill set or shared interests.



BLOCKER



Task #4

Reflect and write

Who could potentially "block" the plan?

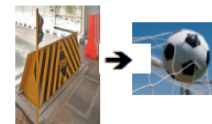
Why?

In what way might you find common ground with this/these "blocker(s)?"

Is there something about their personalities or skill set that might connect with the plan? Do they have objections that **you** should consider? Is there something they care about that you could help them with? *Could they consider YOU a "blocker?"*

*Do you share interests, educational passions?*

How can you make an alliance?



## Presentation and Handout (Day 2, Session 5)

### Try thinking like a diplomat...

- Remember that just because you care about something, it doesn't mean someone else does.
- Think about how you can assist each other or perhaps combine goals to improve the school.
- Try not to be insulted or hurt if your choices for a team don't work out. There are others who may be interested that you haven't asked.
- Keep an even temper, an open demeanor and a problem-solving attitude.

### With practice....

- You will learn more about the people you share your day with.
- You can figure out how to find a few people whose skills, personalities and goals work as a great part of your team.
- In my study, the data showed that collaboration matters.

## Presentation (Day 2, Session 6)

### Speak as the spirit moves you

Open-space sharing

### Guided questions

- I have selected 3 questions from among those that have emerged in our sessions to consider
- During this time, I will pose the question and we can have multiple responses and from any table in the room.
- Feel free to stand and walk when you talk, but please do take the microphone

## Reflection (Day 2, Session 7)

### Written Reflection with Music

Relax and write

### Enjoy the classical music!

Please reflect upon the day and your learning. Include your thoughts about what you used to think about teacher leadership and what you now think - "I used to think "X," but now I think "Y."

**Trainer notes for Day 3: Allies, Timelines and Implementation.**

Greet the participants to welcome them to the third and final day of the 3- day PD. The title of today's module is "Allies, Timelines and Implementation." The following notes are specific to the sessions for the third day, especially since many of the sessions are discussion based and require special instructions for implementation. The third day has been designed to focus on implementation plans. It is also a time when the trainer circulates and assists participants individually with projects and helps pair up participants who wish to collaborate. The role of the trainer is one of the facilitator who will assist participants with their goal setting efforts. The following notes relate specifically to the sessions in the order that they are scheduled. Please refer to the timeline for additional information about the specific times for sessions.

**Session 1** – Creating social change, one plan at a time – creating SMART goals. In this session, the definition of S.M.A.R.T. goals will be projected on the screen in a Power Point slide as well as a projection of a link that the participants can access to find additional resources and examples. Participants may choose to work on paper, charts or their computers to create their goals, working independently or in a team.

**Session 2** - Communications: crafting a personal communications strategy. The information for this session is fully contained in the slide show. The slides can be used for the trainer to organize the session content, but the heart of the work can be found in the role-playing activity. Once the participants have understood the notion of framing and of how to create a value and their own talking points, they should be ready to practice their communication skills. It is important for participants to thoroughly practice pivoting by using the many prompts provided in the slide. In order for the participants to use the pivots

naturally, it will be important for their partners in the role plays to offer sincere and realistic objections to participant statements.

**Session 3-** Allies and blockers: how to create teams and networks to effect change. This session uses information from the second day (Hogwart's Map). In this session, participants further develop their plan to enlist willing and interested colleagues to them complete their goals, while brainstorming strategies to cope with those colleagues who are less cooperative. This session is important because it builds on skills that were developed the day before, after participants have had time to gain comfort and a deeper understanding of ways to understand the power dynamics of their contexts.

**Session 4 -** Building collaborative strategies– a teacher leader/administrator scenario based activity. In this session, volunteers from the administrative team will come into the room and will sit at tables of teacher leader participants, making sure to spread themselves out evenly in the room so that no one table includes a preponderance of administrators. Each group will brainstorm and write up a problematic school scenario that would affect both administrators and teachers. Please allow participants about 15 minutes to do this.

Once the scenarios have been written, they will be passed to the next table so that each table has received a scenario written by a different group. Next, groups will solve the scenarios using realistic resources and strategies. Teams will prepare their solutions in such a way that they are then able to present them to the full group. The trainer will encourage groups to be as dramatic as possible in their presentations, using theater or artistic renderings to illustrate the results. Please leave art supplies and costumes on the materials table for the use of groups, if they wish to access props. All groups must include a

statement of the problem and a proposed solution. After the groups present, please allow time for participants to reflect on the presentations and on what benefits may have emerged from a mixed-role conversation.

**Session 5** – Charting your success. Participants have already completed S.M.A.R.T. goal training. Now, they will take those goals and create an implementation timeline that will include the goal(s) they chose as well as a list of specific tasks, decisions and a listing about who will accomplish them and a timeline for implementation. This work will be personal and as specific as possible. As the trainer, please assist participants by listening to their ideas and pairing them with others when necessary to help them think through their plans.

**Session 6** – This section will capture data for the PD’s summative assessment. Participants will write a response to six narrative questions. The emphasis should not be on creating a perfect essay, but in capturing the immediate responses of participants after their PD. The entire session will be devoted to writing this response.

1. Please explain ways that you believe you can be a teacher leader.
2. What are the skills, habits and dispositions that you feel will be most useful to you as a teacher leader?
3. What is the school improvement project that you would like to work on this year?
4. What are some barriers to your success and how do you plan on overcoming them?
5. What was most useful to you about this 3-day professional development program?
6. What recommendations do you have to improve this program?

**Session 7 – Circle Closing.** Stand up with the whole group in a large circle. The trainer will thank everyone for participating and will comment on program success and on moments of laughter, insight or accomplishment that the group has experienced together as a newly formed community. Then, the floor will be opened up for participants to comment. Explain to the participants that this is a kind of graduation from the PD and that now participants are members of a cohort that has lived through a common experience. After participants have spoken, do a quick whip around where each participant will speak, beginning their sentence by saying, “I am a teacher leader because...” After everyone has spoken, thank everyone once again and read a few lines of an inspiration poem that seems to capture the spirit of the session.

Trainer notes detailing activities for sessions 4-7, but slide shows are found for sessions 1-3 on the following pages of this appendix.

- Session 1: SMART goals, page 212
- Session 2: Communications – crafting a personal communications strategy, page 213
- Session 3: Lunch session - allies and blockers. Page 215

## Presentation and Handout (Day 3, Session 1)

Creating social change, one plan  
at a time – creating SMART goals

Work Session

S.M.A.R.T.

S = Specific  
M = Measurable  
A = Achievable  
R = Results-focused  
T = Time bound

### Additional help from...

- The University of Virginia (2009) has examples and worksheets that may help you understand and develop SMART goals at the following link.
- [http://www.hr.virginia.edu/uploads/documents/media/Writing\\_SMART\\_Goals.pdf](http://www.hr.virginia.edu/uploads/documents/media/Writing_SMART_Goals.pdf)

Discuss examples

COMMUNICATIONS:  
CRAFTING A PERSONAL  
COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

YOU CAN USE "MESSAGING" OR  
FRAMING...

A powerful tool



DON'T THINK OF AN ELEPHANT: KNOW YOUR VALUES AND  
FRAME THE DEBATE (2004)  
GEORGE LAKOFF

[www.frameworksinstitute.org](http://www.frameworksinstitute.org)

- framing - you take control
- pivoting - redirect

The "frame" is  
the lens  
you see things through!

BET YA CAN'T!

If I say, "Don't think of an  
elephant," YOU THINK OF AN  
ELEPHANT because I brought  
your mind to that thought!

Frames are structures of  
thought





TODAY, WE WILL LEARN  
TO CONTROL THE FRAME

- Step 1: pick a value
- Step 2: pick 3 things that support it
- Step 3: brainstorm examples of each

HERE ARE SOME POSITIVE FRAMES..

- \*Students have abilities that need to be developed
- \*21st Century skills help our students become ready for the world.
- ?

### BUT WHAT IF THE OTHER PERSON SAYS THE "BAD" FRAME?

Do you fight?????

NO, do not engage the frame

They say: "What you do has nothing to do with the real work at school"

You don't say, "Well,that's so wrong, bla, bla, bla (when you do this - you repeat THEIR frame)

You say: "The truth is, Mr. Flatmind, the vision for our program is building the very competencies that students need in the 21st Century....."

"BAD FRAMES" FOR US  
WOULD BE...

- "Teachers want to work very little"
- "Don't you just play games in your class?"
- "MY students could never do that."

VALUE:  
COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCIES ARE CRUCIAL

1. Students have the opportunity to speak to each other
2. We develop presentational skills
3. Students communicate their ideas by citing evidence

(You picked a value and found 3 concrete ways to support it).

### ROLE PLAY

Pick something you value and write it on an index card.

On the other side, write down 3 clear supporting points

Pair up and place the value card so it is visible to your partner

The partner should try to derail the conversation and cite as many ideas as possible that do not support the value.

Switch partners and then reflect

Let's have conversations with at least 2 partners before our session has finished.

### Presentation (Day 3, Session 3)

Working lunch:  
Allies and blockers: how to create  
teams and networks to effect  
change

#### Remember Hogwarts' Map...

- Randomly choose 5 personality types from the images we used yesterday to bring back to your table
- Pretend that you have to form a team composed of these individuals
- Give them names for fun (not real!)
- Figure out what they would do best together
- Have fun! Share out to the group if you like!

### Appendix B: Interview Questions

1. How would you describe teacher leadership?
2. How has the recognition of teacher of the year changed your outlook and experience with leadership?
3. How has your STOY or CTOY recognition affected your interactions with administration and colleagues?
4. What sort of roles and experiences have you had in your school experience in addition to teaching?
5. What are the skills, habits and dispositions have you found essential as a teacher leader?
6. Does trust have a role in the development of teacher leadership? If so, please explain.
7. How would you describe the culture in the school and district where you work?
8. Please describe ways that your school culture has supported your teacher leadership?
9. Please describe ways that your school culture may have failed to support your teacher leadership?
10. Are there any aspects of teacher leadership that you would like to share with me that I have not touched on in my questions?

### Appendix C: Discussion Board Questions

Each week, a question will be posted on edWeb.net in a special group for online collaboration. Questions or statements are directly related to the research questions.

Week #1 –What are some school-based problems that you believe you could help resolve in your school?”

Week #2 - Describe what you perceive to be the greatest obstacles to teacher leadership at your school.

Week #3 – What are the main reasons teachers choose to remain in the classroom despite opportunities to become administrators?

Week #4 – If you could go back in time to mentor yourself as a first year teacher, what would your top three tips about teacher leadership be?

Week #5 - At what point, if ever, do you think a teacher should decide to leave a school that fails to support his or her potential?

Week #6 - Please share what you predict to be your future contributions within the next 5 years.

## Appendix D: Focus Group Discussion Guide with Research Questions

**Topic:** Perceptions of highly recognized teachers about approaches to teacher leadership

**Date:**

**Place:**

**Interviewer:**

**Introduction script:** Greetings, Colleagues. I am so pleased that we could gather today, especially considering how many responsibilities you have. My name is Maryann Woods-Murphy and I will be facilitating our conversation. You have been selected for our focus group because you are a participant in this project study and your experiences and perceptions are of great value. As a participant, I want you to know that you should contribute to our discussion, as you feel moved to do so without any expectations from me or anyone in this group about what you say or how you say it. That said, respectful communication is a group norm so even if you may not agree with the statements that others may make, all of the participants' ideas are most welcome. Please know, that I will be recording our conversation to make sure that I capture everything. When you speak, do your best to speak clearly. When one member of the group is sharing, please know that he or she alone will have the floor. We will use first names for our conversation, but the project study will refer to participants using pseudonyms. Furthermore, I would like to ask you not to name your school or colleagues, but to say instead, "my school" or "the music teacher" without further identification. Finally, let me ask you to turn off any electronic devices including cell phones, if you have them. Before I start, I wonder if you want to ask me any clarifying questions. Fine. I am going to begin now as I press the voice recorder button.

**Opening (Background):**

Please state your first name and position.

**Introduction (understanding perceptions of teacher leadership):**

*RQ1: How do Teachers of the Year perceive teacher leadership?*

Focus Group Question (FGQ1): Tell us how you are able to demonstrate teacher leadership in your own school.

**Discussion (using leadership skills in schools):**

*RQ2: What are the perceptions of recognized teacher leaders about how they use or might use their leadership skills while remaining as teachers rather than transitioning to administrators?*

FGQ2: Tell us about your perceptions of your own leadership skills and how they might translate into something that might impact your own school?

**Discussion (roles that teachers take on in schools):**

*RQ3: What are some roles of teacher leaders in schools?*

FGQ3: Tell us about ways that you or your colleagues have faced challenges, solved problems or made improvements at your school.

**Discussion (teachers describe skills, knowledge and dispositions most valued):**

*RQ4. What are the skills, knowledge and dispositions that teacher leaders most value?*

FGQ4: As a teacher of the year, who has been recognized by staff and stake holders in the community, what are the skills, knowledge and dispositions that you believe are most valued by your colleagues?

FGQ5: Where and how do you get the skills, knowledge and dispositions that you need to work with the community of your school?

**Discussion (teacher leadership and school culture):**

*RQ5: What are the perceptions of recognized teacher leaders about what aspects of school culture support teacher leadership?*

FGQ6: I am curious to learn what kinds of school cultures make it easy for teachers like yourself to lead. Would you share any concrete examples from your experiences to help illustrate a school culture supportive of teacher leadership?

**Close:** I want you to know that I so appreciate your taking the time to talk with us today. Is there anything that you would like to say that you did not get the opportunity to share? If so, I would like to hear from you.