

2020

## Developing Teacher Leaders Through Professional Development Offered in a District Teacher Forum

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*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Education

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Suzanne Theresa Koty

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,  
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2019

Abstract

Developing Teacher Leaders Through Professional Development Offered in a District

Teacher Forum

by

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MA, American Intercontinental University, 2009

BS, Francis Marion University, 1992

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

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## Abstract

Teacher attrition is an ongoing problem in education, and the lack of leadership opportunities contribute to that problem. Teachers who serve in leadership roles are more likely to remain in the profession and positively impact students and the profession as a whole. However, there is little qualitative research to address how teachers develop the needed leadership skills to take on additional leadership roles. The purpose of this qualitative study was to describe the experiences of participants in a District Teacher Forum. The District Teacher Forum is a cohort of teachers identified as Campus Teachers of the Year led by the District Teacher of the Year with the intended purpose of helping the members to develop leadership skills. The conceptual framework that guided this study was a congruence of the social cognitive theory, constructivist theory, and perceived organizational support. The study aimed to examine the experience of teachers participating in a teacher leadership development program. Interviews of 6 Forum members selected through maximum variation sampling and a focus group provided the needed information, and findings were analyzed in relation to the research questions. This study provided insight into how teachers perceive their experiences in a teacher leadership development program as a foundation for future professional development processes to develop teacher leadership. Findings showed that teachers who are provided the opportunity to participate in professional development related to leadership in a cohort setting gain a self-identity as a teacher leader and want to serve as teacher leaders. Implications for social change include a guide for other districts to use to establish a Forum or other leadership initiative and potentially greater teacher retention.

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## Dedication

I would like to dedicate this study to the two people who influenced me in my work: my parents. I promised my father that I would one day pursue a doctorate with no idea how I would ever have the capacity to meet the goal. He did not live to see it come to fruition, but he inspired me to open myself to the opportunity. From my dad, I learned my work ethic, my sense of responsibility, and my desire to help those who may not yet possess the tools to help themselves. My mother taught me the value of service and giving of your own time and talents to take care of others. She lived long enough to see me named the state Teacher of the Year but not long enough to see me realize this goal or develop into the person I am today.

Additionally, I dedicate this to the educators who go above and beyond what is expected because it is good for students, for colleagues, and for the profession. I believe we are shaped by our experiences, and I have been honored to know exemplary educators who give their best each and every day to make a difference. They understand both what leadership is and what it can be.

## Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my family and friends for their encouragement and support as I worked through the dissertation process. To my husband, Dow, thank you for understanding that I needed the space to balance the demands of working and writing. To my children, Mary and Thomas, thank you for sometimes fending for yourselves and sometimes waiting for me to be available. Thank you for the encouragement and welcome breaks when needed. My colleague and friend, Dr. Jenna Hallman, has been a resource, a role model, a sounding board, and a coach. Words cannot express what I have learned from her. To the educators who have walked the path with me, thank you for your support and for informing the work. To Elisa Lee, my friend and classmate, thank you for the constant encouragement, collaboration, and support; we persisted.

I am appreciative of the many educators who support the District Teacher Forums. I am grateful to those who participated in this study and to the focus group discussion participants who not only informed this study but my work moving forward. My hope is that this work will impact districts throughout our state and beyond so that teachers, regardless of where they work, will have the opportunity to develop as leaders.

I am grateful to the members of my dissertation committee, Dr. Blacher-Wilson, Dr. Kingston, and Dr. Vlachopoulos. I am especially thankful for the encouragement and gentle nudges from Dr. Blacher-Wilson and methodological expertise and support from Dr. Kingston. Both have been not only experts in their respective fields but cheerleaders for me along the path. I could not have completed this study without them.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

### **Introduction**

A current problem in K-12 education in the southern region of the United States is teacher attrition due in part to a lack of leadership opportunities (Castro, Quinn, Fuller, & Barnes, 2018). To address this issue, there are a number of districts in the state that offer Campus Teachers of the Year the opportunity to develop as teacher leaders through a cohort program called District Teacher Forums. Yoo (2016) extended previous research in a study by showing that professional development has a positive impact on a teacher's efficacy towards change in an era of school reforms. Working together as a cohort or a professional learning community (PLC) empowers teachers to develop greater professional autonomy (Chow, 2016). Teachers who have had the opportunity to participate in leadership development have reported advantages. These advantages include a sense of professional growth, an awareness of self as a change agent, a heightened awareness of one's own leadership style, and greater personal and professional satisfaction (Lowery-Moore, Latimer, & Villate, 2016). There is not currently a unifying framework to describe the benefits of teacher leadership as most studies only address one dimension of leadership (Bae, Hayes, O'Connor, Seitz, & Distefano, 2016). Studies have shown a connection between teacher leadership and a positive school culture (Cansoy & Parlar, 2017; Wilson, 2016). However, few studies were found showing what preparation is needed for teachers to develop as leaders (Bradley-Levine, 2011; Smulyan, 2016). There are currently no studies based on the outcomes of the District Teacher Forums regarding the development of teacher leaders.

This study could provide insight into how to best develop teacher leaders through professional development.

This chapter includes an introduction to the study to include a summary of current research related to teacher leadership, professional development, and professional learning communities. The chapter also features a description of the problem statement, the purpose of the study being conducted, the research questions being addressed, and the conceptual framework, which is a combination of three existing theories. The methodology of the study is included as well as an explanation of how data were collected and analyzed. Key terms, assumptions, scope, delimitations, and limitations of the study are also included in this chapter. Finally, the chapter concludes with a description of the study's significance.

### **Background**

Teacher leadership, retention, a school principal, and school culture are all directly linked together (Demir, 2015; Johnson et al., 2014; Sebastian, Huan, & Allenworth, 2017). Prior research regarding teacher leadership has addressed evaluating the role of school culture and principals in creating a culture that promotes and supports teacher leadership. Demir (2015) found that trust in the school's principal is the most significant factor of a supportive school culture but that trust in the organization as a whole and in colleagues also matter. Another study indicated that teachers are more likely to step into leadership roles when principals take an inclusive approach to teacher contributions (Johnson et al., 2014). Sebastian et al. (2017) found that teacher leadership is intrinsically connected to principals in that principals create organizational processes of

school leadership that include roles for teacher leaders. Teacher leaders need the space and supporting climate to assume leadership roles (Demir, 2015; Johnson et al., 2014; Sebastian et al., 2017).

There is no one model to explain what roles teacher leaders may assume. Eckert, Ulmer, Khachatryan, and Ledesma (2016) conducted a mixed method study of participants in cohorts of the yearlong U.S. Department of Education Teaching Ambassador Fellowship to examine their career pathways as teacher leaders. A key finding was that the participants tended to conceptualize teacher leadership based on personal characteristics rather than defining it by a position (Eckert et al., 2016). The continuum of teacher leadership has had four distinct phases throughout the years: formal leadership positions such as department chairs, roles based on professional knowledge such as curriculum developers, supportive roles such as mentors, and, most recently, the practice of distributed leadership (Bradley-Levine, 2011). Distributive leadership is a term that describes an organizational structure that allows for shared leadership among all levels of an organization. Sales, Moliner, and Amat (2017) conducted a case study that focused on the impact professional development has on change capacity. The researchers found that obstacles to distributive leadership and organizational change include both a resistance to innovation and a lack of delegation of power among the teaching staff (Sales et al., 2017).

Professional development is a crucial part of teacher leadership development. Prior researchers have explored professional development for teachers in a number of different capacities. Hilton, Hilton, Dole, and Goos (2015) examined the impact



professional development had on teachers' professional growth. The authors conducted action research that involved a 2-year professional development cohort (Hilton et al., 2015). They found that teachers embrace growth when they perceive that their professional development is valued by school leaders (Hilton et al., 2015). In another study, McCulla and Degenhardt (2016) conducted action research using a grounded theory approach in which they facilitated a year-long cohort for 31 classroom teachers to determine what participants valued in a leadership development program aimed at helping teachers transition into principal positions. A key finding was that many of the participants valued their inner journey and self-discovery more than any specific leadership knowledge or skill acquisition. In addition, Nicholson, Capitelli, Richert, Bauer, and Bonetti (2016) conducted a case study in which they observed a single meeting of a teacher network that supports 21 teacher leaders in acquiring skills related to facilitating data conversations with their colleagues. The purpose of the study was to determine how to support leadership development so that teachers are equipped to facilitate future data conversations. The authors found that the network afforded the teachers a safe and collaborative space to both challenge and support others' thought processes (Nicholson et al., 2016). Moreover, Parker, Patton, and Sinclair (2016) explored teachers' depiction of change within their practice after participating in professional development. All participants in the study reported a greater self-awareness following professional development (Parker et al., 2016).

In this research, I focused on various aspects of organizational support, teacher leadership roles, and professional development experiences. There is, however, a lack of

empirical evidence showing what type of preparation is needed for the development of teacher leaders (Bradley-Levine, 2011; Smulyan, 2016). This current study helps to fill the gap in the existing body of literature by examining the experiences of teachers as they participate in professional development specifically related to the development of leadership skills in a cohort setting. There are no existing research studies of the District Teacher Forums. In this study, I helped to inform future processes of leadership development with the District Teacher Forums as well as provide information for other school organizations that are exploring processes for leadership development among teachers.

### **Problem Statement**

A current problem in education is the uncertainty about how to develop teacher leadership. Teacher leadership is an evolving concept with a potential that has yet to be realized (Toner, 2015). Teachers who are provided leadership opportunities are more likely to have a positive impact on not only their classrooms but also the profession (Jacobs, Gordon, & Solis, 2016; Tubin, 2017). Existing research on teacher leadership mainly focuses on instruction, curriculum, and policy rather than how teachers develop leadership skills (Smulyan, 2016). While teacher leadership has yet to be universally defined because there is so much variance in the activities taken on by a teacher leader, most scholars have agreed that it includes both formal and informal roles (Lowery-Moore et al., 2016; Nappi, 2014). There seems to be a false presumption that teachers know how to lead their colleagues without being provided focused support in leadership development (Harris & Kemp-Graham, 2017; Knapp, 2017). Fairman and Mackenzie

(2015) discovered that professional relationships, both existing and emerging, were essential to leadership strategies such as sharing, coaching, collaborating, and advocating. The cohort model of the Forum offers the opportunity to develop those professional relationships while receiving the needed training and support to take on leadership capacities (Edwards & Hinueber, 2015).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to understand the process of teacher leadership development when participating in a District Teacher Forum. A qualitative research study using interviews and a focus group was conducted to better understand what participants experience as a result of the professional development, their acquired leadership skills, and leadership opportunities while participating in a District Teacher Forum. Interviews of participants and a focus group of stakeholders and colleagues of the participants including school administrators, alumni of the Forum, and teacher leaders such as National Board Certified Teachers or lead teachers, were used to gather data.

### **Research Questions**

What is the experience of teachers participating in a teacher leadership development program?

Subquestions:

1. How do teachers perceive themselves as leaders during and after participating in the District Teacher Forum?
2. What were the experiences that most contributed to the teachers' perceptions of their development as teacher leaders?

3. How do teachers feel more prepared to seek leadership roles and responsibilities after participating in the District Teacher Forum?
4. How do teachers feel that the school culture and school leadership can support their leadership development?

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for this study was based on a congruence of the social cognitive theory, constructivist theory, and perceived organizational support. Social cognitive theory is derived from social learning theory and highlights three modes of personal agency: direct personal agency, proxy agency, and collective agency (Bandura, 2001). Teacher leaders participating in the District Teacher Forums are both contributors and products of the Forum's social system. The constructivist theory provides a theoretical framework for leadership capacity as teacher leaders are provided opportunities for inquiry, participation, and dialogue with their peers (Lambert, 2003). The Forum assumes a constructivist approach in which the participants are both teachers and learners who are allowed to struggle with the challenges of both roles (Rout & Behera, 2014). Finally, perceived organizational support posits that employees who perceive that the organization for which they work value them are more likely to be committed to remaining in and improving the organization (Kurtessis et al., 2017). There is a significant relationship between teachers' work engagement behaviors and both the perception teachers have that their administrators support them and that the school culture in which they work provides them space to grow professionally (Köse, 2016). If teachers feel supported by their administrators, they are more willing to participate in individual

and collective extra roles beyond the requirements of the classroom (Alparslan & Uğur, 2015). Teachers who are allowed space to grow as leaders in the Forum and are given that space within their schools may make meaningful contributions to their profession and school system. With the research questions, I aimed to uncover how the teachers develop their leadership agency or capacity, how they construct their knowledge of leadership skills and roles, and how their school culture impacts their growth as a leader. All three theories involve a commitment to organizational and professional improvement; more information and an explanation of how the theories work together is provided in the next chapter.

### **Nature of Study**

The nature of this study was basic qualitative. Qualitative research is consistent with the purpose of the study, which was to gain an understanding of the experiences of teachers participating in a teacher leadership development program. This was a study of one District Teacher Forum, and all participants were members of the Forum or stakeholders of the Forum. Triangulation of data was achieved through interviews and a focus group discussion. Yazan (2015) outlined the importance of triangulation in qualitative studies to add validity and transferability to the findings. Types and sources of data included interviews of six selected participants of the District Teacher Forum using open-ended questions and a focus group discussion with colleagues and stakeholders of the Forum participants, including a school administrator, alumni of the Forum, and other teacher leaders such as National Board Certified Teachers, lead teachers, and state-level

administrators. Data analysis included coding for themes and member checks to ensure accuracy.

### **Definitions**

*Campus Teacher of the Year:* In this Southeastern state, each school selects one teacher to be recognized as a Campus Teacher of the Year. That person is considered for the District Teacher of the Year. While some districts have set requirements, such as a minimum number of years in the school, there is not state-wide policy about who is eligible to be named a Campus Teacher of the Year. Therefore, the requirements and expectations for Campus Teachers of the Year vary by district. In districts that have District Teacher Forums, the Campus Teachers of the Year make up the membership of the Forum (Center for Educator Recruitment, Retention, and Advancement [CERRA], 2018).

*Cohort:* A cohort for the State Teacher Forum is made up of the District Teachers of the Year from across the state. The cohort meets multiple times throughout the year to receive professional development in the area of teacher leadership. The cohort of District Teacher Forums is made up of Campus Teachers of the Year and led by a former cohort of the State Teacher Forum (CERRA, 2018).

*Collective leadership:* Collective leadership is a shared construction of leadership by a group of individuals who share a goal within an organization (O'Neill & Brinkerhoff, 2018; Raelin, 2018). It is based upon the idea that all members of the group can and should lead (O'Neill & Brinkerhoff, 2018). It is a plural phenomenon, not a distributive approach in which roles are formally assigned (Raelin, 2018). The five

essential elements are trust, shared power, effective and transparent communication, shared learning, and accountability (O'Neill & Brinkerhoff, 2018).

*Distributive leadership:* This concept first emerged as a practical tool that leaders within complex organizations could use to share the increasing workload they faced (Tian, Risku, & Collin, 2016). Distributive leadership involves distributing power and responsibilities to all individual members in both formal and informal roles within the organization in order to realize the organization's goals (Göksoy, 2015).

*District Teacher Forum:* A District Teacher Forum is made up of a group of Campus Teachers of the Year. They usually serve 2-year terms, depending on the district. Some smaller districts that may have less than 10 schools have members serve 3 years, and some larger districts that may have over 30 schools have members serve 1 year. They spend their time on the Forum receiving professional development in the area of leadership. The District Teacher Forum is led by the former District Teacher of the Year who most often assumes the role of chairperson in his or her second year of membership (CERRA, 2018). Only senior members of the Forum serve as chairs of the various committees. This program is unique to this state.

*District Teacher of the Year:* A District Teacher of the Year is selected to represent each district for a period of 1 year. The District Teacher of the Year is selected from the pool of Campus Teachers of the Year. The eligibility requirements for District Teacher of the Year vary from district to district. Many districts mimic the rigorous selection process used for the selection of the State Teacher of the Year. Superintendents have the discretion to involve educational organizations, business and community

leaders, and media representatives in the selection process (South Carolina Department of Education, 2018). The District Teacher of the Year participates in the State Teacher Forum for a period of 1 year and, if the district has a District Teacher Forum, serves as the chair of the District Teacher Forum (CERRA, 2018).

*Professional learning community (PLC):* The term PLC has been used to describe everything from small collaborative groups such as committees to large groups such as entire school organizations (Huffman, 2011). A PLC facilitates teacher leadership by allowing teachers to collaborate on their professional work and learning (Wilson, 2016). It can be difficult to define PLCs because of the variation in interpretations and implementation (Jones, Stall, & Yarbrough, 2013). Teachers' professional learning through collaboration can be a key characteristic of a PLC (Owen, 2014). For the purpose of this study, a PLC is defined as a group of emerging teacher leaders participating in a cohort-style learning group focused on learning more about leadership skills. A PLC must involve the whole organization, efforts that are based on the five dimensions of PLCs, and active participation of all members (Huffman, 2011). The five PLC dimensions include a shared and supportive leadership, shared values and vision, collective learning and application, shared personal practice, and supportive conditions (Huffman, 2011; Wilson, 2016). The benefits of participating in a PLC are potentially higher professional, human, and social capital (Wilson, 2016). Participants may also feel less isolated and more committed to the shared goals of the PLC (Wilson, 2016).

*State Teacher of the Year:* The State Teacher of the Year is selected from the nominees from each district. The State Teacher of the Year serves for a single academic



year as the spokesperson for the state's over 48,000 teachers, attends speaking engagements, works with teacher cadets and teaching fellows, leads the state Teacher Forum, and serves as an educator ambassador for the state (South Carolina Department of Education, 2018). This person is selected from the pool of applicants on the basis of a written application, interview before a panel, and a videotaped lesson (South Carolina Department of Education, 2018). The State Teacher of the Year serves a 1-year residency at the CERRA in order to create the flexibility needed for the various professional development opportunities and speaking engagements that will present themselves during the year (South Carolina Department of Education, 2018).

*State Teacher Forum:* The State Teacher Forum is a program that is unique to this Southeastern state. It was started in 1986 under the leadership of the 1985 State and National Teacher of the Year, Terry Dozier (CERRA, 2018). It is a nonpartisan organization unaffiliated with all other teacher organizations in the state (CERRA, 2018). District Teachers of the Year form the membership body and serve 1-year terms before becoming alumni members. The current State Teacher of the Year serves as the chair. The Forum offers its members the opportunity to communicate with key education leaders and policy makers and to participate in dialogue at the national, state, and local level on educational issues (CERRA, 2018).

*Teacher leaders:* There is not a universally accepted definition of teacher leaders at this time. Not only is the term undefined, but there is further confusion by the fact that teacher leaders hold different titles in different schools (Wenner & Campbell, 2017). Teacher leaders are able to engage in and contribute to what is occurring in the schools

(Jackson, Burrus, Bassett, & Roberts, 2010). For this study, the definition of a teacher leader is a classroom teacher who is able to positively impact others or the profession by assuming roles outside of the boundaries of the classroom, either formally or informally.

### **Assumptions**

There were multiple assumptions within this qualitative study. The first assumption was that the District Teacher Forum varies from district to district. The Forum is participant-led and, therefore, the participants create their own reality based on the desired learning outcomes of the participants, the strengths and interests of the Cohort leaders, and the social interactions within the group. For this reason, it is understood and expected that the Forum's activities and the participants' experiences are contextual. The study was based on an assumption that patterns exist and that research that focuses on the participants' experiences and perspectives illuminates the patterns.

Another assumption that was present in this study concerns the honesty of the participants. To encourage honesty during the interviews and the focus group, participants were given the right to leave the study at any point, and their anonymity was protected. No one from the district had access to the participants' names so that they would not feel compelled to conceal anything about their experiences. No continuing District Teacher Forum participants were in the focus group; the assumption was that this promoted honesty among the focus group participants.

A final assumption was that the definition of teacher leadership used in the study allowed for the inclusion of opportunities that the participants have had within their schools and the district. This assumption was important because the participants in the

District Teacher Forum participate in professional development as it relates to teacher leadership with the understanding that they will have multiple opportunities to employ the acquired skills in their building, the district, and the community. If those opportunities are not, in fact, in place, it impacts their perception of themselves as teacher leaders.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

The scope of this qualitative study was limited to the experiences of six members of the District Teacher Forum and perspectives of stakeholders. In order to be a member of a District Teacher Forum, a person must be a classroom teacher who has been named a Campus Teacher of the Year in the current or prior year and must still be employed by the district. Stakeholders participated in a focus group discussion. Stakeholders included teacher leaders, a school administrator, and alumni of the District Teacher Forum. The rationale for the scope of this study was based upon multiple factors. First, there were no studies of the District Teacher Forums. Second, there was a lack of qualitative research that addressed the potential impact of professional development specifically focused on teacher leadership on a developing teacher leader. Finally, there was a lack of studies of developing teacher leaders participating in a cohort-style professional development group. The results of the study can inform other District Teacher Forums as well as future professional development activities centered on leadership development.

The scope was limited to the participants' experience in the learning community, construction of personal and professional knowledge and leadership capacity, and the perceptions they have of the support that exists within their organization as outlined by the conceptual framework. The study does not include background or explanatory details

about the District Teacher Forum itself as that was beyond the scope of a basic qualitative study and would be more appropriate for a case study. The scope was additionally limited in its adherence to the existing theories of the conceptual framework. There was no attempt at developing theory as this was not a grounded theory study.

The scope of the study was additionally narrowed by the selection of participants, resources, and time. Only one District Teacher Forum was selected. The reason for this decision is that, in spite of variances among District Teacher Forums, the overall structure and experiences should share common patterns. I believed that there was no benefit to including more than one District Teacher Forum. The District Teacher Forum that was studied was in close proximity to my location for the purpose of convenience. This delimitation was based on the resources and time available to a single researcher. Another delimitation was time as data were collected during 1 academic year.

### **Limitations**

Study limitations were related to the approach taken during the study and the potential weaknesses of the selected methodology. In a qualitative study, trustworthiness may be an issue if protocols for data collection and analysis are not followed. For this reason, there is a description of the protocols used during data collection and analysis in Chapter 3. Another possible limitation of the study involved transferability. This study involved data from one District Teacher Forum, which is a program that is unique to this Southeastern state. Therefore, it is possible that generalizability is limited to similar programs. A third possible limitation is researcher bias. In an effort to reduce any potential bias, Chapter 3 includes a description of the strategies that were used to enhance

the trustworthiness of the study, including member checks and triangulation of data sources. This improved transparency.

### **Significance**

This research filled a gap in understanding the experience of teachers when participating in professional development specifically aimed towards teacher leadership development. The District Teacher Forums were established to provide opportunities for teachers to develop as teacher leaders; in this study, I explored the experiences of teachers as they participated in the professional development offered by the Forum. This qualitative study addressed an area of the profession where there is a lack of empirical research into the necessary preparation of a teacher leader (Bradley-Levine, 2011; Smulyan, 2016). The findings from this study provide insight into how teachers perceive their experiences, their preparation to become teacher leaders, and supportive school cultures.

The findings also provide a foundation for future professional development processes to develop teacher leadership. Social change implications from this finding are that it provided insight into how members of the District Teacher Forum perceive their experiences and their development as teacher leaders; therefore, any needed changes to the program can be identified. In addition to the work being done within the District Teacher Forums, other efforts to develop teacher leaders may benefit from the insight gained from this study. Ultimately, improved teacher leadership development may lead to improved job satisfaction and even improved retention, but those variables are beyond the scope of this study.

## **Summary**

This chapter served as an introduction to the study. The chapter included the problem statement, the purpose of the study, and the research questions. There was also a description of the conceptual framework, which was based on three theories: social cognitive theory, perceived organizational support theory, and constructivist theory. This is described in more detail in Chapter 2. A brief summation of the methodology and the protocols that were used for data collection and analysis were included. Additionally, I provided the assumptions, scope, delimitations, and limitations of the study. Finally, the significance of the study was provided. In the next chapter, I review the literature relevant to the topic being studied.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

Teacher leadership is a well-researched concept as it relates to descriptions of teacher leaders: the needed skills, expected characteristics, and potential roles. Many definitions of teacher leadership have emerged in the current literature, but none have been universally adopted. What is missing from the existing body of research are studies describing the development of teacher leaders, specifically the experiences of developing teacher leaders. Prior researchers have primarily focused on the roles for existing teacher leaders without regard to how to develop the needed skills and characteristics to fulfill those roles. While scholars have advocated for leadership development among teacher leaders, there has been little to no research into what teacher leaders experience as they participate in professional development related to leadership skills. Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative study was to describe the experiences that developing teacher leaders have while participating in a District Teacher Forum. Extensive research on teacher leadership exists (Angelle & Teague, 2014; Cheng & Szeto, 2016; Cosenza, 2015; Crowther, Ferguson, & Hann, 2009; Danielson, 2006; Derrington & Angelle, 2013; Jackson et al., 2010; Sinha & Hanuscin, 2017; Smylie & Eckert, 2018; Uribe-Flórez, Al-Rawashdeh, & Morales, 2014; Wenner & Campbell, 2017; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). These researchers have focused on related topics such as defining teacher leadership, characteristics of teacher leaders, the evolution of teacher leader roles, and teacher leadership preparatory programs within a formal degree program.

This chapter includes a literature review, beginning with an explanation of the literature search strategies that were used and an elaboration of the conceptual framework

for this study. The conceptual framework was based on a merging of three theories: social cognitive theory, which emerged from the work of Bandura (2005); constructivist theory, which is based on work by Dewey, Bruner, Piaget, and Vygotsky (Richardson, 2007); and perceived organizational support theory, defined by Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002). The description of the conceptual framework is immediately followed by a review of the literature. This review addresses teacher leadership definitions and characteristics, teacher leader roles, and professional development; each of these constructs is further broken down into subtopics. A discussion of themes and gaps found are included in the summary.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

Several search strategies were used for this study, including general Internet searches as well as library database searches. The majority of the research studies selected for inclusion were published between 2014 and 2018 although some seminal works were included, especially as they related to the conceptual framework. The search engines of Safari, Google, Google Scholar, and Google Chrome were used for the general Internet search. The concepts of leadership, *teacher leadership* including *definitions*, *characteristics*, and *roles* and *professional development* including the *cohort* or *professional learning community* model were researched. Additionally, notifications were retrieved in Research Gate and Google Scholar for any publications based on these concepts and any publications from authors cited. Within the Walden library, the education and multidisciplinary databases were searched for the concepts of *teacher leadership*, *leadership development*, *professional development*, and *leadership*



*characteristics*. Key terms that were used in the search of both the general Internet search and the Walden library search were *leadership development, teacher leadership, leadership potential, leadership characteristics, teacher leader, teacher leader roles, education cohorts, professional development, professional learning communities, leadership development, leadership training, self-efficacy, and leadership skills*. The key words and subject terms were combined to create more specific searches. In addition to these searches, the three theories that made up the basis of the conceptual framework were researched extensively. Books on teacher leadership and qualitative research were also reviewed and used in the study. During the search for articles, searches for particular authors referenced in research articles were conducted as well as searches for articles that cited studies that informed this work.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Ravitch and Carl (2016) explained that the conceptual framework ties together the interrelated parts of a qualitative study, including an argument for the topic's significance, and guiding the development of the study, including the iteration of the research questions, the selection of theories, and the methodology. Ravitch and Carl stressed the importance of defining what the conceptual framework is and how it informs the research study. The purpose of this section includes a description of the three theories that informed this study: social cognitive theory, constructivist theory, and perceived organizational support. Following these descriptions is an analysis of the incidence of these theories in current research. The concept of the social cognitive theory, constructivist theory, and perceived organizational support and previous research on

teacher leadership and professional development relate to the development of teacher leaders through the experiences of a District Teacher Forum. The findings of this research study were interpreted through this conceptual lens.

### **Social Cognitive Theory**

Bandura developed the social learning theory, which spawned the social cognitive theory. Social learning theory incorporates both behaviorism and cognitive theories of learning (Kretchmar, 2018). It is a viewpoint that postures that people are contributors to their own circumstances (Bandura, 2005). Human agency involves intentionality, forethought, and self-regulation, and all human functioning is rooted in social systems (Bandura, 2005). The theory posits that learning requires social resources including observations so that the learner can decide which of three actions to take regarding the model: imitate, mutate, or disregard (Banks & Mhunpiew, 2012). There are four conditions for effective modeling: attention, retention, motor reproduction, and motivation (Banks & Mhunpiew, 2012; Kretchmar, 2018; Osifo, 2016). Not all models are equally effective. Factors that impact how likely a model is to be emulated include whether the learner identifies with the model in some area of similarity as well as the relevance and the level of prestige of the model (Kretchmar, 2018). This is a twofold process in that people will emulate well-respected leaders within an organization, and leaders within an organization desire to impact others through social exchange processes (Osifo, 2016). Social exchange is premised on what Bandura labeled as the norm of reciprocity; that is if one exchange partner does something beneficial for the other, then

an obligation is created for the other exchange partner to reciprocate with good faith behavior (as cited in Osifo, 2016).

There are four defining principles of social learning theory and subsequently social cognitive theory (Kretchmar, 2018). Bandura believed that people learn by observing both the behavior of others and the consequences of the person's behaviors (as cited in Kretchmar, 2018). Bandura did not believe that learning and performance are always the same thing as one can perform without learning and learn without performing (as cited in Kretchmar, 2018). Bandura suggested that while reinforcement can play a role in learning, it is not an essential component (as cited in Kretchmar, 2018). Finally, cognitive processes play a role in learning (Bandura, 2005; Kretchmar, 2018).

Bandura (2005) described an essential component of social learning theory as reciprocal determinism. That is the idea that there is a three-way relationship among three elements: personal factors including cognition, behavior, and environmental factors (Banks & Mhunpiew, 2012; Kretchmar, 2018). Bandura asserted that these interactions could be two-way interactions (as cited in Kretchmar, 2018). For example, the environment in which a person works might influence his or her behavior, and the person's behavior can also transform the environment. Each factor can impact the other two factors and be influenced by the other two.

### **Constructivist Theory**

Dewey is the founder of the constructivist theory. Dewey believed that learners should validate knowledge through creativity and collaboration and that they should be provided opportunities to not only think for themselves but also to verbalize and share

their thinking (as cited in Jennings, Surgenor, & McMahon, 2013). The theory posits that students build on previous knowledge and personal experiences in order to construct new meaning (Jennings et al., 2013). Cognition and continual academic growth are seen as integral components to learning (Richardson, 2007). Learning is individualized as each individual learner will have a different construction based on past experiences (Jennings et al., 2013). Learning is not acquired but is constructed through an active process (Jennings et al., 2013).

A constructivist learning environment has essential features (Jennings et al., 2013). Facilitators must provide multiple representations of reality that represent the complex reality of the world and allow students to engage in authentic tasks in real-world or meaningful contexts or case-based learning (Jennings et al., 2013). Learners should be encouraged to engage in thoughtful reflection on their individual experiences (Jennings et al., 2013). Knowledge construction should be context and content dependent (Jennings et al., 2013). The learning environment should support collaboration and social negotiation without competition (Jennings et al., 2013).

There are two subsets of the constructivist theory. Cognitive constructivism stresses that individual learners base their knowledge construction on personal experiences (Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2015). The two main cognitive constructivists were Bruner and Piaget (Jennings et al., 2013).. Social constructivism expands knowledge construction to incorporate social interaction with others as another avenue of applying meaning to new information (Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2015). A prominent social constructivist was Vygotsky whose zone of proximal development illustrates what

learners can accomplish with and without assistance and calls for intersubjectivity, scaffolding, and guided participation (Jennings et al., 2013).

### **Perceived Organizational Support**

Perceived organizational support emerged from the organizational support theory. The organizational support theory provides that employees adopt universal beliefs about the organization for which they work and whether or not it values their contributions and cares about their well-being through a personification of the organization (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). There are three ways in which an organization can treat employees that lead to a sense of perceived organizational support: fairness, supervisor support, and favorable organizational rewards and job conditions (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). When employees have a sense of perceived organizational support, they believe that the organization will assist them in completing their job responsibilities and support them in stressful times (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). There are many positive outcomes associated with perceived organizational support. Some of those outcomes are commitment to the organization, job-related affect, improved job involvement and performance, reduced stress, greater retention, less tardiness and absenteeism, and a greater inclination towards risk-taking (Neves & Eisenberger, 2014). If an employee has a sense of perceived organizational support, he or she is more likely to help the organization reach its goals, feel that increased work activities are rewarded, and adopt a social identity based on organizational membership and role status because his or her social-emotional needs are being met by the perceived support (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002).

Several studies have explored the outcomes associated with perceived organizational support. A crucial finding is that employees are more likely to take risks when they feel supported by the organization and do not fear consequences (Neves & Eisenberger, 2014). Neves and Eisenberger defined failure-related trust as the belief that the organization will take into consideration the employee's good intentions if work-related actions are not successful. Neves and Eisenberger found that perceived organizational support leads to an increase in failure-related trust which in turn leads to a greater willingness to take risks that may result in higher gains for the organization and for the employee.

Another outcome that has been recently addressed is the relationship between perceived organizational support and job performance. There are two types of performance: in-role performances are standard job expectations; extra-role performances are roles that are assumed beyond the assigned activities such as professional growth and informal leadership roles. A moderate relationship was found between in-role performance and perceived organizational support (Eisenberger & Stinglhamber, 2011; Neves & Eisenberger, 2012). Neves & Eisenberger explain that an even stronger relationship exists between extra-role performance and perceived organizational support. This strong connection may be impacted by the fact that extra-role activities often occur as opportunities arise, and without open communication and support, the employee may not know of opportunities (Chen, Eisenberger, Johnson, Sucharski, & Aselage, 2009).

### **A Congruence of Theories**

The theories are all directly related to the activities of the District Teacher Forum. The District Teacher Forum is a cohort made up of the Campus Teachers of the Year (CTOY) from the current and prior academic year from each of the schools within the district. The current CTOY is considered a junior member while the prior CTOY is considered a senior member. The senior members can take on the role of serving as chair of a committee within the Forum. The junior members do not assume any leadership roles within the Forum. The prior District Teacher of the Year (DTOY) serves as the chair of the Forum, and the current DTOY serves as the vice-chair and the chair-elect. The current DTOY also participates as a member of the State Teacher Forum from which he/she learns more about leadership development and how the Forum functions as a cohort for developing teacher leaders. Each District Teacher Forum has the power to decide on committee formation, but most of the Forums have committees that are committed to taking up issues of advocacy, communication, service, professional development, and cohort organization. A leadership team meets ahead of the regular membership to plan the meetings; the leadership team consists of the chair, vice-chair, all prior chairs, the Forum's liaison, and two appointees from the membership body. The purpose of the District Teacher Forum is to develop teacher leaders through the professional development provided in a cohort model.

The three theories are all integral to understanding the experiences of participants in a District Teacher Forum. The social cognitive theory explains the three modes of personal agency and how these are crucial to a group's social system. Participants of the

Forum are both contributors and products of the cohort's social system. They are developing as teacher leaders while contributing to the development of their colleagues within the group; thus, the three agencies (direct personal agency, proxy agency, and collective agency) are all at play. In accordance with the constructivist theory, participants operate simultaneously as teachers and learners through inquiry, participation, and dialogue to realize their leadership capacity. The perceived organizational support theory outlines the importance of the work environment; participants within the Forum are being given the space to grow as leaders. This will also inform the interview questions as part of the experience is dependent upon the perception of the support the participants have at school. All three of the theories are based on professional growth and organizational commitment. Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual framework for this study.



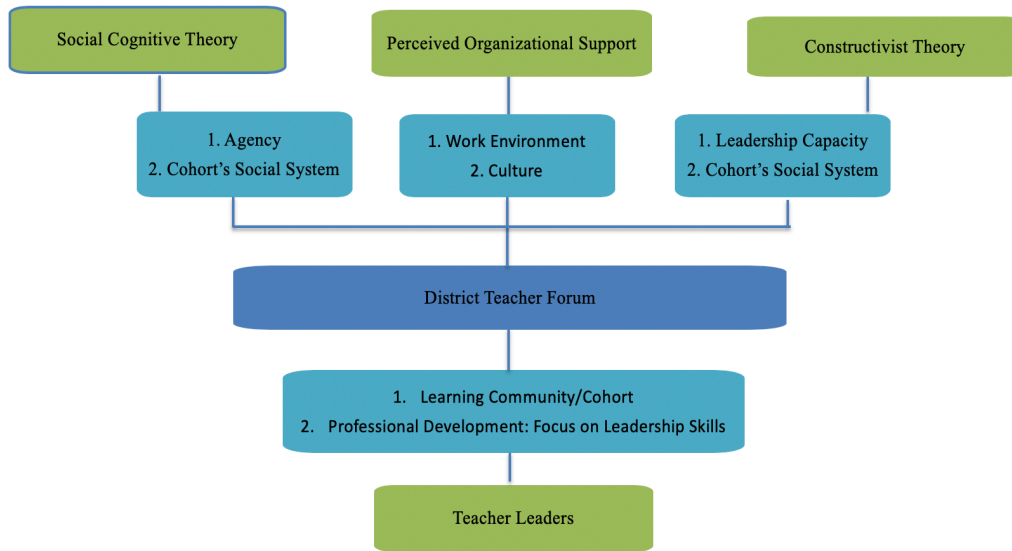


Figure 1. Conceptual framework

### **Literature Review Related to Key Concepts**

The purpose behind this literature review is to describe the existing research related to leadership development, teacher leadership in the K-12 educational system, teacher leader roles, and professional development trends related to teacher leadership and ownership. In an effort to prepare for this literature review, 48 peer-reviewed articles and studies were read from researchers who described leadership in organizations, teacher leadership, teacher leader roles, and professional development related to teacher leadership. The review includes two literature reviews, 14 quantitative studies, 15 qualitative studies, four mixed methods studies, 12 books or peer-reviewed articles, and one dissertation. While the research included an equal number of quantitative studies and qualitative studies, there were significantly more quantitative studies done outside of education and more qualitative studies done within the field of education. Some of the studies on leadership in organizations outside of education were seen through the lens of the three theories that make up the conceptual framework for this current study. Some of the researchers investigated teacher leadership and the related topics through a general perspective, while others evaluated through the lens of leadership as an organizational quality, participative leadership, distributive leadership, and parallel leadership. Two major existing literature reviews were included, one that spanned 1980 to 2004 and the other that examined the research that was published after 2004. Some of the researchers approached the topic in terms of the benefits to the individual teachers while others explored how utilizing teacher leadership could impact the organization as a whole. Studies that only focused on the impact on student learning were not included. Some of

the researchers were exploring leadership development through graduate programs, while others were examining initiatives within the school system to develop teacher leadership. A few of the studies included schools in countries outside of the United States. The studies included qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches. The remaining sources were summary articles. The most common sources of data collection involved interviews or surveys. The review focused on three main key concepts. The first is teacher leadership including definitions, the characteristics of a teacher leader, the impact of that leadership, and the agency or capacity to develop teacher leadership within a system. The second topic is teacher leader roles. This section begins with an examination of the capacity needed to create and sustain these roles and is followed by the necessary culture to support the inclusion of teacher leader roles. The third topic is professional development. This section contains a description of the changes from traditional professional development that was delivered to teachers with predetermined foci to some of the more recent forms of professional development including teacher-led sessions with collaboratively developed foci.

### **Leadership Development in Organizations Outside of Education**

This portion of the literature review involved an analysis of 13 articles and studies. Of the studies, 10 of them were quantitative research studies. Only one qualitative and one mixed methods study were found. There are many leadership models and ways in which organizations develop leadership among their employees. Lacerenza, Reyes, Marlow, Joseph, and Salas (2017) evaluated one leadership training program to determine what made it effective and found that leadership training is most effective

when it does not assume a one-size-fits-all approach. The leadership pipeline is one approach to leadership. The leadership pipeline is a model that includes the idea that different levels of leadership within an organization require different skill sets, and training is needed to move up the pipeline (Terblanche, Albertyn, & van Coller-Peter, 2017). In this model, it is understood that leadership training should allow employees to think about and explore various possibilities rather than just memorize lessons (Laughton, 2017). Furthermore, the model includes the idea that both time and resources are essential investments in order to build good leadership (Laughton, 2017). Another model of leadership is the stratified systems theory that purports that different skill sets are required by leaders at different levels of the organization (Terblanche et al., 2017). This theory has constructivist roots in its assumption that various roles within the organization require various cognitive complexities (Törnblom, Stålné, & Kjellström, 2018). Many businesses also use distributive leadership. Fu and Lui (2018) explain that distributed leadership has an emphasis on the work of a team rather than of individuals and leads to improved organizational capacity. Holmberg, Larsson, and Bäckström (2016) conducted a quasi-experimental study in which they evaluated employees going through leadership training. They found that program not only benefited the employees in terms of leadership skill development, but it also had positive impacts on the participants' well-being and stress levels (Holmberg et al., 2016).

Terblanche et al. (2017) conducted a constructivist, grounded theory study to evaluate current coaching practices in supporting employees through the transition into leadership roles. Key findings were that leadership training and coaching should be

ongoing for an extended period of time and that the professional development should take place outside of the office (Terblanche et al., 2017). Ren and Zhu (2017) investigated the practice of leadership self-development which is a term that represents self-initiated, goal-oriented, and deliberate leader development activities. Leader self-development is grounded in social cognitive theory in that the individual aims to find a fit between their development activities and what they are expected to do in terms of role performance (Ren & Zhu, 2017). Leader self-development enhances job performance because of the self-efficacy and self-regulation aspects of social cognitive behaviors (Ayub, Kokkalis, & Hassan, 2017). Another method of leadership development involves the use of coaching. Mosteo, Batista-Foguet, McKeever, and Serlavóos (2016) explain that there are two basic approaches to coaching in leadership development: one approach is to focus on an individual's weaknesses and utilizes performance goals, and the other approach is to focus on the individual's strengths, goals, and personal development. While their study did not specifically focus on social cognitive theory, they did find that effective coaching in leadership influences a participants' cognitive–emotional processing in regards to areas such as improved clarity, personal vision, and ability to face adversity (Mosteo et al., 2016). Leadership development is also grounded in perceived organizational support. Kunze, de Jong, and Bruch (2016) argue that perceived organizational support could be diminished when there are high levels of differentiated individual focused leadership because the focus on individuals takes away from the focus on organizational processes. Tremblay and Simard (2018) found that perceived organizational support is a strong predictor of office, individual, and team citizenship behaviors. Perceived organizational

support bolsters the belief that the organization will reward performance, leading to a motivation to take on extra-role leadership responsibilities (Tremblay & Simard, 2018). Perceived organizational support positively impacts employees as they are empowered to take on leadership (Kim, Moon, & Shin, 2018).

### **Teacher Leadership**

There have been seminal research studies that inform much of the research conducted around teacher leadership. York-Barr and Duke (2004) conducted an extensive literature review that spanned the years of 1980 to 2004 that showed that teachers hold a crucial position that can facilitate the operation of a school but that there is much left to be learned about the pathways into teacher leadership. They found that there were numerous ideas but no solidified definition of teacher leadership and that teacher leaders can hold a number of varied roles and responsibilities that were both formal and informal in nature (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Obstacles to the full realization of the possibilities of teacher leadership include traditional bureaucratic structures, physical structures, and insufficient time (York-Barr & Duke, 2004).

York-Barr and Duke (2004) suggested that there were four conceptions of leadership that include both formal and informal leaders that could situate teacher leadership: participative leadership, leadership as an organizational quality, distributive leadership, and parallel leadership (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). York-Barr and Duke (2004) presented Leithwood and Duke's model of participative leadership that focuses on decision-making processes and democratic principles. The idea is that when members of an organization actively participate in decision-making, the organization's effectiveness

improves (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). York-Barr and Duke also explored Ogawa and Bossert's model involving leadership as an organizational quality rather than an individual quality. A third model into which teacher leadership could situate is distributive leadership (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). In this model, leadership is shared among people in the school to enhance teaching and learning and leadership should be stretched among various social and structural contexts (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Leadership should be more than the sum of individuals' contributions but rather a compilation of what they can do together (Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2001). Finally, York-Barr and Duke suggested that in parallel leadership, teacher leaders and principals can work collectively to build organizational capacity; the principals would take ownership over vision, resource alignment, and networking while the teacher leaders focus on instructional practice. Teacher leaders have the power to shape meaning systems (Crowther et al., 2009).

York-Barr and Duke (2004) established a framework for teacher leadership based on their research that included the following characteristics of a teacher leader: respected as a teacher, learning oriented, and in possession of leadership capacities. The framework established that the work of a teacher leader had to be valued, visible, negotiated, and shared (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Given a supportive culture and colleagues, the time and resources, and opportunities to develop, a teacher leader should be able to influence individuals, teams, and the organization's capacity to ultimately impact student learning (York-Barr & Duke, 2004).

Wenner and Campbell (2017) expanded upon the work completed by York-Barr and Duke in part to determine what had changed since they published their original literature review. They found that the definition of teacher leadership remained as unclear as it had been despite several advancements: several states had implemented mandates for teacher quality standards, Teacher Leader Model Standards had been created, and a set of Teacher Leader Competencies had been published (Wenner & Campbell, 2017). They reported that educational landscape had existed in a state of constant change since York-Barr and Duke's study and that the research on teacher leadership since they had maintained a narrow focus (Wenner & Campbell, 2017).

One finding that they were able to report was that there were primarily two ways that teacher leaders were prepared: professional development either through local training or conferences and a master's degree program. It is noteworthy that only 17% of the literature they reviewed even mentioned how teacher leaders were prepared (Wenner & Campbell, 2017). Of the literature they reviewed, 13% described teacher leaders being prepared by professional development, local training, or conferences (Wenner & Campbell, 2017). Regardless of the type of professional development or the length of time involved, all of these types of preparation programs involved training in leadership skills and strategies (Wenner & Campbell, 2017). Although master's degree programs were less frequently mentioned, Wenner and Campbell (2017) were able to identify two commonalities. They found that the master's programs focused on both personal and professional growth; they also found that there were allowances of personalized learning within the programs (Wenner & Campbell, 2017).



Two important developments that Wenner and Campbell (2017) were able to report were the development of the seven domains of teacher leadership by the Teacher Leadership Exploratory Consortium in 2008 and the Teacher Leadership Competencies developed by several education partners in 2014. The domains of teacher leadership established by the Teacher Leader Exploratory Consortium are as follows (National Network of State Teachers of the Year, 2017):

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

These seven domains were used as the foundation for the development of the Teacher Leader Model Standards (Wenner & Campbell, 2017). The Teacher Leader Model Standards navigate away from the top-down approach to leadership in favor of the idea that teachers can serve as essential contributors to the success of the school and of students (Cosenza, 2015). The Teacher Leader Initiative consisted of several education

partners who used the National Education Association (NEA) Leadership Competencies and the Teacher Leader Model standards to develop the Teacher Leadership Competencies (National Board for Professional Teaching Standards & National Education Association, 2014). The Teacher Leadership Competencies provide guidance for developing teacher leaders about the skill sets, knowledge, and characteristics needed to increase one's impact on both student learning and the teaching profession.

Another seminal work that informs the body of knowledge surrounding teacher leadership is Danielson's framework of teacher leadership. Danielson (2006) explains that teacher leaders are those who are able to energize and mobilize others in an effort to improve the school's responsibilities of teaching and learning. She explains that teacher leaders must have expertise in engaging others, a commitment to the school, and bravery to confront obstacles (Danielson, 2006). Teacher leadership offers a solution to the otherwise flat nature of a traditional teaching position (Danielson, 2006). Teachers are ideal leaders not only because of their expertise but also because of their institutional memory as they often stay in schools longer than the principals (Danielson, 2006). They can serve in formal or appointed roles or in informal roles that are often spontaneously developed (Danielson, 2006). Danielson cautions that the organizational conditions and the culture of the school must support teacher leadership and that the teachers will need knowledge and skills that require development.

Other studies have continued to contribute to what is known about teacher leadership. In 2010, research was conducted to clarify the various definitions of and frameworks for teacher leadership; emerging from this research was a suggestion for

developing and validating assessments of teacher leadership in an effort to legitimize the concept (Jackson et al., 2010). A key finding was that more definitional clarity is needed before precise measurements can be put into place to assess teacher leaders (Uribe-Flórez et al., 2014). They suggested three changes are imperative before the role of a teacher leader can be fully embraced: principals must be trained to understand and facilitate the role of a teacher leader, teacher leaders must be trained to work with adult learners and in other constructs of leadership that are traditionally not included in teacher preparation programs, and teachers must be trained to understand the role and purpose of a teacher leader (Uribe-Flórez et al., 2014). Smylie and Eckert (2018) described the pathway of teacher leadership development as the intentional and systematic development of teachers' leadership practice and capacity. This is a direct contrast to the anoint and appoint method of administrators assigning teachers to formal leadership roles and to the method of administrators distributing leadership to teachers (Smylie & Eckert, 2018). It is also different from the practice of a teacher stepping forward to accept a role; it is a learning and preparatory process of developing skills to match the needs to the organization (Smylie & Eckert, 2018).

The Mathematically Connected Communities Leadership Institute for Teachers developed a two-year program that aimed to develop math teachers to be teacher leaders (Uribe-Flórez et al., 2014). A study was conducted to determine how the teachers and the principals felt about teacher leadership halfway through the program (Uribe-Flórez et al., 2014). The researchers found that participants from both groups define teacher leadership as an individual initiative rather than as a collective initiative (Uribe-Flórez et al., 2014).

This differs from the research that focuses on the implementation of teacher leadership rather than the development and stresses the critical nature of principal involvement (Derrington & Angelle, 2013). There were many differences in the perceptions of the responsibilities of a teacher leader by the teachers and the principals (Uribe-Flórez et al., 2014). That study shows the need for more communication and a collective effort to support teacher leadership. Researchers have found a strong relationship between teacher leadership and collective efficacy (Angelle & Teague, 2014; Derrington & Angelle, 2013).

Sinha and Hanuscin (2017) conducted a multiple case study to determine the processes and pathways of leadership development of teacher leaders. They found that their cases all experienced different pathways based upon their own priorities, their school context, and their life experiences (Sinha & Hanuscin, 2017). However, they held similar leadership views, practices, and identities (Sinha & Hanuscin, 2017). They found that as teachers develop as teacher leaders, they widen their views of and increase their scope of leadership practices (Sinha & Hanuscin, 2017).

Cheng and Szeto (2016) conducted a study to explore novice teachers' perspectives of their leadership roles and their principal's facilitation of their development as teacher leaders. Cheng and Szeto (2016) found that early-career teachers can take on informal teacher leadership roles either through self-initiation or through principal-delegation. This study suggests that teachers may be more willing to take on leadership earlier in their careers if the culture values teacher leadership supporting the idea that teacher leadership is contextual (Cheng & Szeto, 2016). Day and Gu (2007)

found similar results in their study that revealed that teachers may be more open to professional growth earlier in their career rather than later.

### **Teacher Leader Roles**

Teacher leadership roles have yet to be fully realized or defined. Ingersoll, Sirinides, and Dougherty (2018) found that teachers are more likely to lead in ways that impact classroom instruction, instructional strategies, and grading than they are in ways that impact decisions that are school-wide and exist beyond the classroom in both academic and nonacademic ways. Principal leadership has been found to have a directional relationship with teacher leadership in that teacher leadership results when principals are able to empower teachers and delegate influence (Sebastian et al., 2017). Thus, principal leaders create teacher leaders, and both impact organizational processes leading to an impact on classroom instruction and ultimately on student achievement (Sebastian et al., 2017). A strong correlation exists between teacher leadership and student achievement (Ingersoll et al., 2018). However, a negative correlation has been found between teacher leadership and the principal's selection of teacher leaders (Derrington & Angelle, 2013).

There have been distinct phases of understanding teacher leadership. The concept was first introduced to the school leadership hierarchy over 40 years ago when teachers were appointed as department heads (Bradley-Levine, 2011). This is a directional relationship in which principals are responsible for the creation of teacher leadership opportunities (Sebastian et al., 2017). Over time, teachers were invited to develop curriculum or work towards staff development (Bradley-Levine, 2011). The principal

continued to be in control over the opportunities afforded to these teacher leaders. The next phase occurred when teachers stepped into support roles, such as working as mentor teachers (Bradley-Levine, 2011). Recently, the concept of distributed leadership has emerged (Bradley-Levine, 2011). Both qualitative and quantitative studies have revealed a strong relationship among distributed leadership, school culture, and teacher self-efficacy (DeMarco, 2018; García-Martínez & Tadeu, 2018). Teachers who accept positions of leadership tend to face ongoing struggles with perceived authority for two reasons: having to accept changes in professional identity and role ambiguity (Collay, 2006). Teacher leaders often take on roles that have expected managerial tasks such as problem-solving with staffing, scheduling, and budgeting; these may require skill sets that they have not traditionally needed for their role as a classroom teacher (Strike, Fitzsimmons, & Hornberger, 2019). Additionally, teachers may be reluctant to accept formal leadership roles as the traditional structure of school has been that teachers are female and principals are male; thus, the formal leadership roles may conflict with the social and cultural experiences that the teacher has previously had (Collay, 2006). It is no longer true that there are two career paths for educators: principal or teacher; the inclusion of a classroom teacher as a teacher leader requires an organizational and cultural shift in the way we think about education (Bassett, Kajitani, & Stewart, 2014).

Teacher leader roles are also directly impacted by capacity. Larger schools, such as high schools, tend to have more capacity for teacher leadership as the school system is more complex than their smaller counterparts (Portin, Russell, Samuelson, & Knapp, 2013). Principals must pull from their existing faculty to fill formal leadership roles, but

teachers do not typically have the necessary training to assume leadership roles unless the school has purposefully built that capacity (Harris & Kemp-Graham, 2017). In a study of both administrators and teachers, both groups reported the importance of school culture in promoting the capacity for teachers to assume both formal and informal teacher leadership roles including such factors as the mission statement and the master schedule that must allow teachers time and space for collaboration and fulfillment of the leadership responsibilities (Harris & Kemp-Graham, 2017). Teachers who are expected to assume leadership responsibilities and are not afforded time and space for that work may find themselves working over-time, burning out, or leaving the profession due to stress. Hybrid teacher leadership was developed to address that by giving teacher leaders an official schedule that includes both teaching and leading in some capacity (Bagley & Margolis, 2018). However, the majority of teacher leadership roles remain non-hybrid; this may be partially due to a lack of finances and resources and partially due to a lack of organizational capacity (Bagley & Margolis, 2018). Margolis and Huggins (2012) found that one of the reasons that hybrid roles have not been successfully implemented is the lack of a tangible definition of the role that led to conflicting determinations of what hybrid teacher leaders should be doing with their leadership time. This, again, can be traced back to the lack of a definition of teacher leader.

Riveros, Newton, and da Costa (2013) noted that the emphasis on how teacher leadership can improve a school has overshadowed how important teacher leadership roles can be in the career advancement of teachers. Newton, Riveros, and da Costa conducted a study to determine how teachers who participated in a teacher leadership

initiative perceived their experience in terms of allowing them to take on formal leadership roles including administrative positions. The participants reported that they felt more confident in their leadership skills and more open to applying for formal positions (Newton, Riveros, & da Costa, 2013).

### **Professional Development**

Frick and Browne-Ferrigno (2016) identify implications for developing teacher leaders: the professional development can be formal or informal but must be ongoing, and it will likely involve job-embedded professional learning through communities of practice, and a reinterpretation of the terms *teacher*, *leader*, and *self*. Active engagement in a community of practice, which is a community of people who develop expertise over time regarding a shared practice, can support the emerging teacher leader's opportunities for career advancement and professional growth (Frick & Browne-Ferrigno, 2016).

Huggins, Lesseig, and Rhodes (2017) found that teachers who were allowed to participate in two iterative communities of practice including professional development settings and a school-based PLC were more willing to consider taking on leadership responsibilities related to peer coaching. Osmond-Johnson (2017) conducted a study showing how having teacher leaders facilitate professional development nurtures both the teacher leader and those participating in the professional development session by providing meaningful learning experiences; this leads to a development of professional capital. They found that being able to extend their own skills as facilitators equated to increased human capital, social capital was increased by learning with and from each other, and decisional capital increased by leading the learning of their colleagues (Osmond-Johnson,



2017). Sarah Fiarman (2017) is a school principal who realized that getting input from teachers about the school's professional development plan was not enough to develop leadership among her teachers. To move away from a traditional school culture involving systems of autonomy, egalitarianism, and seniority, she built supports for teachers to lead their peers and establish a culture of collective responsibility (Fiarman, 2017).

Other types of changes to combat the traditionally designed one-size-fits-all model with a single predetermined foci include the use of EdCamps featuring unconferences and Twitter. EdCamp unconferences are participant-driven as an agenda is not developed in advance (Carpenter & Linton, 2016; Wake & Mills, 2018). The participants in an EdCamp collectively establish common foci and gather in groups to share their expertise, thus leading the professional development (Carpenter & Linton, 2016; Wake & Mills, 2018). Twitter also allows that personalization through Twitter chats, resource sharing, networking, and communicating (Carpenter & Krutka, 2015). A benefit to professional development utilizing Twitter is its immediacy and that it is not limited by time or space (Carpenter & Krutka, 2015). This trend towards these new forms of professional development is further evidence of the value of teacher-led professional development.

### **Summary**

In summary, this chapter included a review of the current research related to the key concepts of leadership, developing teacher leadership, and leadership capacity. The concept of developing teacher leadership included three subtopics: teacher leadership, teacher leader roles, and professional development. Furthermore, the chapter included

definitions of teacher leadership, the continuum of teacher leadership, leadership identity, leadership capacity, and barriers to teacher leadership.

The research surrounding leadership outside of education revealed that some of the same systems were in place that are in place in education such as distributed leadership. The models of leadership that exist within organizations tie into the three theories that inform the conceptual framework for this current study: constructivist theory, perceived organizational support, and social cognitive theory. Leadership development within organizations often utilize coaching or ongoing professional development.

The research revealed a lack of consensus about teacher leadership including how to develop leadership, the definition of a teacher leader, and the roles and responsibilities of a teacher leader. Nevertheless, teacher leadership is a widely researched topic, and three major themes emerged from the research: the need for teacher leaders, the need for a system of teacher leadership development, and the challenges that exist due to the lack of a formal, universally accepted definition and framework for teacher leadership. Each theme is described in more detail in the subsequent paragraphs.

The first theme that emerged in the literature review is that teacher leadership is needed and is valued. Districts, schools, and teachers are under public scrutiny in this age of school reform with calls for accountability and higher standardized test scores and graduation rates. There is a strong correlation between student achievement and teacher leadership (Ingersoll et al., 2018). The existing literature championed the potential benefits of teacher leadership. York-Barr and Duke (2004) found that organizational

effectiveness improves when members of an organization work together in leadership capacities. Danielson (2006) was among the early researchers who identified the importance of teacher leaders in energizing their colleagues in order to improve both teaching and learning within a school. Researchers have reported a strong connection between teacher leadership and collective efficacy (Angelle & Teague, 2014; Derrington & Angelle, 2013). Growth and change are necessary components of reform efforts. Effective leaders are crucial in order to facilitate and sustain growth and change within the education system.

The second theme that emerged from the research was that teacher leaders need to be developed through some type of formal training. While the current literature reiterates the need for leadership development in order to develop teacher leadership, there is not yet a definitive model for leadership development. There are a number of studies that summarize various programs including master's programs and PLCs. Empirical data on the existing programs including approaches to leadership, effectiveness, and duration of programs are available, but there remains a lack of a definitive model for leadership development. Research suggests that teacher leadership development must be ongoing in nature (Frick & Browne-Ferrigno, 2016; Huggins et al., 2017; Visone, 2018). Studies show that ongoing professional development in leadership leads to increased human and social capital (Osmond-Johnson, 2017). The literature review revealed that teachers being trained in leadership benefit from learning in collaboration with peers (Fiarman, 2017; Frick & Browne-Ferrigno, 2016; Osmond-Johnson, 2017).

The third theme that materialized from the literature review was that there are a number of challenges to teacher leadership. One of those challenges is the lack of a definition for teacher leadership. There are numerous suggestions contained within the literature. Another challenge is that teacher leader roles remain ill-defined. Without a set definition of teacher leader or a specific role to fill or pathway to pursue, a teacher may struggle to self-identify as a teacher leader.

While there is much known about teacher leadership, there remains much to learn as research gaps still exist. In addition to needing a definitive definition of teacher leadership and definitive roles of teacher leaders, there is also a need to better understand the process of leadership development. Additional research is needed to better understand leadership development perceptions of emerging teacher leaders as they undergo professional development in the area of leadership.

This current qualitative study addressed that research gap because the study included interviews of teachers participating in a District Teacher Forum and a focus group convening of their colleagues. Therefore, this study determined how the teachers perceive themselves in terms of teacher leadership and how they feel the culture of their organization supports teacher leadership. Because this program is currently limited to one state, it will add to the research on teacher leadership development.

This chapter included an extensive and exhaustive review of the current literature on teacher leadership. This review informed the research design and the rationale for the study that is described in Chapter 3. Chapter 3 will include a discussion about the role of

the researcher, the recruitment and data collection procedures, and the plan for data analysis. Ethical considerations will also be outlined in the next chapter.

### Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this qualitative study was to better understand the experience of teacher leaders as they undergo leadership development when participating in a District Teacher Forum. I described the teacher leaders' perceptions regarding their development as teacher leaders and the role that central aspects of social cognitive theory, constructivist theory, and perceived organizational support played in their development as emerging teacher leaders. I explained how the participants perceived themselves both during and after participating in the District Teacher Forum and explored what experiences specifically contributed to their own personal development as teacher leaders. I examined whether the participants believed they were more prepared to seek leadership roles after their participation in the District Teacher Forum. Furthermore, I examined how school culture impacts their leadership development.

This chapter includes a detailed explanation of the research methods that were used to conduct the study. Included are the research questions, the conceptual framework, the methodology, and the role of the researcher. This chapter also catalogs the manner in which participants were recruited and selected, instrumentation, procedures for data collection, and analysis. Finally, I discuss trustworthiness and ethical considerations as it relates to qualitative research.

#### **Central Research Question**

What is the experience of teachers participating in a teacher leadership development program?

Subquestions:

1. How do teachers perceive themselves as leaders during and after participating in the District Teacher Forum?
2. What were the experiences that most contributed to the teachers' perceptions of their development as teacher leaders?
3. How do teachers feel more prepared to seek leadership roles and responsibilities after participating in the District Teacher Forum?
4. How do teachers feel that the school culture and school leadership can support their leadership development and roles as teacher leaders?

### **Research Design and Rationale**

I used a basic qualitative approach for this study. The research questions were designed with consideration of the current research on teacher leadership and through the lens of the conceptual framework. There are three main goals of basic qualitative research: to determine how people interpret their experiences, to discover how they construct their existence, and to uncover what they attribute to their experiences (Merriam, 2002). The research questions aligned with the goal of basic qualitative inquiry, which was to understand how people make sense of their experiences and their lives (see Merriam, 2002). A conceptual framework aids the researcher in designing questions that address the problem being studied (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The conceptual framework for this study was built upon three theories: social cognitive theory, constructivist theory, and perceived organizational support. The social cognitive theory posits that people contribute to their own circumstances (Bandura, 2005). The research questions considered the participants' participation in the District Teacher Forum, and the

interview questions investigated the roles they assumed within the District Teacher Forum. Constructivist theory includes the belief that individuals construct knowledge from their personal experiences (Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2015). Through the research questions, I sought to understand how each individual experienced the District Teacher Forum. Finally, perceived organizational support exists when employees feel they have supervisor support and favorable job conditions (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). One of the subquestions dealt with work conditions.

The selection of a research method for a study is a crucial decision that involves reflecting upon the topic of the proposed study, the research questions that are developed from a thorough review of the existing literature, and the procedures for both the data collection and analysis. In this study, I focused on teacher leadership, social cognitive theory, constructivist theory, and perceived organizational support; these central concepts were appropriate for qualitative research methods. Because the goal was to better understand the experiences of teachers participating in the District Teacher Forum, interviews were a necessary data collection method. This led me to investigate case study, phenomenological design, grounded theory, and basic qualitative design.

A case study is a frequently used qualitative research method. Merriam asserted that a case study is a descriptive and analytical investigation of a bounded phenomenon (as cited in Yazan, 2015). The case is often a system of action, not just a group of individuals (Tellis, 1997). A case study is coming to an understanding of the case itself, not the methods by which it was created or by which it operates (Patton, 2015). The purpose of this study was not to only understand the Forum itself but to also understand



the methods by which it operates, the impact it has on participants, and the perceptions the individual members have of their own leadership. Therefore, a case study was not the appropriate choice for this study.

Another qualitative research method is phenomenology. The goal of this type of research is to explore the sense that individuals make of their experience and to also acknowledge that the researcher's interpretation of the data is an important aspect of the study (Wagstaff & Williams, 2014). Because the sampling strategy is purposive and the expectation is to explore subjective personal experiences, there is no expectation of transferability from a phenomenological study (Center for Innovation in Research and Teaching, n.d.; Padilla-Díaz, 2015). For this reason, phenomenology was not suited for the study as my goal was to acquire information that can be used to understand and inform other District Teacher Forums.

Another qualitative research method is grounded theory. This particular methodology involves investigating a topic in order to understand the primary concerns from the data in order to identify and develop a new theory (Walsh et al., 2015). There are many challenges to using grounded theory, including the need to include at least three levels of coding, the difficulty of developing a new theory, and time constraints (Wu & Beaunae, 2014). Additional challenges of using this type of research for a dissertation include finding committee members who are knowledgeable about the grounded theory processes and the struggle of getting approval from the institutional review board that involves getting forms such as interview protocols approved in advance, which is difficult to do in the fluid nature of grounded theory (Wu & Beaunae, 2014). For these

reasons and because the purpose of this study was not to develop a new theory, grounded theory was not the right methodology for this study.

The final qualitative approach that was considered and ultimately selected was a basic qualitative approach; it is also called a generic, interpretative, or descriptive approach (Kahlke, 2014). A basic qualitative study aims to discover truth about a discipline; therefore, the audience of consideration is other scholars within the discipline (Patton, 2015; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). A key assumption of this type of research is that the world is made of patterns that can be known and explained (Patton, 2015). Basic qualitative research falls outside of the major established qualitative methodologies, which means that the researcher can blend tools from each other established methodologies or choose to not use any framework at all (Kahlke, 2014). It does not, however, mean that the researcher does not have to establish credibility. Caelli, Ray, and Mill (2003) explained that basic qualitative research in education draws from the existing theories and models within the discipline to develop the framework for the study. In order to establish credibility, there are four areas that the researcher can address: theoretical positioning, the congruence of methodology and methods, employed strategies to establish rigor, and the analytical lens that is used (Caelli et al., 2003).

Understanding the purpose of a study is essential as the design, measurement, analysis, and data reporting all stem from the purpose (Patton, 2015). The purpose of a basic qualitative research study is to contribute to fundamental knowledge and theory, to discover truth (Patton, 2015). The goal of a basic qualitative approach is to understand how people construct meaning from their experiences (Merriam, 2002). Basic qualitative

approaches seek to understand how people construct meaning from their experiences (Merriam, 2002). The purpose of this study was to determine how the participants perceived the experience of being a member of the District Teacher Forum; this aligned with a basic qualitative study.

A basic qualitative approach is aligned with a social constructivist epistemology and is inductive by nature, using interviews, observations, and document analysis for data collection (Merriam, 2002). The findings are reported in a rich descriptive account, and they can ideally be generalized across time and space (Merriam, 2002; Patton, 2015). In this study, I aimed to capture the stories and experiences of the participants in order to understand how developing teacher leaders can benefit from Forums in other districts. The questions that are evaluated by a basic qualitative study are important within the discipline (Patton, 2015). This study can inform other scholars within the discipline about how to develop teacher leaders.

### **The Role of the Researcher**

For this study, I was an observer. At no point did I join as a participant. I conducted interviews, asked questions of the focus group, and processed the collected data. I did not participate in the Forum meetings or any of the related activities.

In August 2016, I became the program facilitator for Teacher Forum programs at the state level. In that role, I also support District Teachers of the Year who are assuming the chairmanship of a District Teacher Forum. My job duties include advising the District Teacher of the Year, overseeing the State Teacher Forum, and presenting to District Teacher Forums when requested. I do not serve in a supervisory capacity, nor do I have a

position of power over any of the participants. I am solely a resource for the District Teacher Forums.

While I do have some contact with Forum members, that contact is minimal. The majority of my contact is with the District Teacher of the Year. For the interviews, I chose individuals who were not prior District Teachers of the Year and with whom I have not had any direct ongoing contact regarding the Forum. By conducting interviews with open-ended questions, I was able to capture their stories and experiences as participants in the Forum. Recording and transcribing the interviews ensured that I remain focused on what was shared and not what I expected to hear.

I offered an incentive for participation in the study. I provided a gift card for a local eatery; the value of the cards did not exceed \$10. This provided compensation for their time without being of such significant value that it became a reason for participation. One participant did refuse the gift card as she felt it was part of her job to advance the conversation around teacher leadership.

As a single researcher, I was solely responsible for the design of the study, the creation of the research instruments, the data collection and analysis, and the interpretation of the collected data. I also kept a journal throughout the process to ensure that I kept accurate records and recorded my thoughts throughout the process so that any biases would be detectable.

## **Methodology**

### **Participant Selection Logic**

The participants for this study were teachers who are current or former members of a District Teacher Forum who are receiving professional development specifically aimed at helping them to develop leadership skills. A list of current Teacher Forum members was obtained from the district office. Purposeful sampling was used to select Teacher Forum members. Six participants were interviewed; ideally, three of those would have been in their first year of membership, while the other three would have been in their second year, but an unequal number of junior (first year) and senior (second year) members were included based on responses to the invitation. The participants included individuals who taught at all grade levels: elementary, middle, and high school. The participant pool also included both males and females. Interviews continued until saturation was reached. I knew I had reached saturation when I was no longer learning anything new from the interviews. Also, a focus group made of the teachers' principals and colleagues as well as other stakeholders including district office staff and former Teacher Forum members provided additional information about the teachers' experiences on the Forum. The focus group was made up of six educators; keeping the group small in number promoted richer discussions as everyone had an opportunity to share their thoughts. I spoke with the liaison to the District Teacher Forum to ascertain suitable candidates to invite to participate in the focus group. The list contained principals, district office personnel, teachers, and former employees who were members of the District Teacher Forum in the past and have continued to support the organization.

Upon receiving approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB), I contacted the public relations representative from the school district to receive the list of Forum members. I sought permission to conduct the study and to contact the potential participants from the district's superintendent. I also informed the chair of the District Teacher Forum of the study. Participants in the District Teacher Forum were invited to participate in the study by email. The email contained the approved verbatim wording by the university's IRB. The participants were notified of how long the interview would take, what to expect, and how their privacy would be protected. The participants were purposefully selected from the teachers who replied to the invitation, and an appointment was set for an in-person interview. I conducted the interviews in a quiet setting such as a private room off a media center in a school.

### **Instrumentation**

The interview guide included all aspects of the study and data collection process including both the research questions and the interview questions to help ensure alignment. Both the interview guide and the questions were original creations for the purpose of this research study. Because District Teacher Forums are unique entities, it was more appropriate to ask questions directly related to the experiences rather than use an instrument created for another purpose. The research questions directly addressed each of the subquestions pertaining to the overarching research question, Appendix A. The interview guide, Appendix B, and the focus group guide, Appendix C, outline the script and the questions used. The first two questions for the individual interviews were basic background questions included for the purpose of putting the participants at ease. There

were a total of 12 questions. A detailed interview protocol should not have too many questions (Patton, 2015). There were a total of six questions for the focus group meeting. The purpose of an interview is to explore the stories of the participants with the underlying assumption that their stories matter (Patton, 2015). Having fewer questions allows for an in-depth interview which allows for a richer understanding (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

A journal and transcripts of the interviews provided other sources of data and quality control. I kept an ongoing journal to record my thoughts, details about the process, and ideas for refinement. I recorded the audio of the interviews and the focus group meeting and used software to transcribe the data. The plan was to use Dragon software, but I ultimately chose to use QuickTime Player to record and NVivo Transcribe to transcribe. I also listened to the recording to ensure accuracy of the transcripts and made needed corrections. The transcripts allowed for a verbatim record of what was shared during the interviews and the meeting.

### **Procedure for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection**

Participants were recruited from the roster of the members of the District Teacher Forum provided by the district. Upon receiving IRB approval, I reached out by email to the members of the District Teacher Forum to invite them to participate in the study. I used the approved IRB's invitation for this purpose. Once responses are received, I selected six members of the Forum to participate. I wanted three senior members and three junior members, but I ended up with two senior members and four junior members. I notified them that they were being included in the study and forwarded them the

informed consent form by email. I then arranged a convenient time for an in-person interview and provided them with information about the location. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. I showed my appreciation for their participation by extending each participant a \$10 gift card to a local eating establishment. This was outlined in the proposal for the study.

The participants for the focus group were also contacted by email. I included the superintendent, principals, former Forum members, teacher leaders, and other stakeholders. Only five individuals responded that they could attend the discussion; all who replied were included. I reached out to an assistant principal who was not on the original invitation list but who I knew would likely attend so that I would have six people. He accepted the invitation. I followed the same protocol for sending their invitation to participate. I set a meeting date and time.

Following the interviews, I emailed the transcripts to the participants for their review. I asked them to reply with any needed changes or clarification. I followed up by phone if I needed more information. The reply concluded their participation in the study.

### **Issues of Trustworthiness**

#### **Credibility**

In order to establish credibility, a researcher has to be able to report a conscientious search for alternative themes and patterns (Patton, 2015). During this study, I went through three steps in the coding process to be sure that I was pulling directly from the words given by the participants. I also used triangulation of data through member checking to ensure that the participants felt that their responses were accurately



represented. I provided the transcripts for the participants' review by email so that they could review it at their convenience. I followed up by email or phone if I needed more clarification. Allowing participants to review their transcripts and giving them the opportunity to either approve the transcripts or clarify any misunderstandings ensured trustworthiness and credibility. Additionally, after analyzing the data collected from the interviews and transcripts separately and identifying themes from each data set, the information was synthesized. By comparing, contrasting, and synthesizing the two data sets, a greater level of triangulation was reached.

### **Transferability**

Transferability in a study is important because the findings should be informative for others. I conducted enough interviews to reach saturation, ensured that the participants are representative of other Campus Teachers of the Year who are emerging teacher leaders, and used member checking to establish triangulation. I also sought participants that are both in the first and second year of membership in the District Teacher Forum. The participants represented teachers at all of the various grade levels: elementary, middle, and high school. They all were campus Teachers of the Year which is the group they represent. Additionally, thick descriptions were provided.

### **Dependability**

In order to ensure dependability, I allowed the interviewees to review their responses and make any needed clarifications. This ensured that their experiences in the District Teacher Forum and their perceptions of themselves are accurately represented. I also provided a clear explanation of the research process so that the steps could be

repeated if needed for further study. Dependability is important to trustworthiness because readers need to be able to trust that if this study were repeated, the findings would potentially be similar.

### **Confirmability**

Confirmability is the last aspect of trustworthiness in qualitative research. It involves ensuring that the findings are driven by the participants rather than by the researcher. I used an audit trail in which I detailed the data collection processes and choices made in regards to coding (Statistics Solutions, 2018). A reflexive journal aided in confirmability.

### **Ethical Procedures**

Once approval was received from Walden University's IRB, data collection could begin. My IRB approval number is 0214190660495. This approval included the invitation, the research design, and the selection of participants. This process is a safeguard to ensure that all necessary precautions are taken prior to conducting research. Protecting the privacy of the participants included removing their names as well as the name of the district. I used pseudonyms in place of real names, and no identifying information was stored on the Cloud.

I have familiarity with the District Teacher Forum. I have worked with all District Teachers of the Year in recent years as part of my job but not all Campus Teachers of the Year. I support the State Teacher Forum and sometimes visit with or present to District Teacher Forums. Additionally, because I have been a prior State Teacher of the Year, many educators in the state know me or know of me. I was careful to select participants

with whom I have had minimal contact at the state level. I also clearly communicated to them that I was not conducting this study as part of my job duties.

Prior to conducting the interviews, I ensured that the participants understood that they could withdraw from the study if they felt uncomfortable. I also made sure that they understood how the data was going to be stored and used. I protected the identity of the participants in the focus group so that the only people who know who participated are the ones who were in the room.

All printed or hard copies of data were to be stored in a home office in a file cabinet. The transcripts of the meetings were stored there as well. The electronic files were stored on my hard drive; my computer is not used by anyone else. The only other people who saw the data were my committee members. The data will be maintained for five years as required by the university. After that, the data will be destroyed.

### **Summary**

This chapter provided details about the basic qualitative study as it was proposed. The study aimed to determine the experiences of members of the District Teacher Forum. The research question for this study is as follows: What is the experience of teachers participating in a teacher leadership development program? This chapter provided the purpose of the study, the research questions, and the research design to include how participants were selected, the instrumentation, and procedures for recruitment and data collection. The chapter also detailed issues of trustworthiness including credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Ethical procedures including a plan for

data collection, analysis, and storage were described. The results of the study will be described in Chapter 4.

## Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of the process of teacher leadership development when teachers participate in a District Teacher Forum. I individually interviewed six individuals who were given the opportunity to participate in a District Teacher Forum. Interview questions focused on their participation in the Forum and whether or not they perceived themselves as teacher leaders both prior to and after their experience on the Forum. The questions also focused on their own capacity to seek leadership roles and responsibilities and their thoughts about how the school culture and school leadership can support their leadership development. These interviews were conducted in-person in a private location. I also conducted a focus group discussion of stakeholders of the District Teacher Forum, including both current and former employees of the district. The focus group consisted of an assistant principal, district office administrators, a retired teacher, and an employee of the State Department of Education who was once a former teacher and instructional coach. The focus group participants discussed their perceptions of Teacher Forum members in regard to whether they see themselves as teacher leaders, the experiences of the Teacher Forum, their seeking of leadership responsibilities, and the culture that is needed to support teacher leadership. Although this chapter's purpose is primarily to present the findings of the data analysis, the chapter also includes details about the setting for the study, the demographics of the participants for the interviews and the focus group, the processes of data collection and analysis, and evidence concerning the trustworthiness of this qualitative research study.

The research question was as follows:

What is the experience of teachers participating in a teacher leadership development program?

Subquestions:

1. How do teachers perceive themselves as leaders during and after participating in the District Teacher Forum?
2. What were the experiences that most contributed to the teachers' perceptions of their development as teacher leaders?
3. How do teachers feel more prepared to seek leadership roles and responsibilities after participating in the District Teacher Forum?
4. How do teachers feel that the school culture and school leadership can support their leadership development?

Setting

This study was conducted in one of the 85 school districts in a Southern state. According to the 2019 State Report Card, the district serves the entire county in which it is located, a span of nearly 700 square miles. The county is less than 50 miles from the state's capital. According to the most recent U.S. Census Bureau, the poverty rate in the county is 19%. There is a large military base that makes up a significant portion of the county's population. The 2019 State Report Card indicates that the district serves 16,500 students and has 3,000 staff members. The district is currently undergoing a leadership change with the hiring of a new superintendent who takes office at the start of the coming academic year (2019-2020), and the district is receiving support by the state department due to an inability to maintain the required general reserve fund and is under a legal

investigation for possible mismanagement of funds. According to the 2019 State Report Card, there are 14 elementary schools, six middle schools, one K-8 preparatory academy, three high schools, one alternative learning program, adult education, one career center, and one Early Head Start program within the district. There are 405 continuously enrolled students for whom English is the second language. The district falls below the state average in all of the areas measured by the State Report Card.

All of the participants who were interviewed are currently employed in the district, and they work in six different school buildings. This includes three elementary schools, one middle school, one high school, and one K-8 preparatory academy. Table 1 provides information about the six schools in which the interviewees work.

Table 1

*Interviewee's Schools*

<i>Participant (Pseudonym)</i>	<i>School (Pseudonym)</i>	<i>Grades</i>	<i>Number of students</i>	<i>Average class size</i>	<i>Number of teachers</i>	<i>Number of instructional coaches</i>	<i>Number of NBCTs</i>
Dawn	Live Oak High	9-12	2,345	30	148	0	12
Mary	Oak Park Middle	6-8	980	28	50	1	5
Megan	Willow Elementary	PreK – 5	830	25	48	1	12
Susan	Cypress Elementary	4-5	504	26	27	1	0
Beth	Poplar Academy	PreK - 8	443			0	0
Lucas	Citrus Elementary	PreK - 5	815	23	48	1	11

During the period that this study was conducted, one of the schools, Poplar Academy (pseudonym), had just merged with another school. Both schools had low enrollment, a small staff, and minimal resources prior to the consolidation. The number of students enrolled shown in Table 1 is for the combined school. The district has not publicized all of the information collected for this study. For those reasons, there are missing figures in Table 1. This was the first year of consolidation, and many changes are still taking place.



### **Demographics**

All of the participants who participated in the interviews for this study have served on the District Teacher Forum for either 1 year (junior member) or 2 years (senior member). They were all named a school Campus Teacher of the Year, which is the prerequisite for being invited to participate in the District Teacher Forum. There were five females and one male. Two of the six were African American, one was Hispanic, and three were White. One of them was a finalist for District Teacher of the Year, and one of them was the current District Teacher of the Year and will assume the chair position of the Teacher Forum in the coming year. Three of the six will be serving on the Leadership Council of the District Teacher Forum to help plan for the year. They have cumulatively taught in the district a total of 70 years, with the average time in the district being a little more 11 years. Table 2 provides data about the make-up of the interviewees.

Table 2

*Interviewees' Demographics*

Participant (Pseudonym)	Grade level taught*	Years in Teacher Forum
Dawn	High School	2
Mary	Middle School	1
Megan	Elementary School	1
Susan	Elementary School	1
Beth	Elementary School	1
Lucas	Elementary School	2

*Note.* \* One of the participants worked in the K-8 preparatory academy, but the grade level reflected the actual classes taught.

I also held a focus group of stakeholders of the District Teacher Forum. Of those participants, four were currently employed by the district, one had retired but continued to serve actively in a volunteer role, and one had moved on to work at the State Department of Education. Two of them currently worked at the district office, one was an assistant principal, and one was a teacher. Table 3 shows more information about the participants in the focus group.

Table 3

*Focus Group Participants' Demographics*

Participant (Pseudonym)	Currently employed by district	Current role	Former Forum Member
Sharon	No	Retired	Yes
Laura	No	State Department	Yes
Eric	Yes	Teacher	Yes
Philip	Yes	Assistant Principal	No
Sarah	Yes	District Office Admin	Ex-officio
Tyler	Yes	Recruitment	Yes

**Data Collection**

For this study, I collected data from two sources: in-person interviews and a focus group discussion. The six participants selected for the interviews were all current members of the District Teacher Forum. They have served either 1 or 2 years in that capacity. The six participants for the focus group discussion were stakeholders of the District Teacher Forum.

## **Interviews**

Prior to beginning the interview, the participants were given an opportunity to ask questions. I reminded them that their participation was confidential and that they could, therefore, feel free to answer any question without fear of retaliation. They were given a copy of the questions I would be asking. I asked each participant the 12 previously developed questions (see Appendix B) during the interview. I used both verbal and nonverbal cues during the interview to prompt the participants to expand upon their responses. I also used probes by asking follow-up questions to elicit clarification or more information based on the individual responses. Audio recordings of each interview were created using QuickTime Player. A back-up audio recording was made using Easy Voice Recorder on my cell phone as a precaution in case there were issues with QuickTime Player. All of the back-up recordings were deleted from my phone once I confirmed that the audio recording on the computer was functional. I also recorded detailed field notes during each of the interviews by taking notes while the participants talked and by writing summaries and impressions after the interviews so that I would not forget anything.

I used NVivo to transcribe the interviews. After the program auto-transcribed the interviews, I read through and made corrections as I listened to each interview. I then emailed the completed transcript to the interviewee and asked that he or she look over the transcript and reply to me with any needed corrections or clarifications. I gave each participant 14 days to respond. Once I had their approval to move forward, I advanced to data analysis.

**Focus Group**

Six stakeholders participated in a discussion that lasted 59 minutes. Prior to beginning, I gave them the opportunity to ask questions. We met in a conference room at the district office. I asked the five previously written questions (see Appendix C). I also used verbal and nonverbal cues as well as follow-up questions to prompt the participants to give more information. I recorded the discussion using both QuickTime Player and Easy Voice Recorder. I took detailed field notes throughout the discussion. Again, the recording on my cell phone was deleted once I listened to the recording on my computer. I used NVivo Transcription to get a draft of a transcription and then went line by line making corrections as needed.

**Variations**

A variance from the plan described in Chapter 3 was a change in the program that was used to record the interviews. I had planned to use Dragon software, but I acquired a new computer prior to starting the data collection and found that the software would not install properly on the new computer. I opted to change software programs.

A second variance was the location for the interviews. I had secured a conference room in the library in a school within the district. We had complete privacy for the discussions. Some of the participants met me in that location, but two asked if I could come to their specific schools because that was more convenient. I accommodated those requests and was careful to not reveal to anyone why I was there as I signed in at the schools.

I encountered one obstacle during this process that impacted data collection. There was a delay in processing the letter of cooperation due to a communication issue. The delay caused data collection to be in the last few weeks of the school year which is a busy time for educators. This made it more difficult to get participants. There were no unusual circumstances encountered during data collection.

### **Data Analysis**

A variety of recognized best practices for qualitative data analysis were employed (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003; Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Saldaña, 2016). With consideration of these best practices, coding took place at two levels. First, I transcribed both the interviews and the focus group discussion. The two data sets were initially kept separate in the coding process. I read through each transcription multiple times to identify crucial information as Saldaña stresses the importance of cyclical coding and explains that the primary heuristic of data analysis is that each read-through reveals more details so that through the process of synthesis, a new understanding can be formed (2016). The transcripts were coded, line-by-line, using inductive first cycle codes including descriptive, in-vivo, and evaluation codes. Descriptive codes involved using words or phrases to summarize what the participants said. In-vivo codes were direct use of words or phrases said during the interviews and focus group. Finally, evaluation codes were the participants' judgments. A spreadsheet was also created to show comparisons of responses to each question.

During the second-level coding, categories were developed using a combination of patterns identified and connections to the research questions (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

The transcripts of the interviews and the focus group were analyzed both individually and holistically to identify emerging themes and to identify any discrepant data. The constant comparative method involves analyzing each transcript individually, then in comparison to the other transcripts in order to identify what themes emerge across the data collection (Merriam, 2002). I then ran a word frequency query and identified words that were used more than five times to ensure that no patterns were overlooked. I deleted any irrelevant words and analyzed the remaining words. The lists can be found in Appendix D and Appendix E. I identified emerging themes by organizing repeating ideas into larger groups and through summarizing the main ideas (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). This then formed the results for the data analysis. These key findings are analyzed in relation to the research questions in the results section.

### **Analysis of the Data**

The data analysis is broken down by the research subquestions and then further broken down by the interview and focus group questions. Then information related to the central research question is provided as a synthesis of the findings within the results section of the next chapter.

**Subquestion 1.** The first subquestion asked the following: How do teachers perceive themselves as leaders during and after participating in the District Teacher Forum? There were two interview questions and one focus group question related to this subquestion. The themes that emerged from this subquestions were as follows:

Interviews:

1. Engagement with other emerging teacher leaders in the District Teacher Forum builds human agency.
2. A supportive culture fosters teacher leadership among the members of the District Teacher Forum.
3. Teachers are more likely to identify as teacher leaders after participating in the District Teacher forum.

Focus Group:

1. Keys to teacher leadership development in the District Teacher Forum are opportunity and trust.
2. Time, space, and reward are necessary components of a District Teacher Forum to develop teacher leaders.
3. Teachers are more likely to identify as teachers after actively participating in the District Teacher Forum.



Table 4

*Subquestion 1 and Related Questions Used in Data Analysis*

Research subquestion	Interview questions	Focus group question
How do teachers perceive themselves as leaders during and after participating in the District Teacher Forum?	<p>Prior to being a part of the Forum, did you perceive yourself as a teacher leader?</p> <p>Can you explain your response to that question?</p> <p>Do you now perceive yourself as a teacher leader? Can you explain your response to that question?</p>	Do you think teachers who have participated in the Teacher Forum see themselves as leaders? Please explain.

Two participants replied with affirmative answers to the first interview question while the rest expressed having a limited view of themselves as teacher leaders. The participants mostly shared that they only perceived themselves as leaders within their schools, if at all. There were two exceptions. Mary identified as a teacher leader because she holds an official teacher leadership role as a curriculum coach. She reported that she had “taken on some responsibilities outside of the ones assigned for teachers,” and that has led her to view herself as a teacher leader. Beth responded that she was a teacher leader because she had been nominated for Teacher of the Year by her peers multiple times. Her own identification was wrapped in others’ perceptions of her as a teacher leader which is reflective of the early stages of teacher leadership development in which

others bestow the title upon teachers (Bradley-Levine, 2011). Dawn, Megan, Susan, and Lucas all reported that they were likely teacher leaders in their school but did not see themselves as having any impact outside of their own buildings and may not have used that title for themselves at the time. Dawn's response was reflective of the other responses in this category as she said, "No because I was just doing what I thought was best for my classroom," but then others noticed her efforts and asked things of her. Lucas pointed out that he had the ability to lead in his school based on his gender. He said that being a male in a female dominated field meant that others looked to him for support with certain tasks like technology.

The responses to the next interview question were overwhelmingly affirmative with responses like "definitely" and "absolutely." Several of them described taking on extra roles such as mentoring, being a lead teacher, or chairing committees. Susan said, "being a leader was never something I sought out," but she now sees herself as a leader. She credits the forum as bringing her out of her comfort zone and helping her reflect on some important questions: "What kind of leader do you want to be? What is your vision? Where do you see yourself? How do you define leadership, and how do you want to push others to become a leader?" She thinks these questions have pushed her to assume a role that she did not even know she was destined to assume. Beth noted that she has come to understand that her positive outlook is an attribute that fosters her ability to lead. Lucas said that he has become more aware of the impact that he has within the district and has realized that there are "other avenues to share your voice outside of your school." Only one participant did not report identifying as a teacher leader. Megan said that she is in the

process of understanding what the term *teacher leadership* means and what it can look like. She reported, “I wouldn’t say I’m there yet, but habits are changing and my ideas about what that looks like” are evolving. Megan is a relatively new teacher; she has the fewest years of experience of the group. She has only been teaching for four years, and she is currently completing her first year on the Teacher Forum.

The focus group as a whole agreed that it largely depends on a number of factors whether or not Forum members see themselves as leaders. Factors such as who is leading the Forum, how leadership is distributed throughout the Forum, and the effort put in by an individual are all important in determining that self-identification as a teacher leader. Participants pointed out that when members first join the District Teacher Forum, they may be in different places on the leadership spectrum and that the Forum may be the first opportunity for many of these teachers to see themselves as having a voice or a role outside of their classrooms. The overall feeling was that members typically grow tremendously over the 2 years they serve on the Forum, but the following key factors determine how much leadership development is established: the platform, having a title, personal engagement, and the personal desire for growth.

The platform is essential in helping teachers grow into leaders. The Forum’s leadership changes every year as the outgoing District Teacher of the Year assumes the role of chairperson, but the by-laws and the leadership committee provide some continuity. The meeting schedule, committee work, and official roles are all outlined in the by-laws so that the platform is consistent, but there are differences among chairpersons, and that impacts how engaged members are. The leadership committee is

made up of finalists for Teacher of the Year, past chairpersons, and members who are invited to stay on in the Forum. Sharon was a founding member of the Teacher Forum and recalls how it changed her life and made her more competent in terms of speaking up and gave her confidence both with her students and her colleagues. She said, “Profoundly, the Forum makes teachers see themselves as leaders.” Libby said she does think that time spent in the Forum can lead to that perception of leadership, but she also thinks that growth curve really begins once they change their mindset about what a leader is.

Part of the purpose of the platform is giving members an opportunity to take on leadership within the Teacher Forum itself. They already have the title of “Teacher of the Year.” Some of them will assume titles within the Forum such as chair or vice-chair of a committee. They can also assume the role of an officer such as treasurer or secretary. Eric shared that the capacity to build leaders increases when teachers have the opportunity to serve in official leadership capacities within the Forum. He said that “if they are responsible for a certain piece of the Forum, that leadership capacity grows exponentially higher and quicker than other Forum members that aren’t given one of the leadership roles.” He said the committee work is important because it allows members to “hone in on leadership in what capacity” and allows “teachers to find their niche where they’re going to grow next.”

The last two factors that were deemed essential are personal engagement and a personal desire to grow. Tyler pointed out that teachers do not always see themselves as teacher leaders in the beginning, and it takes a leader to be responsible for one’s own

learning. Tyler says that it starts with a true Teacher of the Year selection process which is harder in a smaller school where it seems like they may take turns in that role. Laura echoed that by saying, “It depends on the person, and it depends on what they put in.”

**Subquestion 2.** The second subquestion asked: *What were the experiences that most contributed to the teachers’ development as teacher leaders?* There were three interview questions and one question to the focus group that addressed this subquestion. The themes that emerged from this subquestion were:

Interviews:

1. Engagement with other emerging teacher leaders in the District Teacher Forum builds human agency.
2. Collaboration and networking in the District Teacher Forum create the opportunity to lead and serve the profession.

Focus Group:

1. Keys to teacher leadership development in the District Teacher Forum are opportunity and trust.
2. A supportive culture must include a district stance that both administrators and teachers will cultivate teacher leadership.

Table 5

*Subquestion 2 and Related Questions Used in Data Analysis*

Research subquestion	Interview questions	Focus group questions
What were the experiences that most contributed to the teachers' development as teacher leaders?	What activities within the committee helped you develop as a teacher leader?	Have Forum members asked to present any Forum activities or ideas to your faculty?
	What was it about those activities that resonated with you?	Was the opportunity afforded, and if so, how did it go?
	What aspects with the Forum community contributed to your own development as a teacher leader?	
	Which activities of the Forum were most meaningful to you?	
	What are your thoughts about why those activities helped you?	

There were three specific activities that the participants spoke of, and the remaining responses were more general in nature. Several of them referenced the legislative activities including a legislative breakfast, attending a State Board of Education meeting, and visiting the state house. Dawn said of visiting the state house and meeting with the State Superintendent of Education, "I doubt that a lot of teachers get

that opportunity to see and understand how things take place even though we see the results of it.” Mary said, “Prior to Teacher Forum, I didn’t really know the political side of education. Prior to that, I haven’t even thought of reaching out to anybody once.” Now she says she knows that she should be reaching out to policy makers and keeping up with what is going on in the legislature that may impact her as a teacher. One participant mentioned the book study. Megan said that taking a book that was not geared directly for educators led her to have to stretch herself to think about how to make connections and how to best help people grow through the experience. The third activity that resonated with them was the scholarship program. The Teacher Forum raises money to award to graduating seniors interested in pursuing a degree in education. Susan spoke about being able to interview the seniors who were excited about their potential future as educators.

To hear people and their why about why they want to be a teacher...is just really inspiring, and it really makes you feel like we as a collective profession need to foster those things...so that in five years or eight years or ten years, they still feel that way.

Dawn echoed the value of the service component of the Teacher Forum. She said that she liked the service to the community and her ability to involve her students and her school with some of the service drives.

Many of the participants responded with more general answers to this question. Beth said, “It just felt good to be valued.” She said that whatever she did was just appreciated by all of the members, and it made her want to do anything and everything that needed to be done. Lucas discussed the value of having this space and time with

“leaders from every school or people from every school and that each of [them] had a voice within the district and acknowledging that [they] had a voice.” He said that helped him develop a different viewpoint about the impact that he can have outside of his school walls. Dawn mentioned that the activities gave them roles and opportunities to be the face of something such as a project. She said that so often teachers are behind the scenes and in their comfort zones, but the activities allowed her to showcase her and that was a growth experience.

Four of the participants talked about the value of the cohort model in response to the next question. They found that having the chance to participate with others who were experiencing the same things but all growing in their own individual ways was beneficial. The cohort allowed for social and professional interaction which they felt allowed them to learn from others. Mary said that the interaction with everyone in their small groups, working within the committees, and hearing from outside speakers was impactful on her own way of thinking.

That changed my own philosophy, my mind, my own vision. It helped me break out of my comfort zone, step up to challenge and I thought to myself that I can do what I wouldn't necessarily think I could have done before.

She credits the interaction as the factor that helped her to grow as both an educator and a leader. Megan said it was important to interact with people who teach different grade levels but also people who teach similar grade levels.

Lucas said it was “nice hearing different voices,” but he also valued the outside speakers as much as the voices within the cohort. He said meeting with people from state-



level education organizations, a preacher, the superintendent, and legislators gave him a new perspective. Hearing from district leaders opened his eyes to a team mentality that teachers may not realize exists at the district level. Dawn said she felt that she had to be a leader whether she wanted to or not, and that stepping into that role helped her develop those leadership skills. Susan found it empowering to just have a voice and a proverbial seat at the table. She said it made her start to ask herself how she could empower all teachers to insist on a seat at the table. She said that participating in the Teacher Forum led her to “see the district as a whole rather” instead of just focusing on her classroom. She started asking herself how she could impact the profession and what her role in the profession was instead of just her role in the classroom. She started thinking on a bigger scale.

In response to the next question, several participants mentioned group activities again and talked about the importance of learning with and from others. They valued the social interaction that they got in their committees as well as in their small groups. Dawn said she found all group activities beneficial. Lucas mentioned hearing from outside speakers. Susan said it was a culmination of all of the activities: the state house visit, networking, legislative breakfast, and just having a voice. She could not narrow it down to one thing but rather valued the experience as a whole. Megan found the recruitment efforts most meaningful. Forum members participated in career fairs, assisted with Teaching Fellow interviews, and recorded recruitment videos. She said they were challenged to think of how to counter some of the negativity that exists in the profession

with a positive message, and it helped her to grow by speaking about the profession. She found herself with a “renewed excitement about the profession.”

The focus group participants reported that this was something that has been emphasized to principals. They said that there are some principals who are open to this and others who are not. The desire is for each Forum member to be given 10 minutes at every staff meeting to share something, but this is still an unrealized goal. Sarah added that one of the things that she has noticed even among Forum chairs is a fear of speaking in front of an adult audience, but she also said that by the end of the time serving on the Forum that fear is usually gone. Tyler said that he has found that Forum members really become empowered to want to speak up. Philip said that he knows that Forum members have brought back information from the Forum to share with the teachers in the school, but he could not state with certainty if they had ever been given time in a faculty meeting.

Laura was able to provide a specific example of this happening. She said that Forum members had contacted her about a micro-credentialing initiative presented to Forum members. Those two Forum members went on to present information about the initiative at a faculty meeting, and they organized a group of teachers from their school to take part in the initiative. Several teachers were successful in their efforts to obtain micro-credentials. She credits that willingness and ability to bring this to the faculty directly to their experience in the Teacher Forum.

Additionally, I allowed the participants to share any final thoughts with me at the conclusion of the interviews by asking if there was anything else they wanted to share about their experience. Their responses all related to this subquestion.

Without exception, all of the participants expressed their gratitude for the experience of being a part of the Teacher Forum. They all felt strongly that the Teacher Forum is an entity that needs to be continued and needs to continue to grow and evolve with its members. They all felt that they had grown from the experience. Four of the participants expressed the importance of the cohort model and learning from others. Dawn described the Forum as “a cohesive unit.” Two of the participants discussed the growth they had experienced. Megan said she felt challenged to really think about the term “teacher leadership” and what it can look like for her moving forward. Susan said it had been the best year she had ever had in terms of professional growth.

Three of the participants talked about engagement. Specifically, they believed that one’s level of engagement is in direct proportion to the growth that one gets from the experience of being a part of the Teacher Forum. Mary said that just being in the room for the Teacher Forum meetings allows you to absorb positive energy and to see leadership styles that you want to learn and emulate. Yet, she says some people are not present, either physically or mentally. She said it breaks the spirit of the cohort when attendance slips throughout the year because not being present sends the message that it is not important. Lucas countered that by saying that he thought decreasing attendance as the year progresses might be due to a lack of administrator support if teachers are being discouraged from missing classes for the Forum meetings. Beth mentioned that there are always some people who sit in the back of the room and do not engage, but they come to some of the social and recognition events. She said those people are not getting the same growth out of the professional development and have not evolved like others. Lucas said

he wondered if some of what looks like a lack of engagement is really an issue of an introverted personality. Susan mentioned that helping introverts grow and come out of their comfort zone to lead in their own way was a goal moving forward. Overall, there seemed to be an agreement that engaging in the social activities and networking is part of the growth process.

Finally, some of them spoke about the Teacher of the Year process. Beth and Dawn both felt that the change to the selection process was an integral part of the success that the Forum has. In the past, the title was decided by popular vote, and they question whether that always resulted in naming people with leadership potential. The new system involves a true nomination process in which the person nominating the teacher has to write about his/her professional career and habits. The candidates then go through a selection process that includes an interview. The participants felt that this method led to having Forum members who are ready to grow and develop as a leader.

**Subquestion 3.** The third subquestion asked: How do teachers feel more prepared to seek leadership roles and responsibilities after participating in the District Teacher Forum? There were two interview questions and a question to the focus group related to this subquestion. The themes that emerged from this subquestion are:

Interviews:

1. Collaboration and networking in the District Teacher Forum create the opportunity to lead and serve the profession.
2. A supportive culture fosters teacher leadership among the members of the District Teacher Forum.

## Focus Group:

1. A supportive culture must include a district stance that both administrators and teachers will cultivate teacher leadership.
- 2: Time, space, and reward are necessary components of a District Teacher Forum to develop teacher leaders.

Table 6

*Subquestion 3 and Related Questions Used in Data Analysis*

Research subquestion	Interview questions	Focus group questions
How do teachers feel more prepared to seek leadership roles and responsibilities after participating in the District Teacher Forum?	<p>Do you hold an official role as a teacher leader? If the answer is yes: Please describe that role.</p> <p>If the answer is no: Do you want to hold an official role as a teacher leader? Why or why not?</p> <p>Can you talk to me about what you see as the opportunity to serve as a teacher leader moving forward?</p>	<p>Have you noticed any changes in the Forum member's professional practice or professionalism?</p> <p>Have Forum members sought leadership roles? If so, what roles did they seek?</p>

Several of the participants said they have come to understand that being the Teacher of the Year is a leadership role. It is more than a title or award; it allowed them to serve their schools and colleagues as well as represent them on the Teacher Forum. Several of them mentioned serving on or chairing committees at the school level such as Relay for Life and School Improvement Council. One is a grade level leader. One serves

as a coach in addition to teaching duties. One person has paid roles she has assumed at the school.

They all said that they desire a leadership role, but they are not entirely sure what that will look like at this point. Dawn said that she has no desire to go into administration but could see herself supporting teachers in the classroom. She said she could either do something supporting curriculum and instruction or supporting service programs. Mary said she is actively seeking a position as a curriculum coach but is willing to stay in the classroom as well. Megan said she has no desire to leave the classroom but does want to support other educators, so she would like to be a resource to other teachers. Susan said she is in a number of leadership roles at this time and has these roles because of her Teacher of the Year title. She feels that a teacher should not have to have that title to have opportunities to lead, so she sees herself wanting to help teachers without the title. Beth also serves on a number of committees and is toying with the idea of moving into more official leadership roles. Lucas said he is a grade level leader. He pointed out that the position is a principal-appointed role.

All of the participants see themselves moving forward into some type of teacher leadership position. Lucas is planning to work on an administration degree, but he said the real motivation is to have the most impact as possible. Several of them said they desired to work in curriculum and instruction or in some type of coaching role. Beth said she is torn because her principal wants her to take on a coaching position, but she is not sure she of exactly what she wants or if she wants to leave the classroom or remain. Megan expressed that her desire is to support teachers without leaving the classroom.

The focus group participants immediately referred back to the example that Laura had given of the two Forum members who brought the information about micro-credentialing to the faculty and organized an effort to support teachers. Eric said that the first year in the Forum had boosted one of those Forum members up enough to give her the confidence to take on that leadership role. Sarah added that the superintendent always comes to the Forum when the district wants teacher leadership, and the Forum members step up to the challenge. She said there are always some introverts in the Forum, but when given the opportunity they embrace the opportunity to get involved. Eric said he has observed many of the Forum members take on unofficial, non-titled leadership roles in the form of sitting in on meetings, voicing opinions, and even taking part in a county council meeting. Those are roles that may not be official, but they are leadership roles and are a direct result of participation in the Forum.

**Subquestion 4.** The fourth subquestion asked: How do teachers feel that the school culture and school leadership can support their leadership development and roles as teacher leaders? There was one question asked during the interviews and two during the focus group that addressed this subquestion. The themes that emerged from this subquestion are:

Interviews:

1. Engagement with other emerging teacher leaders in the District Teacher Forum builds human agency.
2. A supportive culture fosters teacher leadership among the members of the District Teacher Forum.

## Focus Group:

1. Keys to teacher leadership development in the District Teacher Forum are opportunity and trust.
2. A supportive culture must include a district stance that both administrators and teachers will cultivate teacher leadership.
3. Time, space, and reward are necessary components of a District Teacher Forum to develop teacher leaders.
4. District Teacher Forums need strong leadership, a committed liaison, and district and school level support.

Table 7

*Subquestion 4 and Related Questions Used in Data Analysis*

Research subquestion	Interview question	Focus group questions
How do teachers feel that the school culture and school leadership can support their leadership development and roles as teacher leaders?	How do you feel your school's culture and leadership can or will support your continued leadership development?	What types, if any, of teacher leadership roles exist within your school? Are there other roles that you can envision being a part of your school?  How do you think you can support teacher leadership? What kind of culture is needed for this support?

Most of the responses from the interviewees were that their current administrators were very supportive of their desire to pursue teacher leadership development. Dawn stated that her experience has been that when teachers are doing what they are supposed



to be doing, administrators tend to support their continued growth. All but one of the participants report that they believe their administrators will say yes to any professional development they request as long as it something that can be approved at the school level. They did not directly address whether they would be supported if they asked for a leadership role which may be reflective of a culture issue. One of them did caution that it is important to handle things in a way that reassures the principal that there is no threat to his power and that there are often communication issues that become obstacles to requests.

The participants in the focus group were quick to point out that this is going to look different at every school. Eric said that at a small school, every teacher may assume some type of leadership role. In his school, teachers serve on the school leadership committee, plan professional development, oversee student organizations, and work on curriculum. Philip said that sometimes Forum members take initiatives on their own, and sometimes principals have to tap the talent that they see in them. One of the fears that he has as an administrator is that if he identifies a teacher leader, he does not want to lose that person in the classroom to another opportunity. He wants them to be able to shine while staying in the classroom and benefiting students. Sharon said that she thinks at the larger schools, the leadership roles are primarily department chairs that are appointed positions by administrators. Laura agreed, adding that “sadly the majority of teacher leadership roles are still those traditional, selected, picked, tapped, given roles.”

A recent change in the district is the inclusion of hybrid roles. A hybrid role is one in which a teacher teaches part of the day and assumes an official leadership role for the

other part of the day. Philip and Tyler said that some principals get creative with a schedule and give the Teacher of the Year who is serving on the Forum an extra planning period with the expectation that they serve in a leadership capacity that suits their talents.

Sarah added that at the district level, many of the Forum members serve in other capacities such as the Teacher Advisory Council in which they bring concerns from their schools to a meeting with the superintendent and then disseminate information back to the faculty. She added that teachers almost always serve on any type of district-level meeting that is held. They also encourage teacher leaders to present at their annual professional development conference and to help plan the conference. One Forum member did serve on the planning committee this year and was instrumental in steering those efforts. The District Teacher of the Year also speaks at the convocation.

All of the participants said that the Teacher Forum is essential in fostering teacher leadership. Tyler said that it is because of his experience on the Forum that everything he does in his work centers around ensuring that there is a level of support for teacher leadership. Sharon added that she always asks herself where is the teacher voice in anything that is happening. She said, "If there is not a teacher involved, I have to ask why." Eric said until this year, the Forum was the only systematic entity that helped developed teacher leadership.

Laura agreed that the "Forum is vital in helping to foster teacher leadership." However, she added that it cannot stop there. If the Forum pours into the teachers for 2 years but they go back to schools with negative cultures or cultures in which stepping forward is not accepted, then they shrink back into their old selves and lose the growth

that they had gained. Tyler expressed that some of that stems from the Teacher of the Year selection process. If the title is a popularity contest or something that is just passed around each year, then the Forum itself loses momentum. Changing the Teacher of the Year status so that it is rigorous and merit-based adds credibility.

Laura added that having the right person serve as the liaison for the Forum is also crucial. The liaison in this district keeps them focused, ensures they do not get off track, and serves as a tremendous resource for the Forum. The liaison has to believe in the work and understand the value of the Forum in order to support it and foster teacher leadership. The Forum needs that link to the superintendent.

Philip said that he does not think administrators take full advantage of the Forum. He said they should be including the Forum members, including past Forum members, on the agenda for every school meeting. He added that this was essential in ensuring that the quiet, introverted leaders do not get forgotten because the extroverted ones are more likely to take initiative and be proactive; without the administrator providing the opportunity, the introverted teacher leaders will not have a leadership role. The Forum members were chosen as Teacher of the Year for a reason; they have talents that should be used. Laura spoke of the way principals need to support teacher leadership.

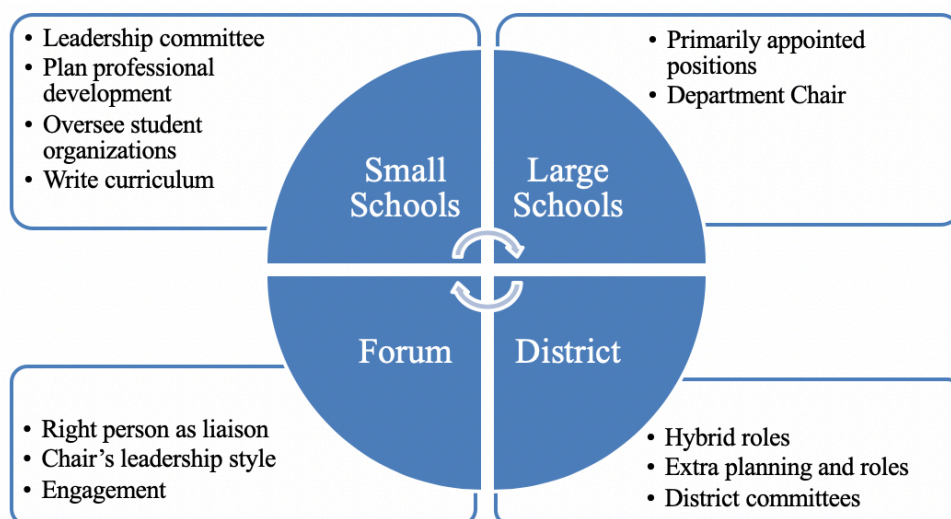
The key role of administrators is to be able to step aside and embrace whatever that leadership skill is of that particular person because everybody leads in a different way. The key is principals having opportunities for them to lead and not just the 'I pick you' traditional leadership roles.

Principals can also create hybrid roles or give extra planning for Forum members to serve in a leadership capacity. Eric said that it may be just empowering the members to present on topics about which they are passionate and to share their strengths. They have to be afforded the opportunity, time, and space.

Laura said, “We got stuck doing things the way they have always been done.” Leadership teams that include teachers usually only include the department chairs or somebody like a reading interventionist or guidance counselor who do not require class coverage. Administrators could have multiple cohorts of leadership teams and let teachers decide if they want to serve on those teams. Several participants suggested that Forum members should be invited to the monthly principal meetings because principals need to be reminded that they have leaders in their buildings waiting for opportunities. Paul felt that the leadership meetings could be held after school hours which would give the Forum members a chance to attend without missing class. Laura disagreed, saying that work needs to happen during the workday. This was also a reason that they are adamant that the Forum meetings should be held during the day rather than after school. Sharon said the least productive time for leadership is after school when teachers are exhausted and already thinking about their other obligations such as their families and households.

Trust between administrators and teachers is also essential. Philip said principals cannot be scared that they are going to lose their best teachers if they allow them to shine. Laura added trust involves giving time, space, and reward to lead. She said that if something is added to a teacher leader’s plate, then something needs to be taken off of their plate. Leading should not be an added burden.

The focus group participants added that it is also important that the culture of the district supports the Forum. There are some members who have trouble attending meetings because their principals will only allow one person from the school to attend, not two. They have trouble getting coverage for their classes. It needs to be understood that it is a district expectation that principals support developing teacher leaders. There may need to be designated funding in place to cover substitutes. Tyler added that the District Teacher of the Year may need additional professional days or an assistant. It was suggested that the Forum work should count as professional development so these teachers should be excused from the traditional sit and get professional development they do for renewal points and be able to work on their leadership development. The graphic below (See Figure 2) includes the details the focus group discussed.



*Figure 2.* Culture and teacher leadership.

The participants felt that there had to be starting points. For some principals, it may be that a starting point is just giving a managerial responsibility to the Forum

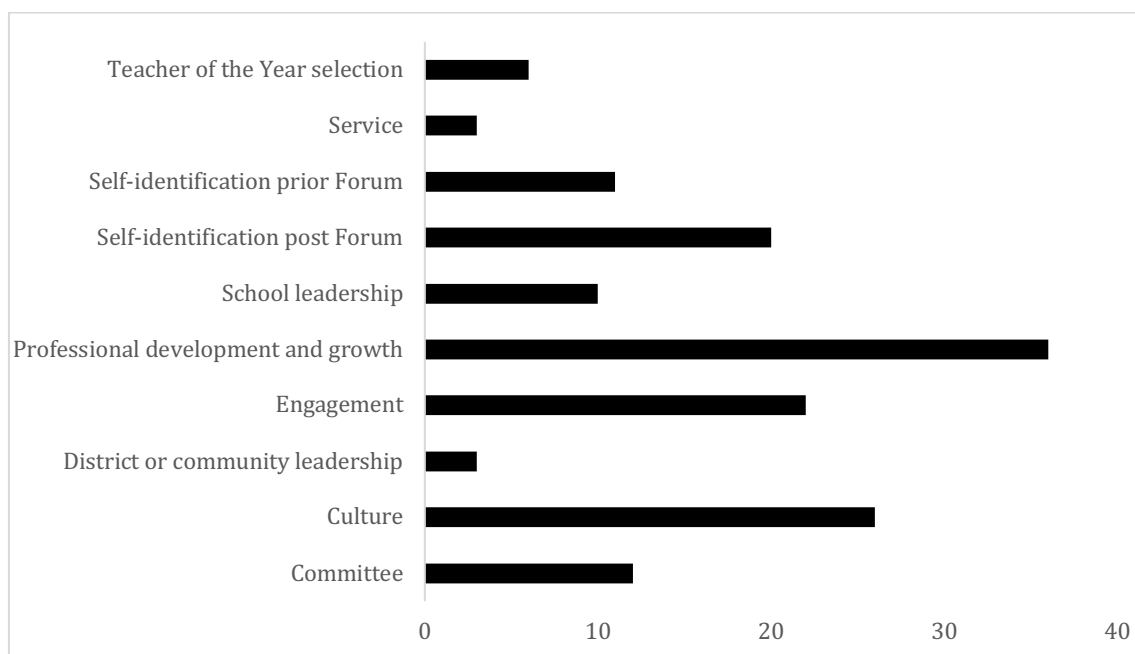
member. Every school has to start somewhere to allow the Forum members to use their leadership skills and talents.

### **Identification of Codes From the Interviews**

As all of the transcripts of the interviews were analyzed, codes were identified which were later developed into themes. The codes included

1. committee,
2. culture,
3. district or community leadership,
4. engagement,
5. professional development and growth,
6. school leadership,
7. self-identification as a leader both prior to and after being on the Teacher Forum,
8. service, and
9. Teacher of the Year selection process.

The codes that had the most references were professional growth and development, culture, engagement, and self-identification as a leader post participation in the Teacher Forum. There were a greater number of references to school leadership than to district and community leadership which may be indicative of the participants' mindset at the time. The graph below (see Figure 3) shows the number of times each of the codes was referenced during the interviews. These codes were then examined in context to the responses to each of the questions so that themes could be extrapolated.



*Figure 3.* Breakdown of codes from interviews.

In examining the references in the context of the responses, five themes emerged.

They are as follows:

- T1: Professional growth and development requires time and space which are necessary components of a District Teacher Forum.
- T2: Engagement with other emerging teacher leaders in the District Teacher Forum builds human agency.
- T3: Collaboration and networking in the District Teacher Forum create the opportunity to lead and serve the profession.
- T 4: A supportive culture fosters teacher leadership among the members of the District Teacher Forum.
- T5: Teachers are more likely to identify as teacher leaders after participating in the District Teacher Forum.

The first theme that emerged is that professional growth and development requires time and space which are necessary components of a District Teacher Forum. The participants all talked about the importance of having the chance to meet with other emerging leaders to participate in professional development. They all talked about the value of the time that they spent working in their committees and working in small groups. They valued the opportunity afforded to them through the Teacher Forum to spend time working on their own professional growth. As Susan said, it “was the best year yet in terms of growth.” Five of the six of the participants reported that they now see themselves as teacher leaders, and the one person who said she was not there yet did say she was gaining a better understanding of what they can look like for her.

The second theme concerns human agency. There are three types of human agency, and this concept traces back to the social cognitive theory described by Bandura. Direct personal agency is being responsible for one’s own outcome; it is the concept of self-efficacy (Bandura, 2001). The participants reported feeling that engagement was directly related to the professional growth experiences they had. They discussed the idea that those who were not engaged were not realizing the impact the District Teacher Forum could have on them. Proxy agency is when individuals influence those who can act on their behalf (Bandura, 2001). The participants talked about using their new-found voice to advocate for the profession with legislators and the superintendent. They also used each other as resources. Collective agency is when people work together to get a desired outcome (Bandura, 2001). Although each participant is growing in their own



way, they collectively were able to reach goals and carry out initiatives such as the service projects and events.

The third theme is that collaboration and networking in the District Teacher Forum create the opportunity to lead and serve the profession. Working in groups, collaborating, and networking were the primary things the participants spoke of as being beneficial to their own growth. Being able to work with other Teacher Forum members elevated each participant. Several participants mentioned the value of being able to talk with people who teach the same thing they do as well as those who teach something completely different. They felt that working together brought them new levels of understanding.

The next theme identified from the interviews was that a supportive culture fosters teacher leadership among the members of the District Teacher Forum. The participants talked about the importance of having principals and administrators who support their desire to grow and experience professional development. Dawn pointed out that she had always felt like teachers who were doing their jobs well tend to be supported by administrators. She went on to say that when people see you doing more than what is required, they recognize it and begin tapping you for other things. Beth said her principal has asked her to take on a formal leadership role, but she is the one who is unsure of what to do. One participant said it has been a past experience that principals can feel threatened when teachers try to take initiatives; this participant said it matters who your school principal is as to whether or not opportunities will be available. It was pointed out that

principals can only say yes to things they have control over, so anything outside of the school level takes another level of support.

The last theme that emerged from the interviews was that teachers are more likely to identify as teacher leaders after participating in the District Teacher Forum. As a whole, the participants reported that they came to see themselves as teacher leaders after participating in the District Teacher Forum. The only exception was a teacher who is just finishing her first of 2 years on the Forum. She said that she is beginning to see herself that way, but that she needs more time to see that fully realized.

### **Identification of Codes From the Focus Group**

As the transcript of the focus group was analyzed, codes were identified. They included

1. leadership roles,
2. culture,
3. professional growth,
4. self-identification as a teacher leader,
5. liaison,
6. forum leadership,
7. committee work,
8. engagement and participation, and
9. Teacher of the Year selection process.

The codes that had the most references were leadership roles, culture, professional growth, and self-identification as a teacher leader. There was also a significant discussion

about the importance of the Forum's liaison. The graph below (see Figure 4) shows the number of times each of the codes was referenced during the focus group. Each of these codes was then examined in the context of the focus group's participants' responses to identify the emerging themes.



*Figure 4.* Breakdown of codes from the focus group.

Five themes emerged from the analysis of the codes in the context of the responses from the participants. They are as follows:

- T1: Keys to teacher leadership development in the District Teacher Forum are opportunity and trust.

- T2: A supportive culture must include a district stance that both administrators and teachers will cultivate teacher leadership and create and sustain teacher leader roles.
- T3: Time, space, and reward are necessary components of a District Teacher Forum to develop teacher leaders.
- T4: District Teacher Forums need strong leadership, a committed liaison, and district and school level support.
- T5: Teachers are more likely to identify as teacher leaders after active engagement in a District Teacher Forum.

The first theme that emerged was that two key components to developing teacher leadership in the District Teacher Forum are opportunity and trust. The participants in the focus group reported that a critical difference between the status quo and the emerging teacher leadership model is that opportunity to participate in a District Teacher Forum and having the opportunity to lead. They said that you cannot build these teachers up for 2 years and then send them back into a toxic culture in which they have no opportunities to lead or in which only appointed leadership roles exist. Laura said, “administrators must be able to step aside and embrace whatever that leadership skill is of that particular person” and have opportunities for them to lead beyond the appointed roles that administrators assign to the same teachers over and over again. Philip acknowledged that principals do not take full advantage of the leaders that have been developed in the Forum. He stated that both the current and former members of the Forum should have

time on the agenda of every faculty meeting. Laura agreed, adding that there has to be more trust between the administrator and the teacher leader.

The second theme is that a supportive culture must include a district stance that both administrators and teachers will cultivate teacher leadership. The participants felt that some school level administrators were not fully utilizing the Forum. They have been encouraged to give the Forum members time at each faculty meeting, but that has not yet been realized. Some principals do not provide coverage for both Forum members to attend the meeting or do not allow members to attend. The district administration has expressed full support of the Forum, but it needs to be understood that it is an expectation that principals will fully support it as well. There are some principals who do support it and have gone so far as to give their Teacher of the Year extra planning time. Laura reported that it is sometimes the teachers who do not embrace it. The Forum members find themselves shut down by their colleagues when they try to take initiative or step into a leadership role. The end result in a situation like that is often that a Forum member will not have the opportunity to lead or to use what was learned in the Forum.

The third theme is that time, space, and reward are necessary components for a District Teacher Forum to develop teacher leaders. This is an expansion on the time and space that the Forum members had talked about in the interviews. The focus group felt that reward was a necessary component. They stressed that teacher leaders should be afforded opportunities to lead in their own unique ways and to use their talents, but it should not be extra work. If a role or responsibility is added to their plate, something else should be removed. They also felt that there was no need for Forum members to

participate in the traditional professional development provided to all teachers, that the time could be better used meeting with the Forum. The school administrator in the focus group suggested that leadership teams could include teachers if they met after school hours, but the other members felt that all work related to teacher leadership including the Forum meetings should be held during the school day. Again, this was an effort to not overburden a teacher and to show that the work is valid and valued.

The next theme is that District Teacher Forums need strong leadership, a committed liaison, and district and school level support. Several times the participants discussed the importance of having a strong leader as the chairperson of the Forum. The nature of the position is that it does change yearly, so there are times when leadership will fluctuate. However, the Forum has established committees and leadership opportunities written into the by-laws so that when a leader is in place who is less likely to encourage distributed leadership, there are still opportunities.

Having a strong liaison was also something the participants felt was essential. The district liaison needs to have a direct connection to the superintendent and have the ability to acquire needed resources. The liaison should be passionate about supporting teacher leadership development because there are times that this person has to reign in the Forum members and ensure that they stay focused. This position must be filled by someone who the members can trust without worries that the person is there to spy on them or to report back to district leadership. The liaison serves on the leadership committee, helps plan the meetings, and supports the chairperson.

Finally, it is important that both the district and the schools support the program. That means that there needs to be transparency so that others who are not part of the Forum know what is happening and why these teachers are missing class to attend meetings. This is possible through newsletters or other forms of communication such as presenting at faculty meetings. It needs to be an expectation that all administrators at both the district and the school level will foster teacher leaders and support the Teacher Forum.

The final theme that emerged was that teachers who participate actively in the District Teacher Forum are more likely to identify as teacher leaders. The participants in the focus group did not feel that membership alone was enough for teachers to make this transition into seeing themselves as teacher leaders. They felt that it takes active participation and engagement in the processes and activities afforded to them in the District Teacher Forum.

### **Confluence of Codes and Themes**

Analyzing the similarities and differences between the two data sources started with a comparison of the codes that developed from each. Table 8 below shows the codes that were developed from both sets of data sources as well as the codes that were found in only one data set.

Table 8

*Congruence of Codes*

Both	Interviews	Focus group
Culture	District/community leadership	Leadership roles
Professional growth	School leadership	Forum liaison
Self-identification as a leader	Service	Forum leadership
Committees		
Engagement		
Teacher of the Year process		

The members of the Forum who were interviewed were focused on their immediate working conditions such as the administrative leadership they have at the school and district level. They also referenced service frequently which is a part of the Forum's activities. The focus group participants tended to talk about things that the members may not be fully aware of yet such as the role of the liaison and how the Teacher Forum leadership impacts the strength of the cohort. Both groups discussed things related to the purpose of the Teacher Forum such as growth, self-identification as a leader, culture, and engagement. They both also referenced the process of selecting the Teacher of the Year and how that process impacts the make-up of the Teacher Forum.

There were several similarities between the themes that developed from each of the two groups of participants. The first of those had to do with what is necessary in a District Teacher Forum if members are going to develop as teacher leaders. The interviewed participants identified time and space, while the focus group participants added reward to that list. All of the participants felt that in order for teachers to develop



the necessary skills and a comprehensive understanding of what teacher leadership means and can look like, they need to be given the opportunity to participate in the Teacher Forum. They thought that having both the time and space away from school and with colleagues in the Teacher Forum was part of the growth and development process. The focus group members also thought that rewarding that leadership behavior was important so that the Forum member felt valued and utilized as a teacher leader without being burdened.

Both groups spoke of the importance of the collaborative cohort. The interview participants credited collaboration and engagement within the Teacher Forum as the essential building block for building human agency as a teacher leader. The focus group talked about the importance of trust and opportunity. Their comments indicated that trust has to exist within the Teacher Forum and also outside of it within the larger school and district community. The interview participants talked about being trusted with the opportunity to take on leadership within the Forum and how that helped them gain confidence and a self-identity as a teacher leader within the larger community.

The district, school, and Teacher Forum leadership was also relevant to the members' growth. The members of the Teacher Forum felt that a supportive culture both within the Forum and within the larger communities helped them develop as teacher leaders. The focus group broke this down further. They said that the school and district leadership needed to support the Teacher Forum and teacher leadership. They also said that the Forum's leadership is essential to the growth that the members receive. Finally, they spoke of the importance of the role of the liaison. This person serves as a connection

between the district and the Teacher Forum and needs to be someone who is committed, has access to resources, and understands that their role is to support the members rather than report their activities back to the district leadership which would affect trust within the organization.

Finally, both groups focused on what it takes to develop teacher leadership. The interview participants found that the networking opportunities and the ability to collaborate with other emerging teacher leaders within the Forum helped them grow as teacher leaders. The focus group emphasized that those opportunities are only present and helpful if the district takes a stance that both administrators and teachers will support teacher leadership. They explained that the Teacher Forum members have to have the opportunity to serve as teacher leaders within a supportive culture or what they learn in Teacher Forum will not come to fruition.

In summary, the analysis shows that the District Teacher Forum is a viable platform for developing teacher leaders through collaboration, networking, and professional development if the time, space, and support is given to its members. The culture of the school organization largely determines how successful the members of the Teacher Forum are in assuming teacher leader roles after participating in the Forum.

### **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness determines both the credibility and dependability of the findings of qualitative research relative to practical, real-world purposes. The results and recommendations of this study may inform not only practices within the field but also future topics of research. Numerous strategies were employed to ensure the credibility,

transferability, dependability, and confirmability of this research as the results may impact others. The following sections outline the strategies used to increase the trustworthiness of this qualitative study.

### **Credibility**

A researcher must be able to report a conscientious search for alternative themes and patterns in order to establish credibility (Patton, 2015). I used extensive descriptions to provide the setting, participants, and findings of the study. I maintained notes during the data collection process in the form of a research journal as part of an audit trail. I also went through multiple steps in the coding process and even looked at word frequency. I pulled direct quotes from the transcripts of the interviews and focus group discussion and triangulated the data by including member checking. Transcripts for the interview participants' review was provided by email so that they could review it for accuracy and clarity. Follow-up exchanges were held by email as needed. Allowing them to review their transcripts ensured that there were no misunderstandings and added to the credibility and trustworthiness of the study's results.

### **Transferability**

Transferability is essential in a research study because the findings should be useful for others. There were enough interviews conducted to reach saturation. I ensured the participants were representative of other emerging teacher leaders and used triangulation as described above. I used maximum variation sampling by seeking out and including a varied demographic. I ensured that participants for the interview represented both the first year and second year of membership in the District Teacher. I also included

different races, genders, years of experience, and grade levels. The use of rich descriptions regarding the setting, participants, data collection and analysis, and findings added to the transferability.

### **Dependability**

Dependability refers to how stable the data is over time and whether or not the data answers the research questions (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The dependability of this study was enhanced by the use of triangulation, member checking, the use of an audit trail, and extensive descriptions of the methods employed during the study. Dependability is important to ensure that readers can trust that the data found in this study would be the same if the study were to be repeated.

### **Confirmability**

Confirmability involves the presentation of data that is not influenced by biases (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). It involves verifying that the findings are driven by the participants, not the researcher. Confirmability in this study was ensured through adherence to predetermined data collection and analysis protocols, the use of research notes, and disclosure about my role working with the State Teacher Forum.

## **Results**

The results of this qualitative study are presented and analyzed in relation to the central research question drawing from the information collected related to each subquestion and to the conceptual framework. The central research question was as follows: What is the experience of teachers participating in a teacher leadership development program known as a Teacher Forum?

The members of the Teacher Forum participate for 2 years after being named a Campus Teacher of the Year. During those 2 years, they receive professional development and participate in activities and projects related to leadership, service, advocacy, and celebration. They serve on committees and have the opportunity in the second year to serve as chairs or vice-chairs of the committees or to oversee a project. In their first year, they can serve as vice-chair of a committee. They hear from speakers and have the chance to collaborate within the Forum.

The members who were interviewed overwhelmingly reported after being in the Forum, they self-identified as a teacher leader. They said that in hindsight, they were likely already emerging as teacher leaders but had not recognized it in themselves. Only one teacher held back from identifying herself as a teacher leader saying that she is starting to see what that title means and understand what that can look like for her. Some of the members also reported that they believe active engagement and participation in the Forum adds to the development of leadership skills. The focus group confirmed that as well saying that how much effort a member of the Forum puts in is directly related to how much he/she will develop as a teacher leader. The focus group participants felt that Forum members' self-identification as teacher leaders is also dependent on who is leading the Forum as a chair and the leadership distribution within the Forum. They felt that the more opportunities members had to chair committees or to take a leadership role within the Forum, the more likely members were to later identify as teacher leaders.

Another key experience is the opportunity to collaborate and talk with others. Members found that it was helpful to have the chance to talk to others who teach the

same things they do as well as those who teach different subjects or grade levels. Social interaction and opportunities to talk with each other in the Forum were crucial in their own professional growth. The participants said that they appreciated being allowed time to engage in meaningful dialogue with others in small group settings.

The conceptual framework for this study included a congruence of three theories: social cognitive theory, constructivist theory, and perceived organizational support. Each of these theories connected to previous research on teacher leadership as covered in the literature review, and each relates to the experiences of teachers participating in a District Teacher Forum. The three theories give insight into the analysis of the study.

The social cognitive theory purports that people are contributors to their own circumstances, that human agency involves self-regulation and intentionality, and that social systems are essential to our cognitive processes (Bandura, 2005). The teachers within the District Teacher Forum contribute to their professional growth as they take on leadership roles both within and outside of the Forum. They commit to working within committees and to networking and collaborating with others. They have to be intentional in their participation and in their individual growth so that they can fully realize their agency as a teacher leader. The participants in the focus group said that it is important how strong the Forum's leadership is in regards to the members' professional growth. The social cognitive theory details the importance of a strong leader that learners can observe so that they can choose to imitate, mutate, or disregard the leader's actions (Banks & Mhunpiew, 2012). If the members of the Forum can recognize themselves in the leader and if they trust and respect the leader, they are more likely to be impacted

through the social exchange processes (Osifo, 2016). Additionally, the theory stresses the norm of reciprocity; that if a person has benefited from a leader, they feel an obligation to give back (Osifo, 2016). This is seen in the Forum members' willingness to take on chair positions within the committee and within the service activities in their second year of membership.

The constructivist theory posits that people learn through collaboration (Jennings et al., 2013). The members of the District Teacher Forum stressed the importance of collaboration during the meetings. A component of this theory is that social interaction with others is a means to applying new meaning to information (Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2015). The theory suggests that learning is individualized and is constructed through an active process (Jennings et al., 2013). The members are allowed to choose their committees and what projects they work on during their membership. The learning they receive is largely personalized to their interests. As adult learners, the members of the District Teacher Forum value self-direction in their learning and see their own experiences as a source of knowledge (Wever, Fenton, & Wingert, 2018). The theory holds that previous knowledge and personal experiences are both essential to knowledge construction (Jennings et al., 2013).

Perceived organizational support stresses the importance of the work culture and of leadership. If employees perceive that their contributions and ideas are valued, they are more likely to have a positive perception of their workplace (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). The three ways in which an organization can create perceived organizational support are through fairness, supervisor support, and favorable organizational rewards

and job conditions (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). The teachers who participated in this study talked about the importance of feeling valued and supported by their principal and the district. The focus group members asserted that who is in the leadership role of the Forum determines how much growth the members experience. The focus group participants also talked about the importance of reward for taking on leadership roles. Employees with perceived organizational support are also more likely to adopt a social identity based on role status and organizational membership (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). The Forum members all said they started to change the way they identified themselves, that they began to see themselves as teacher leaders. Often teacher leadership roles are extra-role responsibilities meaning that they are assumed beyond the assigned formal job requirements. Neves and Eisenberger (2014) found that there is a strong correlation between extra-role performance and perceived organizational support. The Forum members' willingness to take on leadership roles as extra-role performances may be indicative of a perceived organizational support created by the opportunity to participate in the Forum as they did express how grateful they were for the opportunity.

### **Summary**

This chapter included the results of this study. The data shows that teachers who participate in a District Teacher Forum come to view themselves as teacher leaders. They find the social engagement of the cohort and the ability to collaborate with others beneficial to their own growth as a teacher leader. They value the professional development they receive and are interested in pursuing both formal and informal teacher leadership roles.



The chapter also included descriptions of the setting, demographics of the participants, data collection process, and data analysis process. Analysis of the interviews was provided in relation to the research subquestions and then described at the level of the individual interview questions as well as in relation to identified categories. The same process was used for the focus group discussion. The constant comparative method was employed to identify emergent themes as well as any discrepant data (Merriam, 2002). This contributed to the findings for this study as related to the central research question and related subquestions. This chapter also outlined evidence of trustworthiness for this study in relation to the strategies that were used to collect and analyze data. Chapter 5 contains an interpretation of the findings, a discussion of the study's limitations, recommendations for future research into the topic, an examination of the implications for social change, and a conclusion.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to understand the process of teacher leadership development when participating in a District Teacher Forum. A basic qualitative research study using interviews and a focus group was conducted to better understand what participants experience as a result of the professional development, their acquired leadership skills, and leadership opportunities while participating in a District Teacher Forum. Interviews of participants and a focus group of stakeholders and colleagues of the participants including school or district administrators, alumni of the Forum, and teacher leaders such as National Board Certified Teachers or lead teachers were used to gather data. A basic qualitative research design was appropriate for two main reasons: The intended audience is scholars within the discipline, and the goal of a basic qualitative study is to determine how people construct meaning from their experiences (Merriam, 2002). The goal of this study was to understand how members of the District Teacher Forum construct meaning from their experiences. Triangulation of multiple data sources including both interviews and a focus group discussion provided depth to better understand what teachers experience when participating in the Forum and how to best support the intended purpose of the program to grow teacher leadership. Each data source was analyzed independently and then as a synthesis to show how they collectively related to the research question and subquestions. In the study, I addressed the research gap that exists in understanding the experience of teachers when participating in professional development specifically aimed towards teacher leadership development.

The key findings of this research study are that the District Teacher Forum is an effective platform for developing teacher leaders and that members of the Forum develop a self-perception of themselves as teacher leaders. The members find that essential components to their own growth are committee work, opportunities to network and collaborate with others in small groups and in committees, and meaningful activities and projects aligned with the interests of the members. A rigorous, merit-based Teacher of the Year selection process helps to ensure that members of the Forum are individuals who are open to personal and professional growth. Personal engagement and participation within the Forum impact human agency and growth. Important elements to support the members' professional growth are time, space, reward, trust, and opportunity. A supportive culture must include a district expectation that teacher leadership will be fostered, and both teachers and administrators must be intentional about supporting the Forum. Finally, Forum members need an effective liaison who can help them acquire needed resources and foster their leadership. With these elements in place, members of the Forum report significant professional growth and a better understanding of what teacher leadership can look like in their own careers.

### **Interpretation of Findings**

The findings from this study are interpreted as they relate to both the literature review and the conceptual framework that was presented in Chapter 2. The findings for the related subquestions are provided prior to the findings related to the central research question as that serves as a synthesis of the findings.

### **Self-Identification as a Teacher Leader**

The first subquestion asked the following: How do teachers perceive themselves as leaders during and after participating in the District Teacher Forum? The finding for this question was that teachers begin to identify as a teacher leader after participating in the Teacher Forum, whereas they did not previously see themselves as a teacher leader. The participants reported that they needed to learn more about how to define and identify teacher leadership before they could see themselves as teacher leaders. The stakeholders felt that the Teacher Forum is the platform from which teachers begin to see themselves as teacher leaders and that without this platform, most teachers do not identify as teacher leaders. When speaking of teacher leadership, the participants mostly described others' perceptions of them and titled roles.

Research has reinforced this finding that teachers' perceptions of themselves as teacher leaders are largely determined by others (Smylie & Eckert, 2018). York-Barr and Duke (2004) completed a literature review that included 20 years of research into teacher leadership and concluded that there was no solidified definition of teacher leadership and that the roles and responsibilities of teacher leaders are varied and can be both formal and informal (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Wenner and Campbell (2017) found that the definition of teacher leadership remained unclear since York-Barr and Duke's original study even though states had implemented mandates for teacher quality and both the Teacher Leader Model Standards and the Teacher Leader Competencies had been published. The ambiguity regarding how to define teacher leadership and what the roles can look like may contribute to the reluctance of participants to see themselves as teacher

leaders until they have received professional development within the Forum that specifically targets these areas of understanding the concept and definition of teacher leadership and personal capacity to serve as a teacher leader.

That self-identification as a teacher leader is likely related to the theories that make up the conceptual framework. By collaborating and using past experiences, the teachers are constructing new meaning. They are assuming leadership within the Forum as part of the norm of reciprocity that dictates that if a learner benefits from a partner, there is an obligation to give back meaning to another (Osifo, 2016). Additionally, if they have perceived organizational support by having the opportunity to participate in the Forum, they are more likely to adopt a social identity based on role status and organizational membership (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Their perception of organizational support may lead them to identify as a teacher leader who can take on extra-role responsibilities in an effort to give back to the organization.

### **Developing Leadership Skills**

The second subquestion asked the following: What were the experiences that most contributed to the teachers' development as a teacher leader? The participants felt that a primary component of their growth involved the ability to collaborate and learn with and from others. They reported benefiting from collaborating with their committees, working in small groups, and networking with others regardless of what grade level or subject they teach. Having a chance to talk with others gave them a broader perspective of what was happening in the district and within the field of education as well as gave them ideas about how others handle issues. Additionally, they found being asked to step

outside of their comfort zones and take on responsibilities that were new to them beneficial. They also found particular activities and projects beneficial such as a legislative event in which they spoke with elected officials, a service drive where they were able to take leadership within their school communities, and a book study. They revealed that it was their engagement in the Forum activities and learning more about leadership that led to them to beginning to view themselves as teacher leaders.

Current researchers support these findings. Wenner and Campbell (2017) found that two important components of teacher leader preparation were a focus on both personal and professional growth and an allowance for personalized learning. This is precisely what happens with the Forum as each member has the opportunity to serve on or lead various committees and work on developing their own personal leadership skills. Frick and Browne-Ferrigno (2016) found that to develop teacher leaders, professional development had to be ongoing and job-embedded; it also had to include a reinterpretation of the terms *teacher*, *leader*, and *self*. The Forum members reported needing to redefine *teacher leadership* and learn to think of what that can look like for them individually. Huggins et al. (2017) found that participation in iterative communities of practice involving professional development led to a willingness to consider leadership responsibilities.

The social cognitive theory posits that people learn through collaboration with others and by observing a strong leader (Bandura, 2005; Banks & Mhunpiew, 2012). The members of the Teacher Forum had the time and space to collaborate with others and to observe their Forum chair and committee chairs in order to help construct their own

knowledge about leadership. The constructivist theory echoes the importance of collaboration in constructing new meaning. The zone of proximal development is a constructivist idea that suggests that learning should include intersubjectivity, scaffolding, and guided practice (Jennings et al., 2013). All of these are components of the Teacher Forum.

### **Emerging Teacher Leaders**

The third subquestion asked the following: How do teachers feel more prepared to seek leadership roles and responsibilities after participating in the District Teacher Forum? The participants reported that they are ready to take on both formal and informal leadership roles within their schools. Some of them see their future as leading outside of the classroom, while others see themselves leading from the classroom. All of them want to make an impact on the profession and support their colleagues. The focus group reported that some Forum members had taken it upon themselves to lead an initiative within their schools after learning about something in the Forum.

Current researchers support the findings related to this question. Through the development of human agency and a professional identity that includes self-identification as a teacher leader, teachers can and do embrace nonpositional teacher leadership roles (Frost, 2019). Participating in a teacher leadership initiative and receiving professional development leads to increased confidence in leadership skills and a willingness to seek formal leadership roles (Newton et al., 2013). Teachers who serve in a leadership role positively impact students and the organization (Ingersoll et al., 2018; York-Barr &

Duke, 2004). Organizational capacity to support leadership roles assumed by teachers leads to collective efficacy (Angelle & Teague, 2014; Derrington & Angelle, 2013).

The desire to take on extra roles is connected to the perception they have that the organization that they work for supports them, as is evidenced by being provided the opportunity to participate in the District Teacher Forum. They have constructed new meaning and have come to understand what it means to be a teacher leader. Because they believe that their work as a teacher leader will be valued, they are willing to take risks associated with assuming new responsibilities.

### **Culture That Supports Teacher Leadership**

The fourth subquestion asked the following: How do teachers feel that the school culture and school leadership can support their leadership development and roles as teacher leaders? The participants mostly felt that they had supportive school-level administrative support. One participant expressed that some principals do not support teachers having a voice or only support certain teachers having a voice. Overall, the feeling was that they would be supported if they wanted to lead a professional development session, pursue further professional development, or assume extra-role, informal responsibilities. As they discussed the possibilities of extending that reach to a district level, they did not yet have a realized conceptualization of how to pursue roles. The focus group participants expressed concern that a supportive culture must also include fellow teachers, and their experience has been that this is a weakness within the organization.



Current researchers and the conceptual framework support the findings. Capacity is largely determined by organizational design and leadership behaviors (Harris & Kemp-Graham, 2017; Portin et al., 2013). Perceived organizational support predicts both individual and team behaviors (Tremblay & Simard, 2018). Supervisor support is a crucial component of an employee's adoption of perceived organizational support and, consequently, a willingness to take on extra-role responsibilities to benefit the organization (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Conversely, there is a negative correlation between teacher leadership and organizations in which the principals select teacher leaders (Derrington & Angelle, 2013). Teachers who assume leadership responsibilities require time and space for both collaboration and fulfillment of the responsibilities (Harris & Kemp-Graham, 2017). Employees who perceive organizational support are more likely to feel that those increased work roles are rewarded (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002).

### **Preparing Teacher Leaders Through Teacher Forums**

The central research question for this study was the following: What is the experience of teachers participating in a teacher leadership development program? Specifically, members in a District Teacher Forum are individuals who have been named Campus Teachers of the Year. They serve a two-year membership in the Forum. The first year is referred to as their junior year, and it is in this year that they begin to understand what teacher leadership means and start to realize their own individual skills and passions. The second year is the senior year. It is in the senior year that they may serve as chairperson of a committee or head an initiative. In the junior year, they are recipients of

learning, whereas in the senior year they begin to be facilitators. The person who is named District Teacher of the Year is named the vice-chair of the Forum in the junior year and chair in the senior year. Honor Roll teachers, or finalists for District Teacher of the Year, serve on the leadership council along with past District Teachers of the Year, the liaison, and other selected individuals. During the Forum meetings, members hear from speakers on a variety of issues related to leadership development and education. They participate in activities such as a book study and personal story development. As a group, they take responsibility for a number of projects related to advocacy, service, and community. The purpose of a Teacher Forum is to give recognition to Teachers of the Year, to develop teacher leadership, to give teachers a voice in educational issues, and to impact professional development of other teachers (CERRA, 2018). The key finding of the study was that participants in the District Teacher Forum emerge with a self-identification as a teacher leader and a desire to take on both formal and informal teacher leadership roles. They have a better understanding of what teacher leadership is and have more confidence in their own personal leadership skills.

The research question is a synthesis of the subquestions. Therefore, the current research cited in the interpretation of the findings for each of the subquestions also supports the central research question. An additional example of a similar study supports the key findings. Abramovich and Miedijensky (2019) studied a group of teachers who participated in a cohort aimed at developing teacher leaders. They found that the teachers merged into a unified community with shared goals, developed a greater confidence

which resulted in improved classroom performance, and gained valuable leadership skills (Abramovich & Miedijensky, 2019).

In regard to developing a self-identification as a teacher leader, all of the members reported that being a part of the Teacher Forum has led or is leading them to see themselves as teacher leaders. They reported that they did not previously see themselves as teacher leaders, but the activities, collaboration, and opportunities afforded to them in the Teacher Forum helped them to develop leadership skills and a better understanding of what a teacher leader is and how to assume that role. In looking back at the continuum of teacher leadership throughout time, there have been four phases: formal leadership positions including department chairs, roles based on professional skills and knowledge such as curriculum developers, supportive roles including mentors, and most recently the practice of distributed leadership (Bradley-Levine, 2011). The teachers who are participating in the District Teacher Forum have been given an official title in being named a Teacher of the Year, but they have not been given a job that is a formal leadership position. They have to carve out those roles that best fit their interests in order to support distributed leadership which means that they do not have to become administrators to be school or district leaders.

The teachers all expressed gratitude about having the opportunity, time, and space to be a part of the District Teacher Forum. This opportunity led them to assume that the organization supports their growth and development as a teacher leader. This perceived organizational support makes it more likely that they will assume identities as teacher leaders and assume extra-role responsibilities (see Neves & Eisenberger, 2012). The

members of the Teacher Forum gained a new professional identity as a teacher leader, not through a formal title but through the skill acquisition and professional growth that they gained from the Teacher Forum. That knowledge and skill were developed by constructing meaning through social interaction and observation as outlined by social cognitive theory and constructivist theory (see Banks & Mhunpiew, 2012; Kretchmar, 2018). They have an agency to take on leadership roles and responsibilities after experiencing that within the Teacher Forum and learning alongside of others. They contribute to their own circumstances through their intentional choices about committees and activities as well as their active participation in the Teacher Forum (see Bandura, 2005). This then leads to their development of agency as teacher leaders.

The members of the Teacher Forum and the focus group participants spoke of the need for a supportive culture. The members' experience has been that their leadership development has been supported while they serve as members of the Teacher Forum, but they have become aware that their schools also need to have the culture built in as an expectation to foster that development. The teachers felt that the availability of the Teacher Forum shows that the district supports their growth, and the principal's willingness to accommodate the Forum's schedule shows their school administration's support. That perceived organizational support is an important factor in their willingness to grow and take risks in assuming new responsibilities as teacher leaders (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Perceived organizational support has three related outcomes: a feeling that extra-role responsibilities are rewarded, a social identity based on role status, and a willingness to help the organization reach its goals (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002).

## **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for this qualitative study was based on a congruence of three theories: social cognitive theory, constructivist theory, and perceived organizational support theory. These theories provided the lens for the study in all aspects including the development of the research questions, interview and focus group questions, and research strategies. The conceptual framework supported the findings for the study.

Bandura's (2005) social cognitive theory posits that people contribute to their own circumstances and that human agency includes learning in social systems. The Forum members reported that they took on challenges outside of their comfort zones and found they had to develop new skills to carry out the tasks. They also spoke at length about the value of the social component of the Forum. They attributed the ability to collaborate with others as one of the greatest benefits to their own learning and growth. They appreciated not only the committee assignments, but they also valued the chance to work in small groups both with people who teach like things and people who teach subjects or grades different than their own. They developed personal agency by their involvement in various projects suited to their own interests and skills. The theory also purports that learners will emulate well-respected leaders and that social exchange is a norm of reciprocity (Banks & Mhunpiew, 2012; Osifo, 2016). The focus group reported that when strong leaders are serving in the role of chair of the Forum, the members are more likely to experience distributed leadership within the Forum and emerge as stronger leaders themselves. Finally, the theory suggests that there are two-way interactions between the three personal factors impacting growth (cognition, behavior, and

environmental factors) (Banks & Mhunpiew, 2012; Kretchmar, 2018). The culture in which one works influences his or her behavior, and the person's behavior can transform the environment. The one teacher who reported that the principal is not supportive of teacher leadership other than appointed leadership roles also reported an intention to seek an administrative degree so that leadership opportunities can be realized. The teachers who work for supportive principals felt that they could lead within the organization without leaving the classroom. All of them have the opportunity to add to the organization using their newfound leadership skills.

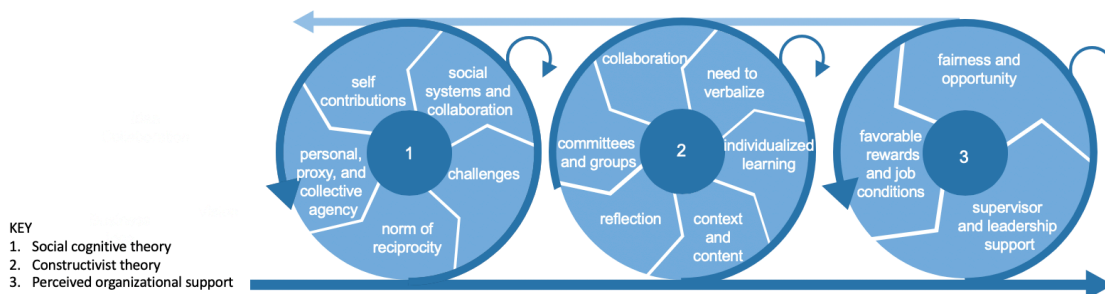
Dewey's constructivist theory stresses the importance of collaboration and allowing learners to verbalize and share their thinking as they construct knowledge (Jennings et al., 2013). Individualized learning, thoughtful reflection, and context and content dependent knowledge construction are key components of this theory (Jennings et al., 2013) Forum members are collaborating in a number of settings including the whole group of the Forum, committees, and small groups. They received shared professional development but also opportunities to develop their own individual skills by tasking themselves with desired projects and outcomes. They reported that being able to talk with others about ideas not only solidified their ideas but also allowed them a broader perspective. Talking and collaborating were essential components of their growth.

The third theory is perceived organizational support. The ways in which an organization can help employees gain a perceived sense of organizational support are through fairness, supervisor support, and favorable rewards and job conditions (Rhoades

& Eisenberger, 2002). Most of the Forum members reported feeling that their principals and school-level administration supported them. They felt supported at the district level by the availability of the Forum, and all of them were appreciative of the experience and wanted to see it not just continue but excel. The focus group spoke of the importance of rewards for teacher leadership. One of the ways they envisioned that was in extra time such as a hybrid role in which the teacher served part of the day as a classroom teacher and part of the day as a teacher leader in a formal role. Two of the benefits of perceived organizational support are retention and a commitment to the organization. All of the participants talked about their future with the organization. None of them were seeking to leave, although some of them were open to the idea of supporting the district in other ways when and if needed. Finally, a key job performance for teacher leaders is often extra-role performances. Perceived organizational support has a moderate relationship with in-role performance and a strong relationship with extra-role performances (Eisenberger & Stinglhamber, 2011; Neves & Eisenberger, 2012). The Forum members are able to meet with and hear from the district's leadership in a more direct way than other teachers; this may lead to a greater awareness of opportunities of extra-role responsibilities (Chen et al., 2009). This supports what the focus group reported as a need which is to continue capitalizing on former Forum members' leadership skills and include them in opportunities to serve as teacher leaders.

The three theories are all essential to understanding the experiences of the members of the District Teacher Forum. The social cognitive theory outlines three modes of agency: direct personal, proxy, and collective (Bandura, 2005). The members are

learning individually, learning from those with whom they interact, and learning from the whole group. They construct knowledge based on their experiences within the social experiences of the Teacher Forum but also help other members learn through the norm of reciprocity (Banks & Mhunpiew, 2012; Osifo, 2016). They develop a sense of organizational support from having this opportunity afforded to them. The social cognitive theory explains how they develop agency, while constructivist theory explains how they develop leadership capacity within the social system of the District Teacher Forum. Perceived organizational support outlines how the work environment and their feelings about the culture of the organization in which they work impact their willingness to assume the role of a teacher leader. Through the professional development specifically targeted at developing leadership skills and the community established within the social structure of the Teacher Forum, they are better able to identify as and assume the role of a teacher leader. The graphic below (see Figure 5) shows how each theory connects to aspects of the Teacher Forum.



*Figure 5.* Conceptual framework links to aspects of the Forum.



### **Recommendations for the Future of District Teacher Forums**

The focus group outlined their recommendations for District Teacher Forums in order to ensure that the intended purposes of the Forum are met. Many of their recommendations were also expressed by the participants of the study. The focus group expressed that there were some components of a Forum that were universal regardless of setting or leadership. They felt it was important to set certain expectations because it is inevitable that change happens in an organization, but changing leadership or personnel should not impact an established program. The recommendations are as follows:

1. The Teacher of the Year selection process must be meaningful and based on professionalism, expertise, and contribution to the organization rather than popularity to ensure that those selected are individuals who are open to growth and development.
2. There should be a district expectation that all schools will support the Forum through class coverage and the use of substitutes as needed so that both the junior and the senior members of the Forum can attend meetings.
3. Meetings should be held during school hours. This is work, and it will benefit the organization. It should not be a burden for members to attend.
4. Members, both present and past, should be given opportunities to serve in leadership capacities. This includes allowing them opportunities to share at faculty meetings, professional development sessions, and other settings. They may be best suited to serve on leadership committees within the school or district.

5. The district should communicate that at all levels, district and school, teachers and administrators will cultivate and support teacher leadership.
6. Teacher leaders should be given time, space, and reward for their work. Forum chairs, for example, could use release time or extra planning time to conduct work related to the Forum.
7. Every Forum should have a committed liaison who has access to resources but does not serve in a supervisory role over any teachers.
8. Every Forum should be served by a strong leader. When needed, the leadership council shall serve to strengthen the leadership and ensure that members have access to leadership roles and responsibilities within the Forum.

The focus group did not set recommendations for details such as meeting frequency or other things that may vary district to district. This particular Forum meets four times during the school year with events spread throughout the year. They meet during the day for those four meetings. Some of their events are held during the day, while others are held in the evening or the weekend as appropriate for the intended audience and purpose. They also did not specify any particular activities or professional development sessions as that too may vary from district to district.

### **Limitations of the Study**

A limitation of the study is related to the research design. There are inherent strengths and weaknesses of using a basic qualitative research methodology that may impact its transferability. First, this type of research uses a small sample size, but this is necessary because of the thickness of the description that is included in the analysis

(Rahman, 2016). Also, the lack of reliance on statistics means that people's experiences are being taken into consideration as the researcher is dealing with multiple realities (Rahman, 2016). Again, this is countered by a holistic understanding of human experiences in a specific setting (Rahman, 2016). This type of research allows patterns to be known and explained (Patton, 2015). Credibility is established by addressing theoretical positioning, the congruence of methodology and methods, employed strategies to establish rigor, and the analytical lens that is used (Caelli et al., 2003).

A second limitation of this study was related to the selection of the participants. The participants were selected from a subset of a population. An email was sent to a small number of Forum members. When not enough responses were received, a second email went to more members. Eventually, six people were chosen through maximum variation sampling to ensure that both junior and senior members were included and to ensure varied demographics. The subset of the population was chosen purposefully in order to select members who were all current or recent members of the Teacher Forum. A small sample allows for a more in-depth understanding of a circumstance (Merriam, 2002). For the focus group, I invited a number of stakeholders to attend the discussion. When five responded, I was left without reaching my minimum number expected and without having a building level administrator. At that point, I reached out personally to a building level administrator to ask him to participate even though he was not on my initial invitation list. He agreed and provided the building level perspective that would otherwise have been missing.

A third limitation of this study involved data collection. I chose to only focus on one Forum rather than studying a number of them. Time and resources limited my ability to gather data from multiple Forums as a single researcher who was employed full-time while conducting the study. It was decided in consultation with my methodologist that there was nothing else to gain from studying more than one Forum as the focus was on teacher leadership development rather than on specific Forum activities.

### **Recommendations for Research**

Recommendations for research are related to the findings of the study. The first recommendation is that a researcher should conduct a longitudinal study to determine the retention rates of Teacher Forum members. This research should include not only the retention within the classroom but within the district and within the field of education. The perceived organizational support theory suggests that these teachers are more committed to their organizations because of the support for their leadership (Neves & Eisenberger, 2014). A longitudinal study could provide insight into whether teachers who participate in Teacher Forums are more likely to remain in the classroom or advance to other positions, stay with the district, or leave the district. One of the focus group discussion participants expressed a fear that if teachers develop strong leadership skills, they may choose to leave for other positions. He cited the researcher's own experience of having chaired the Forum at a state level and not returned to the district. Whether a teacher leader stays in the district is also related to capacity and opportunity; therefore, those would be necessary descriptors in a future study.

A second recommendation for research is to explore the opportunities afforded to members and past members of the Teacher Forum. A participant in the focus group expressed concern that there may not be opportunities for these teachers to lead within the schools or that there may not be a supportive culture to foster the teacher's growth as a teacher leader. A study examining the formal and informal teacher leadership roles could shed light on the existing opportunities. The research could explore whether the recommendations from the focus group were employed to allow opportunities such as presenting at faculty meetings and serving on leadership committees.

The third recommendation is that research should explore the differences and similarities among various District Teacher Forums. Differences exist. In order to capitalize on the strengths of existing Forums, it would be helpful to understand how different districts have structured their Forums and how those structures impact leadership development. For example, a small district may have to extend membership to three years in order to have enough members to divide the work involved with projects. A large district may have travel issues or capacity issues with meeting space. They may opt to shorten membership to 1 year or divide into regional groups. A cross-comparison of the various Forums would help districts understand how to establish and maintain a Forum that works in their particular setting.

A final recommendation for future research is to establish a universal definition of teacher leadership. It is hard for the members of the District Teacher Forum to see themselves as teacher leaders without fully understanding what teacher leaders are. It seems that every study on teacher leadership begins with a definition to be used for the

purpose of the study. Researchers could examine the various definitions for key components and put forth a definition to be universally adopted within the field. This would alleviate some of the confusion about what teacher leadership is and what it can look like in various settings.

### **Implications for Social Change**

This study will contribute to positive social change in numerous ways. At the individual level, this study may help emerging teacher leaders in understanding the process of developing a self-identification as a teacher leader. A recent study showed that teachers are still reluctant to consider themselves to be teacher leaders. Von Dohlen and Karvonen (2018) found that teachers who were asked to report leadership behaviors mostly reported informal roles of instructional behaviors in the classroom; they were less likely to report formal roles or roles that benefit colleagues or the profession. The participants in this study reported that being a member of the Forum allowed them to gain a better understanding of what teacher leadership means and what that can look like in their own setting. The findings may help other teachers or emerging teacher leaders understand the process of developing a self-identify as a teacher leader.

At the institutional level, the study has the potential to inform the processes involved with forming and sustaining District Teacher Forums. The findings provide insight into what participants experience as well as recommendations from stakeholders. Districts can use these findings to guide their own District Teacher Forum in an effort to support teacher leadership development. Additionally, it may inform other leadership initiatives as leadership development is not limited to Teachers of the Year. The Forums

may serve as a model for other cohorts designed to support the development of teacher leadership.

Finally, the study has the potential to impact positive social change at the societal level. Teacher leadership has several potential impacts: student achievement, classroom practices, organizational support, and retention and recruitment. If teachers are given opportunities to develop and use their leadership skills, they are more likely to realize the potential benefits of perceived organizational support which include commitment to the organization, job-related affect, improved job involvement and performance, reduced stress, greater retention, fewer tardiness and absenteeism, and a greater inclination towards risk-taking (Neves & Eisenberger, 2014). All of these benefits impact recruitment and retention efforts. Teachers, as a whole, have an interest in additional opportunities to serve at the school, district, and state levels. If provided these opportunities, teachers may feel encouraged to continue to learn and develop which would positively impact teacher practice and the organization. More satisfied teachers may lead to improved teacher retention.

### **Conclusion**

Teacher leadership is a widely investigated topic, but there has yet to be an established and accepted definition and practice. Teacher leadership roles vary greatly. Until a universal definition is determined, confusion about best practices will likely linger. With the establishment of a definition, districts will have a structured direction for how to prepare and develop teacher leaders. A recommendation for districts wishing to

develop teacher leaders is to define what teacher leadership means in the context of the district until a universal definition is established.

The District Teacher Forums offer an opportunity for Teachers of the Year to develop leadership skills that help prepare them to lead in a myriad of ways that best suit their own individual skills and interests. The teachers who participate in a Forum benefit from the opportunity to learn with and from others as well as from purposeful professional development centered around leadership skills and development. They grow in their confidence and in their understanding of what teacher leadership is and what it can look like in their school system. They want leadership opportunities and a chance to contribute to their organizations and their profession. Given time, space, and reward, they are likely to embrace both formal and informal roles and both in-role and extra-role responsibilities. They are also more likely to remain in the profession and perhaps within their current school organization. The District Teacher Forum can serve as a model for leadership development programs for emerging teacher leaders or for emerging leaders within any organization.



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## Appendix A: Research Questions and Data Collection Matrix

Research Question: What is the experience of teachers participating in a teacher leadership development program known as a Teacher Forum?		
Research subquestions	Interview questions	Focus group questions
How do teachers perceive themselves as leaders during and after participating in the District Teacher Forum?	<p>Prior to being a part of the Forum, did you perceive yourself as a teacher leader? Can you explain your response to that question?</p> <p>Do you now perceive yourself as a teacher leader? Can you explain your response to that question?</p>	Do you think teachers who have participated in the Teacher Forum see themselves as leaders? Please explain.
What were the experiences that most contributed to the teachers' development as teacher leaders?	<p>What activities within the committee helped you develop as a teacher leader? What was it about those activities that resonated with you?</p> <p>What aspects with the Forum community contributed to your own development as a teacher leader?</p> <p>Which activities of the Forum were most meaningful to you? What are your thoughts about why those activities helped you?</p>	<p>Have Forum members asked to present any Forum activities or ideas to your faculty? Was the opportunity afforded, and if so, how did it go?</p>
How do teachers feel more prepared to seek leadership roles and responsibilities after participating in the District Teacher Forum?	<p>Do you hold an official role as a teacher leader? If the answer is yes: Please describe that role. If the answer is no: Do you want to hold an official role as a teacher leader? Why or why not?</p> <p>Can you talk to me about what you see as the opportunity to serve as a teacher leader moving forward?</p>	<p>Have you noticed any changes in the Forum member's professional practice or professionalism?</p> <p>Have Forum members sought leadership roles? If so, what roles did they seek?</p>
How do teachers feel that the school culture and school leadership can support their leadership development and roles as teacher leaders?	How do you feel your school's culture and leadership can or will support your continued leadership development?	<p>What types, if any, of teacher leadership roles exist within your school? Are there other roles that you can envision being a part of your school?</p> <p>How do you think you can support teacher leadership? What kind of culture is needed for this support?</p>

## Appendix B: Interview Guide

### **Introductory Statement**

Thank you for your time and participation in this study. I appreciate your willingness in helping me to gather information related to the District Teacher Forum. The purpose of my project is to gain greater insight into the experiences of a participant in the District Teacher Forum. This should take no more than 90 minutes of your time. Your name will not be identified in any of my documents that I store, and no one will be able to identify you with your responses. I am interested in hearing about your experiences, opinions, and perspective about the professional development you received as part of the Forum. For the purpose of the study, “District Teacher Forum” is defined as the cohort with which you participated as a Campus Teacher of the Year. “Teacher Leader” is defined as a classroom teacher who has formal or informal roles in which he/she is able to impact colleagues or the organization in which he/she works. Is there anything you would like for me to clarify for you before we begin?

### **The Interview**

#### Interview Guide

#### **Research Question:**

What is the experience of teachers participating in a teacher leadership development program known as a Teacher Forum?

#### Subquestions:

1. How do teachers perceive themselves as leaders during and after participating in the District Teacher Forum?
2. What were the experiences that most contributed to the teachers’ development as teacher leaders?
3. How do teachers feel more prepared to seek leadership roles and responsibilities after participating in the District Teacher Forum?
4. How do teachers feel that the school culture and school principals can support their leadership development and roles as teacher leaders?

#### **Conceptual Framework:**

A congruence of the three theories: Constructivist theory, Perceived Organizational Support, and Social Cognitive Theory

#### **Major Concepts:**

Teacher leadership, professional development, cohort/Professional Learning Community, Constructivist Theory, Perceived Organizational Support, social Cognitive Theory, culture

### Interview Questions:

1. How many years have you been a teacher in this district?  
Tell me about your current role.
2. When did you participate in the Teacher Forum?
3. Prior to being a part of the Forum, did you perceive yourself as a teacher leader?  
Can you explain your response to that question?
4. Do you now perceive yourself as a teacher leader?  
Can you explain your response to that question?
5. On what committee did you serve on the Forum?
6. What activities within the committee helped you develop as teacher leader?  
What was it about those activities that resonated with you?
7. What aspects with the Forum community contributed to your own development as a teacher leader?
8. Which activities of the Forum were most meaningful to you?  
What are your thoughts about why those activities helped you?
9. Do you hold an official role as a teacher leader?
  - a. If the answer is yes: Please describe that role.
  - b. If the answer is no: Do you want to hold an official role as a teacher leader? Why or why not?
10. Can you talk to me about what you see as the opportunity to serve as a teacher leader moving forward?
11. How do you feel your school's leadership can or will support your continued leadership development?
12. Is there anything else you would like to share with me about your experience?

### Closing Statement

Once again, thank you for your time and your willingness to share in this process. Please know that the information will be stored on my computer, not the cloud, and that your name will be replaced by a pseudonym in order to protect your privacy. I will email you a transcript of the interview so that you can read it and make any needed corrections and so that you can approve it for accuracy. Nothing will be shared or published without your approval.

## Appendix C: Focus Group Guide

### **Introductory Statement**

Thank you for your time and participation in this study. I appreciate your willingness in helping me to gather information related to the District Teacher Forum. The purpose of my project is to gain greater insight into the experiences of a participant in the District Teacher Forum. This should take no more than 90 minutes of your time. Your name will not be identified in any of my documents that I store, and no one will be able to identify you with your responses. I am interested in hearing about your experiences, opinions, and perspective about your experiences working with members and former members of the District Teacher Forum. For the purpose of the study, “District Teacher Forum” is defined as the cohort designed for Campus Teachers of the Year. “Teacher Leader” is defined as a classroom teacher who has formal or informal roles in which he/she is able to impact colleagues or the organization in which he/she works. Is there anything you would like for me to clarify for you before we begin?

### **The Focus Group**

Focus Group Guide

#### **Research Question:**

What is the experience of teachers participating in a teacher leadership development program known as a Teacher Forum?

Subquestions:

1. How do teachers perceive themselves as leaders during and after participating in the District Teacher Forum?
2. What were the experiences that most contributed to the teachers’ development as teacher leaders?
3. How do teachers feel more prepared to seek leadership roles and responsibilities after participating in the District Teacher Forum?
4. How do teachers feel that the school culture and school leadership can support their leadership development and roles as teacher leaders?

#### **Conceptual Framework:**

A congruence of the three theories: Constructivist theory, Perceived Organizational Support, and Social Cognitive Theory

#### **Major Concepts:**

Teacher leadership, professional development, cohort/Professional Learning Community, constructivist theory, Perceived Organizational Support, Social Cognitive Theory, culture

**Focus Group Questions:**

1. Before we begin, I would like to document who is participating. Would you please state your first name and your role within the district?
2. Do you think teachers who have participated in the Teacher Forum see themselves as leaders? Please explain.
3. Have Forum members asked to present any Forum activities or ideas to your faculty? Was the opportunity afforded, and if so, how did it go?
4. What types, if any, of teacher leadership roles exist within your school?
5. Have Forum members sought leadership roles? If so, what roles did they seek?
6. How do you think you can support teacher leadership? What kind of culture is needed for this support?

**Closing Statement**

Once again, thank you for your time and your willingness to share in this process. Please know that the information will be stored on my computer, not the cloud, and that your name will be replaced by a pseudonym in order to protect your privacy.

## Appendix D: Word Frequency in Interviews

Word	Count	Weighted Percentage	Similar Words
speaker	271	4.22%	speaker
teacher	227	3.53%	teacher, teachers, teachers'
leader	99	1.54%	leader, leaders
school	87	1.35%	school, schools
forum	84	1.31%	forum
district	66	1.03%	district, districts
committee	41	0.64%	committee, committees
leadership	40	0.62%	leadership
help	37	0.58%	help, helped, helpful, helping, helps
time	33	0.51%	time, times
role	32	0.50%	role, roles
opportunity	29	0.45%	opportunities, opportunity
person	28	0.44%	person, personal, personalities, personality, personally
development	25	0.39%	develop, development
participate	24	0.37%	participate, participating, participation
activities	23	0.36%	activities, activity
administration	21	0.33%	administration, administrative, administrator, administrators
questions	21	0.33%	question, questioning, questions
serve	21	0.33%	serve, serves, serving
share	21	0.33%	share, sharing
voice	21	0.33%	voice, voices
experiences	20	0.31%	experience, experiences
support	19	0.30%	support, supported, supportive, supports
meetings	17	0.26%	meet, meeting, meetings
position	17	0.26%	position, positive, positively
profession	16	0.25%	profession
represent	15	0.23%	represent, representative, representatives, representatives', represented, representing
coach	14	0.22%	coach, coaching
community	14	0.22%	community
group	14	0.22%	group, groups
grow	13	0.20%	grow, growing



ideas	13	0.20%	idea, ideas
principal	13	0.20%	principal, principals
change	12	0.19%	change, changed, changes, changing
lead	12	0.19%	lead, leading
legislative	12	0.19%	legislative, legislators
professional	12	0.19%	professional
team	12	0.19%	team
political	11	0.17%	political, politically, politics
perceive	10	0.16%	perceive, perceived
learning	9	0.14%	learn, learned, learning
superintendent	9	0.14%	superintendent, superintendents
understanding	9	0.14%	understand, understanding
appreciated	8	0.12%	appreciate, appreciated, appreciation, appreciative
aware	8	0.12%	aware
challenge	8	0.12%	challenge, challenged, challenging
collaborate	8	0.12%	collaborate, collaborating, collaboration, collaborative
impact	8	0.12%	impact
important	8	0.12%	importance, important
responsibilities	8	0.12%	responses, responsibilities, responsibility
perspective	7	0.11%	perspective, perspectives
service	7	0.11%	service
together	7	0.11%	together
care	6	0.09%	care
concern	6	0.09%	concern, concerned, concerns
curriculum	6	0.09%	curriculum
engagement	6	0.09%	engage, engagement
growth	6	0.09%	growth
meaningful	6	0.09%	meaningful
nominated	6	0.09%	nominate, nominated, nomination, nominations
process	6	0.09%	process
recruitment	6	0.09%	recruit, recruiting, recruitment
vision	6	0.09%	vision
advocacy	5	0.08%	advocacy
advocate	5	0.08%	advocate

celebration	5	0.08%	celebrated, celebration
comfort	5	0.08%	comfort, comfortable
communication	5	0.08%	communicate, communicating, communication
contributed	5	0.08%	contribute, contributed
conversation	5	0.08%	conversation, conversations
coordinator	5	0.08%	coordinate, coordinator
desire	5	0.08%	desire
honors	5	0.08%	honor, honors
involved	5	0.08%	involve, involved, involvement
popular	5	0.08%	popular, popularity
problems	5	0.08%	problem, problems
pursue	5	0.08%	pursue, pursued, pursuing
title	5	0.08%	title, titles

## Appendix E: Word Frequency in Focus Group

<b>Word</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>Weighted Percentage</b>	<b>Similar Words</b>
teacher	196	4.44%	teacher, teachers
forum	82	1.86%	forum, forums
leadership	63	1.43%	leadership
district	49	1.11%	district, districts
school	47	1.06%	school, schools
role	41	0.93%	role, roles
meeting	34	0.77%	meeting, meetings, meets
leaders	31	0.70%	leader, leaders
time	30	0.68%	time, times
principal	27	0.61%	principal, principals, principals'
work	26	0.59%	work, worked, working, works
members	19	0.43%	member, members
person	19	0.43%	person, personal
important	18	0.41%	important
committee	17	0.38%	committee, committees
opportunity	17	0.38%	opportunities, opportunity
change	15	0.34%	change, changed, changes, changing
faculty	14	0.32%	faculties, faculty
teach	14	0.32%	teach, teaches, teaching
present	12	0.27%	present, presentation, presented, presenting
lead	11	0.25%	lead, leading, leads
superintendent	9	0.20%	superintendent
support	9	0.20%	support, supporting
administrators	9	0.20%	administration, administrator, administrators
foster	9	0.20%	foster, fostering, fosters
community	8	0.18%	community
social	8	0.18%	social
space	8	0.18%	space
title	8	0.18%	title
serving	8	0.18%	serve, served, serving
culture	8	0.18%	culture, cultures

building	7	0.16%	building
engagement	7	0.16%	engaged, engagement, engagements, engaging
group	7	0.16%	group
hybrid	7	0.16%	hybrid
idea	7	0.16%	idea, ideas
involved	7	0.16%	involved
learning	7	0.16%	learned, learning
chairs	7	0.16%	chair, chairs
education	7	0.16%	education, educator, educators
participating	6	0.14%	participant, participated, participating, participation
capacity	6	0.14%	capacity
grow	6	0.14%	grow, grows
share	6	0.14%	share, shared
embrace	5	0.11%	embrace, embraced
responsibilities	5	0.11%	responsibilities, responsibility, responsible
structure	5	0.11%	structure, structured, structures
tap	5	0.11%	tap, tapped, tapping
development	5	0.11%	develop, development, develops
teams	5	0.11%	team, teams
model	5	0.11%	model
priority	5	0.11%	priority
research	5	0.11%	research
speaker	5	0.11%	speaker