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## The effects of a shared vision of teacher leadership on classroom teachers' instruction

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# The effects of a shared vision of teacher leadership on classroom teachers' instruction

## Abstract

Many models of instructional teacher leadership exist in schools with various outcomes for teachers. The aim of this illustrative case study was to understand systemic alignment in a formal teacher leadership system and how this alignment impacted instructional change. This dissertation was framed by three research questions: 1) How do the rationales of teachers, teacher leaders, and administrators regarding teacher leadership in their school align? 2) How does the coherence of a system of leadership impact classroom teachers' abilities to engage with formal teacher leaders? 3) How does the coherence of a system of leadership impact classroom teachers' abilities to implement instructional changes?

A qualitative case study was conducted utilizing semi-structured interviews in one rural school in Minnesota. The participants included one K-12 principal, two high school teacher leaders, two high school teachers, two elementary teacher leaders, and two elementary teachers, and a district Q Comp Coordinator. Role theory (Biddle, 1979) was the theoretical framework used to analyze the data. The findings yielded two scenarios: The elementary in which systemic alignment and a positive engaging culture was associated with the teachers' willingness to implement instructional change; and the high school in which a slight variation in the shared vision regarding ownership rendered role conflict, periods of teacher-teacher leader disengagement, and teacher instructional changes dependent upon feelings of ownership and relevance. A coherent and shared vision of teacher leadership is one factor that impacts classroom teachers' instruction.

## Keywords

teacher leadership, vision, coherence, educational leadership, ownership, motivation, systemic alignment, instructional change

## Author Bio

Tiffany L. Bockelmann is a doctoral student and a graduate assistant in the Educational Leadership Doctoral Program at Minnesota State University Moorhead. She also serves as the Assistant Editor of the Interactive Journal of Global Leadership and Learning. She obtained her master's degree in Educational Leadership and licenses in education administration from Minnesota State University Moorhead. She served as the Quality Compensation Coordinator for her school district and led a system of teacher leadership and professional development. She obtained her undergraduate degree in K-12 Instrumental and Classroom Music from the University of Minnesota, Morris, and her technology license from Bethel University. She is a Minnesota Blandin Community Leadership alumna and has led in her community in early childhood and intergenerational initiatives. Her research interests include educational and teacher leadership.

## Introduction

Academically, teachers have the most impact on students' educational outcomes (Lumpkin et al., 2014; McKenzie & Locke, 2014; Darling-Hammond, 2000), and leadership is second only to classroom teachers in impacting student achievement (Leithwood et al., 2004). This relationship is such that educational leaders must employ effective strategies to foster rich and compelling professional development for teachers. One such strategy is to engage teachers in their own professional development and that of their peers, creating systems of teacher leadership. While teacher leadership is not a new phenomenon, teacher leadership systems (and most reform or change initiatives) are inherently complex, delicate, context dependent, and compounded by differing internal perspectives. It is necessary to illuminate teacher leadership systems and their inherent barriers and success in order for educational leaders, teachers, and teacher leaders to continually innovate and move systems forward (Bagley & Margolis, 2018).

This publication uses data collected for and text revised from the researcher's Ed.D. dissertation, *The Effects of a Shared Vision of Teacher Leadership on Classroom Teachers' Instruction* (Bockelmann, 2021). The researcher used a qualitative case study to investigate the perspectives of the principal, teachers, and teacher leaders in one small, rural school in Minnesota, regarding the coherence of the school's formal system of teacher leadership.

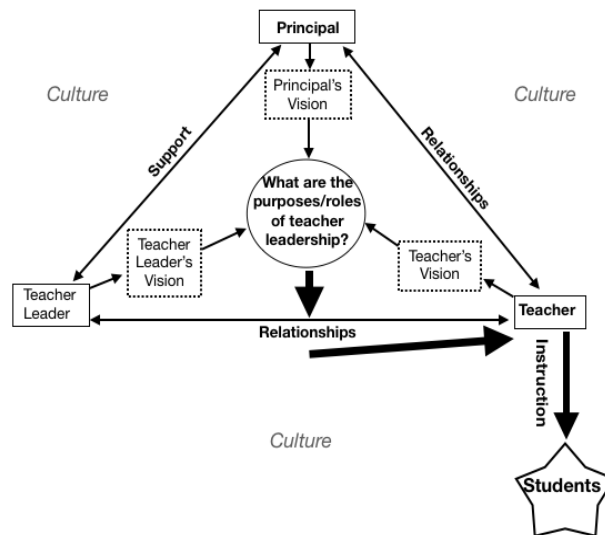
The researcher's study was driven by the complexities experienced during her leadership experiences as a district's first Quality Compensation (Q Comp) Coordinator, a peer observer, and a professional learning community (PLC) facilitator. Q Comp "is a voluntary program that allows local districts and exclusive representatives of the teachers to design and collectively bargain a plan that... [addresses] Career Ladder/Advancement Options, Job-embedded Professional Development, Teacher Evaluation, and Performance Pay and Alternative Salary

Schedule” (Minnesota Department of Education, n.d.). As Coordinator, the researcher found significant variance in the amount of teachers’ engagement with instructional teacher leaders, among philosophies of education and organizational development, and the amount and nature of teachers’ implemented changes from the job embedded professional development opportunities (Bockelmann, 2018).

The complex psychosocial phenomenon of teacher leadership is depicted in Figure 1. The outer triangle depicts the principal’s, teacher leaders’, and teachers’ relationships and impacts on one another. The star depicts the ultimate impact on student achievement through teachers’ instruction. In the center, the purposes and roles of the system of teacher leadership may differ depending on the visions through which the three groups are looking. Alignment of these visions may have an increased impact on the relationship between the teacher leaders and the teachers as these are the people working closest together in most teacher leadership systems. Bold arrows underscore the added complexity of relationships between teachers and teacher leaders in Figure 1. The significance of this study is that it illuminated why a deep understanding of teacher leadership is important. A significant goal of teacher leadership is to impact classroom teacher’s instruction, so student outcomes will be realized.

**Figure 1**

*Emphasis of Teacher-Teacher Leader Relationships on Teachers' Instructional Choices*



*Note.* Teacher leadership systems are embedded in the culture of a school. “Culture is essentially a social indoctrination of unwritten rules that people learn as they try to fit in a particular group” (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015, p. 2). The culture of the school may impact the success of the teacher leadership system as well as a shared vision. From “The Effects of a Shared Vision of Teacher Leadership” by T. Bockelmann (2021).

The researcher examined one formal system of teacher leadership and how the rationales of the principal, teacher leaders, and teachers impacted coherence, how this coherence impacted teacher to teacher-leader engagement, and how this level of coherence impacted teachers’ instructional changes.

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How do the rationales of teachers, teacher leaders, and administrators regarding teacher leadership in their school align?

2. How does the coherence of a system of leadership impact classroom teachers' abilities to engage with formal teacher leaders?

3. How does the coherence of a system of leadership impact classroom teachers' abilities to implement instructional changes?

Teachers' instructional choices are impacted by a myriad of variables including student needs, available resources, district initiatives, state and federal laws, and community needs among other important factors. This purpose of this study is not to infer that systems of teacher leadership are the most impactful variable on teachers' instruction, but to investigate the intricate dynamics of an already established formal system, particularly the alignment of rationales among participants in the system, on the associated teachers' instructional choices.

### **Purpose and Significance of the Study**

Teacher leadership is an evolving middle ground in the education profession that is still not the norm, however more attention is being placed on its development and impacts. Entire states in the United States are implementing models of teacher leadership utilizing state-wide frameworks that suggest a common vision or philosophy, a needs assessment, and clear roles (American Institutes for Research, 2019). However, a study that directly investigates the significance of the clarity of roles, vision, or foundational philosophy has not been found.

Additionally, principals are the designers of the systems and culture under which teacher leadership operates (Lumpkin et al., 2014). Administrators should have a vested interest in reflecting upon the systems in the district including factors that enhance and inhibit the outcomes; in this case, advances in the development of teachers. Administrators should understand how their stakeholders understand the expectations, roles, and purposes of teacher leadership as these viewpoints can impact the culture of the entire school. In congruence with

Biddle's (1979), Katz and Kahn's (1989) and Turner's (2002) descriptions of role theory, administrators can reflect upon the findings of this study to understand the importance of coherence surrounding the role of teacher leadership, how culture impacts this understanding, and how teachers internalize the attempts of teacher leaders to influence teachers' practice.

### **Conceptual Framework**

This qualitative case study is grounded in the social constructivist paradigm.

Ontologically, constructivism asserts that multiple realities are constructed by the individuals and may differ based on context (Badewi, 2013). Applied to this study, one school's teacher leadership system may be different from another, and individuals within one school construct their realities based on their situations, experiences, beliefs, and social interactions.

Epistemologically, this study is approached through an interpretivist lens, specifically through the social constructivist paradigm. Social constructivism is characterized by individuals constructing meaning from the world around them, and researchers relying on the participants' view of the situation (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 24). Participants are assumed to have told the truth and divulged their own philosophies and reflections. Reality was constructed between the researcher and the participants.

### **Role Theory**

This study utilized role theory as the lens through which to analyze the system of teacher leadership and resultant behaviors and reflections of the participants. According to Biddle (1979, p. 4), role theory is "a science concerned with the study of behaviors that are characteristic of persons within contexts and various processes, that presumably produce, explain, or are affected by those behaviors." Role theory spans psychology, sociology, and anthropology allowing for a wide and flexible framework that encompasses individual and collective patterns of behavior and

underlying phenomenon associated with these patterns (Biddle, 1979, pp. 11–13). Biddle explained role theory provides researchers insight as to how a role integrates with other roles in the system and why the role is organized the way it is (p. 70). Foundational assumptions to role theory are (a) patterns of behavior are context dependent, (b) roles are linked to those with a common identity, (c) people are held to expectations, (d) roles are embedded in a social system, and (e) people must be taught roles (Biddle, 1979, p. 8).

Roles are designed to have a function and are enforced through shared expectations for the role's behavior. Role theory assumes a participant in a system holds a mental model for a particular role based on his or her understanding of the function and expectations of the role, and comparisons to other roles. Participants behave in accordance to how their beliefs or mental models align with the role expectations and how the role is manifested through engagements with the role holder, resulting in either role coherence or role conflict. Role conflict would attempt to be reduced through resolution processes on the part of the role holder, individuals who interact with the role, and the larger group. Factors that influence this process are role indoctrination, legitimacy, saliency, longevity and cohesiveness of the group, consensus of expectations, and how well sanctions are tolerated.

Role theory illuminated the initial investigation in this study of rationales (functions) of the system of teacher leadership as a whole as integral to understanding part of the mental models (behaviors and expectations) that principals, teachers, and teacher leaders themselves cast onto teacher leaders. A breakdown of coherence (ability for the system to achieve its function) would result if participants could not agree on the very function of the system of teacher leadership in the first place. Regardless of the role expectations written down on paper, role conflicts could eminently arise between actors in the system. These conflicts could



subsequently impact the behaviors of members in the system as resolution efforts would take place, and ultimately affect the outcomes of the system and teacher leader roles themselves, in this case, teacher development.

## **Literature Review**

### **Definition of Teacher Leader**

From a top-down approach, there has been an urgent push for quality control as students need to be exposed to talented teachers and progress toward the goals and philosophies pushed by institutions. From a grass roots approach, there has been a need for teachers to innovate, meet their own professional goals, and meet the needs of the students in front of them (Fullan, 2011). Research also suggested that teachers learn best in networks in which they can engage in sensemaking with peers to collaboratively reflect upon, plan, demonstrate, and discuss effective pedagogy, data practices, and teaching and learning (Louis et al., 2013; Margolis & Doring, 2012; Shillingstad et al., 2015; Smith et al., 2016; Spillane, 1999). Where, then, does this leave the role of teacher leaders?

The clarity and purpose of teacher leadership roles was cited as a problem throughout the literature on teacher leadership (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Since the early 1980s, the idea of teacher leadership has undergone three primary waves of change including teachers taking on administrative-like duties, leveraging their pedagogical expertise, and developing a culture conducive to collaborative professionalism (Silva et al., 2000). Furthermore, teacher leadership has manifested via informal and formal roles (Fairman & Mackenzie, 2015). Moreover, teacher leadership systems are context dependent. In short, a superintendent put it bluntly, “The teacher leadership movement... has an identity crisis” (National Institute for Excellence in Teaching, 2018, p. 10). This study focused on formal teacher leaders, specifically instructional coaches and

professional learning community (PLC) leaders who have been appointed or elected to roles by their peers.

### **Relationship between Teachers, Teacher Leaders, and Principals**

Systems of teacher leadership are built upon a triadic and symbiotic relationship between teachers, principals, and teacher leaders (see Figure 1, Anderson, 2004). The next sections will briefly describe this interconnectedness.

#### ***The Role of the Principal***

The consensus from the literature is that principals shape the context for teacher leaders by allocating resources (time, financial support, and materials); fostering the skills of the teacher leader; setting expectations and goals for role of the teacher leader position and seeing they are understood (coherence); and creating conditions and setting expectations for the rest of the staff to interact with teacher leader (culture). However, the extent to which these tasks are performed depends on the understanding, value, philosophy, and purpose the principal has for the system of teacher leadership and the teacher leaders themselves. Ultimately, the principal's foundational philosophy and vision for teacher leadership makes a difference in the way the system will respond (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009).

The importance of creating a shared vision for teaching and learning was undeniable in the literature surrounding leadership and change (Barth, 1991; Biddle, 1979; Bolman & Deal, 2008; Buller, 2015; DuFour et al., 2006; Fullan, 2016; Guenert & Whitaker, 2005; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009). The underlying message was clear: The more the stakeholders are involved in a visioning process, the more they will take ownership of the system and outcomes (Deci, 2017; Fullan, 2011; Marion & Gonzales, 2013, Spillane, 1999; Weiner, 2010).

During the implementation process, role confusion can lead to unclear lines of authority (Coquyt & Creasman, 2017). The introduction of a teacher leader role requires the principal to take on a distributed or democratic leadership philosophy in which power is shared, not merely delegated (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009; Spillane, 1999). However, principals and teachers in schools steeped in hierarchy may struggle with the concept and need time and dialogue to enact such a system. Fear of losing power or not trusting teacher leaders inhibits principals' willingness to support teacher leaders, leading principals to step in and undermine or take over the work of teacher leaders (Barth, 1991; Hallinger & Heck, 2013; Senge, 2006, p. 104).

### ***Teacher Leaders' Reflections of Themselves***

Teacher leaders need to engage with both teachers and principals in continual dialogue regarding role differentiation, including what the role is and is not. National and State Teachers of the Year [NSTOY] made clear their roles were to promote collaboration and reflection, connect research and practice, model, and take risks (Jacques, et al. 2016). One such NSTOY commented that it's "just being able to share what you know with others and help them grow" (p. 19) and wanting everyone to succeed, including themselves. One teacher leader justified her position by stating, "in the end, I'm still one of the teacher-colleagues but who only spends more time participating in thinking about school level processes" (Struyve et al., 2014, p. 244).

The social effects of teacher leadership are well documented. Struyve et al. (2014) found teacher leaders felt as though they lost their colleagues since assuming leadership responsibilities. The teacher leaders struggled with obtaining recognition and collaboration from their colleagues but received explicit legitimacy from the school leaders such as praise and being entrusted with confidential information. On one hand, teacher leaders wanted to be recognized for their skills and use these to lead other teachers to better practices through feedback, but they

did not want to risk their relationships with teachers, (McKenzie & Locke, 2014). The result was rampant role downplay among teacher leaders (Mangin, 2005).

Smylie and Denny (2004) concluded that teacher leaders “seem reluctant to challenge the norms of equality, privacy, and autonomy among teachers and the authority and power of the school administration. They seem very careful not to alienate themselves from their fellow teachers” (p. 254). Donaldson et al. (2008, p. 1106) pointed out that in so doing, the teacher leaders “themselves, reinforced those norms.”

Instances of positive outcomes from systems of teacher leadership included those in which teachers were free to choose how to interact with teacher leaders to create their own networks of support, a culture of learning was already established, and positive relationships between the principal, teachers, and teacher leaders were already formed (Struyve et al., 2014; Fairman & Mackenzie, 2015).

### ***The Role of Teachers***

When few people have a concrete idea for the responsibilities and expectations of a role, people will form their own conceptualizations of what those parameters ought to be (Biddle, 1979; Smylie & Denny, 1990). For example, through their own observations, teachers reported teacher leaders to have spent a disproportionate amount of time working with administrators and not enough time working with teachers, and therefore associated the teacher leader role with administration more than the role of a teacher (Margolis & Doring, 2013). Lines of power and authority were obscured which bred mistrust and a breach of egalitarian norms among teachers.

Some teachers chose not to take on leadership because they resisted confronting difficult issues that may bring conflict (Flood & Angelle, 2017). Similarly, teachers may perceive the well-meaning intentions of teacher leaders as infringements upon their autonomy, judgements on

their professional practice, and worse, betrayal. Like teacher leaders, teachers need to have a supportive culture to take risks (Bosso, 2017; Mangin, 2005; Margolis & Doring, 2013)

Finally, the saliency of the expectations imposed upon teachers will affect teachers' willingness to change their behaviors. However, to impose a uniform approach to professional development and networking, and further mandate it is detrimental to a teacher's need for autonomy (Bosso, 2017; Jacobs et al., 2018). Schools are complex thinking organizations dealing with sometimes unpredictable human behaviors. As such, teachers need autonomy to make the best choices to address the student needs in front of them. Fullan (2018) described autonomy as the freedom of teachers to bring their ideas to the group, learn from the group's ideas, and bring back to their practice what the teacher feels is needed to serve the students. Autonomy is thus closely related to ownership and relevance.

### **Leadership and Change**

The study of change processes is not limited to the world of education. Several theorists from the fields of psychology, sociology, education, and leadership have studied the intricacies of influence, motivation, and change. Among the theories cited in the literature regarding teacher leadership are: self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000), attribution theory (Weiner, 2010), social-cognitive theory (Bandura, 1989), adult learning theory (Knowles, 1978), zones of enactment and distributed leadership (Spillane, 1999; 2006), social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), and role theory (Biddle, 1979; Katz & Kahn, 1978; Turner, 2002).

Teacher leadership systems are saturated with issues regarding ownership, influence, motivation, and change. In particular, Ryan and Deci (2000) identified two types of motivation, autonomous and controlled. Deci (2017) observed that when people are operating under autonomous motivation, their performance, engagement, and wellness is greater. Similarly,

Weiner's (2010) attribution theory illuminated the locus of control people may attribute to their decisions, and concluded that the more control one has in a predictable setting, the more likely they will be willing to take control of their behavior and either justify it or implement a change.

Change theorists consistently agreed that the more one pushes for change, the more there will be resistance (Biddle, 1979; Fullan, 2011, 2016; Knight, 2011; Marion & Gonzales, 2013; Senge, 2006). A top-down model of change may work temporarily but may further damage the culture. Furthermore, if teachers feel that the role of a teacher leader is merely a conduit for top-down mandates, then resistance will ensue (Hart, 1994).

### **Method**

This study adhered to the social constructivist paradigm. Social constructivism is characterized by the presence of “multiple realities constructed through our lived experiences and interactions with others” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 35). To capture the multiple realities of the participants in this study, an illustrative case study was designed in alignment Merriam's (1998; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) case study applications in education. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) defined a case study as “an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system” (p. 37). This study is bound by its context of the school and teachers within it.

This study exemplified Merriam and Tisdell's (2016, pp. 16–18) five characteristics of qualitative research. First, the researcher was concerned with understanding the phenomenon of interest from an emic (insider's) rather than the etic (outsider's) perspective. Second, the “researcher [was] the primary instrument for data collection and analysis”. Third, the analysis process was inductive toward the beginning and shifted to deductive toward the end. Fourth, the design of a research study was particularistic in that was responsive to conditions surrounding the case and data collected. Finally, the end product of this qualitative research was richly

descriptive, using words including direct quotations from participants, rather than numbers to illustrate the findings.

### **Participant Selection**

The inclusion criteria for the school were that it had to be a participant of Minnesota's Quality Compensation (Q-Comp) program, which mandated a structured system of formal teacher leadership, and the school site must have been a public, K–12, rural school. Charter schools or alternative settings represent atypical settings beyond the scope of this study. Many of the studies regarding teacher leadership were from larger, urban schools, rather this study utilized data collected from a rural school. Rural schools are often comprised of a smaller administrator to teacher ratio, which may impact the ability of the principal to communicate with teachers. An exclusion criterion for the principal was the presence of an assistant principal who directly shared instructional leadership duties with the principal, which would have added another layer of complexity beyond the scope of this study.

### **Sampling Procedure**

After obtaining approval from the Minnesota State University Moorhead IRB board, convenience sampling was used to select the district based on the relative location of the researcher's place of practice. After contacting the superintendent to obtain permission to engage a school within the district as a research site, snowball sampling was used to select participants. The superintendent recommended a school within the district and established contact with a principal. After the principal agreed to be interviewed, the principal had the opportunity to recommend teacher leaders, and from there, teacher leaders had the opportunity to recommend teachers and other leaders. This snowball sampling procedure was necessary to first find a principal who was willing to participate. Without this key participant, the study would not be

able to be conducted as a vital perspective would have been missing. In addition, in order to identify the teacher leaders in the school, a conversation with a principal was necessary.

The sampling process yielded 10 participants including a K-12 Principal, district Q Comp Coordinator, two elementary teacher leaders, two elementary teachers, two high school teacher leaders, and two high school teachers. There were a total of 24 teachers, however not all teachers received an invitation to participate as snowball sampling was used, and data collection reached saturation. Sampling ended when no other teacher leaders were willing to participate, and the realities and opinions of the participants did not offer further information during data analysis. Finally, four teachers who were invited to participate did not respond, and one additional teacher formally declined, stating they could not separate themselves from the negativity taking place.

### **Context of the Sample**

The K–12 school in which the participants practiced was a rural school in Minnesota, and part of a larger district. According to the Minnesota Report Card (Minnesota Department of Education, 2018), the high school consisted of 145 predominantly White students (2.1% Hispanic or Latino, 7% American Indian or Alaskan Native, 26.9% special education, 40% free/reduced priced lunch). The high school employed 14 teachers who are also predominantly White. Some of these teachers (i.e., specialists) were shared with the elementary school. The elementary consisted of 107 predominantly White students (1.9% Hispanic or Latino, 3.7% American Indian or Alaska Native, 28% special education, 49.5% free/reduced priced lunch). There were 10 teachers in the elementary who were all women and predominantly White.

The district has been participating in Minnesota's Q Comp program for 10 years. According to this district's Q Comp Plan (Seagren, 2010) the school's system of teacher leadership included one Peer Coach (a teacher who observed other teachers and gave them non-



evaluative feedback) in the high school and one Peer Coach in the elementary; one PLC facilitator (a teacher who lead and organized the PLC meetings) for the high school and one for the elementary; one Mentor (teacher who offered support for new to the career or district teachers) for the high school and one for the elementary; one Coordinator (teacher who oversaw plan implementation and program evaluation) for the district; and one Oversight Committee (comprised of administrators and teachers from the district) for the district. The plan had not changed in the 10 years of implementation aside from allocating more funds to certain positions and adding more PLC groups as needed throughout the district. The high school and elementary PLCs in this particular school were comprised of all the high school teachers and all the elementary teachers, respectively.

According to the Q Comp Coordinator and the Principal, by design, the Principal did not have a role in the selection and training of the teacher leaders but had the ability to work with the teacher leaders once they were in their roles. Both report that the Coordinator worked closest with the PLC process.

### **Description of the Sample**

The demographics of the participants in this study are outlined in Table 1. The majority of years of experience for all participants were obtained while employed at this school.

**Table 1**

#### *Participant Demographics*

<i>Participant by Position</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Years of Experience in Education</i>	<i>Teacher Leadership</i>	
			<i>Position</i>	<i>Years</i>
Principal	woman	17 (5 Principal)		
Q Comp Coordinator	woman	29	Coordinator	10
<i>Elementary</i>				
Kindergarten	woman	12		
1 <sup>st</sup> Grade	woman	8	PLC Facilitator	2
2 <sup>nd</sup> Grade	woman	2		

3 <sup>rd</sup> Grade	woman	30	Peer Coach	7
<i>High School</i>				
Math	man	6		
Media/Science	man	17	Peer Coach (former)	6
Social Studies	man	6		
Language Arts	woman	7	Mentor	2

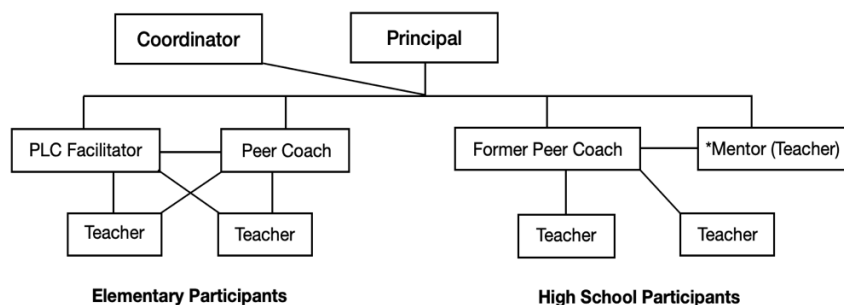
*Note.* The Principal was the school’s Dean of Students prior; those years are not included in the 5 years as principal. The teachers are divided between schools as described in the methods section.

From “The Effects of a Shared Vision of Teacher Leadership” by T. Bockelmann (2021).

The teachers and teacher leaders in this study had multiple forms of engagement opportunities with each other (see Figure 2). The sample size allowed for enough different perspectives to begin to understand the importance of role clarity, vision, and the operations of the teacher leadership system from these different perspectives.

**Figure 2**

*Participant Flowchart*



*Note:* \*Although the Mentor is a formal position, the job requirements do not allow the mentor to facilitate groups, or coach. The Mentor served in a limited instructional capacity, rather orienting new teachers to the building. The current and past PLC Facilitators in the high school declined participation in the study. From “The Effects of a Shared Vision of Teacher Leadership” by T. Bockelmann (2021).

## Data Collection and Analysis

The participants were contacted via email to procure interest in the study, schedule interviews, send and receive the letter of informed consent, and received a copy of the initial interview questions. Semi-structured interviews were conducted via a video streaming software and over the phone. The audio and video interviews were both recorded. Electronic communication was highly recommended as a result of the COVID-19 Pandemic and stay-at-home executive orders. Additional documents were procured from the Q Comp Coordinator, and an informal interview was conducted to understand the district's Q Comp Plan. The guiding questions for the interviews were:

1. Tell me about your professional background (i.e. years as a teacher; subject(s); leadership positions; how many school districts taught in).
2. On a large scale, what is your rationale behind teacher leadership in your school?  
(Follow up or prompts: Why did teacher leadership start in your school? What are the goals or purposes of teacher leadership in your school?)
3. What are the different formal roles in your teacher leadership system?

4. What is the purpose of each of those roles?

Question five was for teacher leaders only:

5. What teacher leadership role(s) are you in? Describe what you do in your role?

Questions six through eight were asked of teachers only.

6. Describe your interactions with teacher leaders. (What do you do together?)
7. Describe any instructional changes you've made lately (think about planning, delivery, assessment, or classroom management).
8. Who or what influences your instructional decisions or changes?

After the interview and recording process was completed for each interview, the data analysis process commenced, following that of Merriam's (1998; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) methodological model for case studies. Each interview was transcribed by the researcher after it was conducted and annotated manually. The documents received from the Q Comp Coordinator and examined for authenticity and triangulation against the data collected from participants.

A deductive, preliminary analysis was conducted using open coding, in which any important or interesting information was highlighted, notes and memos were written in the margins, and short words or phrases were labeled with preliminary codes. As this process continued, pieces of data from interviews were compared with each other and sorted into proper codes, marking the preliminary stages of axial coding and the constant comparative method (Merriam, 1998). Some criteria needed to be established to ensure all data for that code were appropriate. A numbering system was used to combine codes and memos for further grouping via a spreadsheet. This ongoing deductive analysis added focus to the analysis process and informed the researcher of new questions to ask future participants: Previous participants were contacted to gain their perspectives if the answers to the questions could not be derived from the previous interview. Three previous participants provided additional written responses to the following follow up questions:

1. In your school, do you see teacher leaders as more administrator-like, teacher-like, a combination, or something else?
2. In your school currently, what do you see is the purpose of teacher leaders? (i.e.: to drive or implement district/administrative ideas, to foster collaboration among teachers, something else, or a combination of things?)

3. Does what you see teacher leaders as in your school jive with what you think their purpose *should* be? If there is a difference between your experience at your school and your ideal, could you explain that?
4. How does your view of teacher leaders you described in Questions 1 and 2 affect your ability to work with them (communicate, implement advice)? If you are (were) a teacher leader, does how your colleagues view you affect their ability to work with you?

As the spiral and methodical data analysis continued by simultaneously analyzing the interviews and collecting more data, themes began to emerge from the codes and memos to create even larger categories and themes needing abstract reasoning to summarize. At this point, the analysis shifted to use inductive reasoning (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 201). The researcher went back through the interviews to find more data to support the categories as nothing new was emerging from the transcripts. At this point, the researcher felt a point of saturation had been reached. Additionally, participants consistently described the same reality.

This entire process was completed in two phases, first with the data collected from the elementary participants and then the high school participants. It was evident through the interview process that the realities of the two groups were different and warranted separate analysis to examine those differences and find similarities. At the conclusion of the data analysis process, a draft of the results was sent to all participants to complete the member checking process (Creswell & Poth, 2018). No revisions were recommended.

### **Findings**

The high school and elementary participants described two different realities based on their contexts, even though they were part of the same system. Figure 3 and Figure 4 represent a summary of the findings for the elementary and high school respectively. The figures display

how the research questions and findings build upon each other by taking into consideration the prior question's findings and incorporating them into the next question. Taken holistically, the figures depict the relationship between alignment and coherence. Alignment is the agreeance of the technical aspects of the plan such as the alignment of vision, roles to accomplish the vision, and how those roles are enacted. Coherence begins with alignment, but includes the outcomes, perceived behaviors and reactions of people in different roles, and the outcomes of the system.

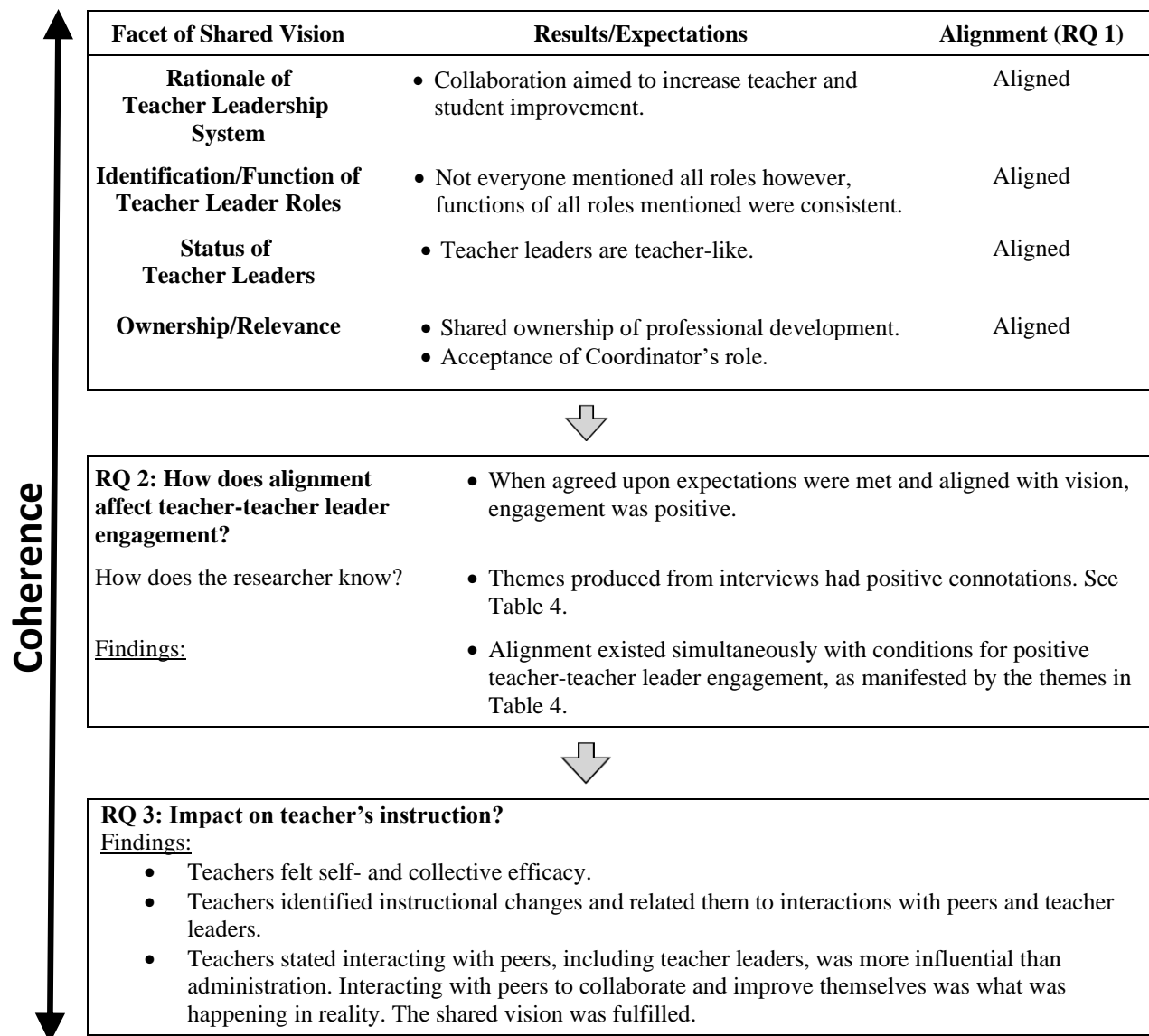
**Research Question 1:** How do the rationales of teachers, teacher leaders, and administrators regarding teacher leadership in their school align?

### *Identification of Teacher Leader Roles*

First, in order to establish a common language and focus between the researcher and participants, the participants were asked to name and describe any teacher leaders in their school (both formal and informal). As participants described the formal Q Comp teacher leaders, questions were asked to clarify their understanding of those positions and focus was given to these positions for the remainder of the interview. Among the elementary participants, not every person was able to correctly identify each role by name, however, they could describe the function of each role consistently. Moreover, the elementary participants agreed upon and accepted each of the roles, therefore alignment was present.

**Figure 3**

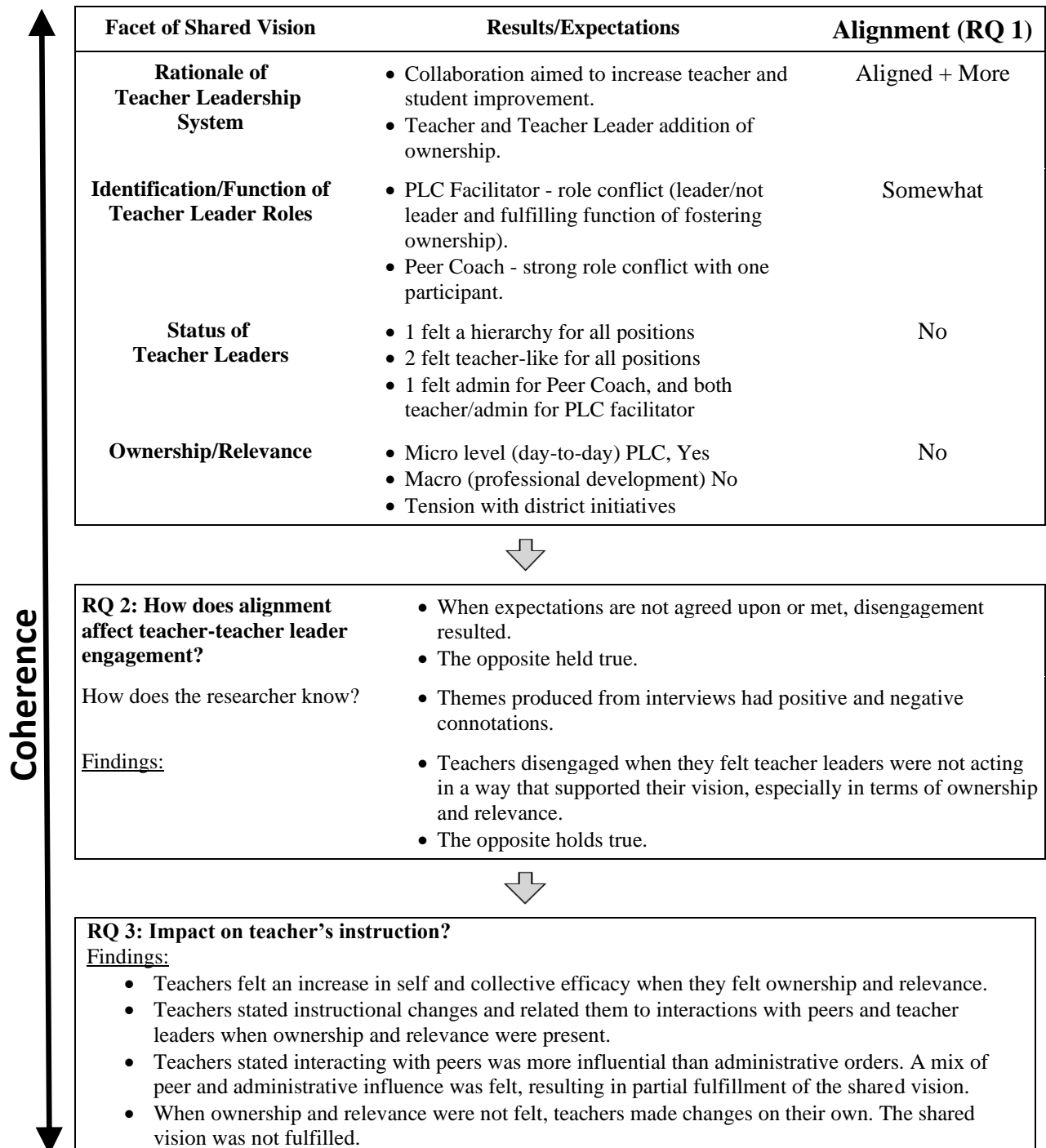
*Elementary Coherence Flowchart*



*Note.* From “The Effects of a Shared Vision of Teacher Leadership” by T. Bockelmann (2021).

**Figure 4**

*High School Coherence Flowchart*



*Note.* From “The Effects of a Shared Vision of Teacher Leadership” by T. Bockelmann (2021).



The high school participants could identify each role by name and describe the function of each role, however, they described the PLC Facilitator role as “not a leadership role” but “leading anyway” when it is listed as such in the Q Comp Plan (Seagren, 2010). Although the math teacher did describe the function of the position of the Peer Coach and described the protocols to be used, he did not agree with the process and suggested a different function and process. Alignment of roles was somewhat present in the high school.

### ***Rationale of Teacher Leadership System***

After the focus on formal teacher leadership was established, participants were asked to describe the rationale and underlying philosophy for their system of teacher leadership. The elementary participants’ responses were in alignment: collaboration aimed to increase teacher and student improvement (see Table 2). The high school participants’ responses reached the same conclusion, however there was an added emphasis on teacher ownership of professional development (see Table 3). This nuance of ownership (and later relevance) permeated the high school interviews.

**Table 2**

#### *Elementary Participants’ Responses to Purpose of the Teacher Leadership System*

<i>Participant</i>	<i>Phrase</i>	<i>Theme</i>
Principal	• Get teachers out of their silos	Collaboration/Unity
Principal	• Teachers working in Teams	Collaboration
Principal	• Want to be more collaborative	Collaboration
Peer Coach	• Build a professional learning community and benefit from it	Collaboration
2 <sup>nd</sup> Gr. Teacher	• It's not only just your classroom...to know how to work together as a team	Collaboration
K. Teacher	• To be able to collaborate with the other teachers, be able to work together	Collaboration
Principal	• Become better teachers	Teacher Development
2 <sup>nd</sup> Gr. Teacher	• How to deliver education, or develop our teaching skills	Teacher development
K. Teacher	• Maintain a unified front	Unity
K. Teacher	• It doesn't make you feel alone	Unity

<i>Participant</i>	<i>Phrase</i>	<i>Theme</i>
2 <sup>nd</sup> Gr. Teacher	• Makes me feel like I can do this job	Self-Efficacy
Principal	• Address student learning	Student needs
Principal	• Help our kids get what they need	Student needs
Facilitator	• It's just focused on how do we improve things at our school for the better of the kids. How do we help kids succeed and what's our role in that?	Student Needs
Facilitator	• The direction the state was going to go	State Direction
Principal	• PLCs were really taking off at the time	State Direction
Peer Coach	• Increase our salaries initially, though I don't think that's the focus anymore	Money

*Note.* The Principal is the same for both the high school and elementary. The themes of *money* and *state direction* were not included in the visions as they are no longer current parts of the vision, only pertaining to initial implementation of the system. From “The Effects of a Shared Vision of Teacher Leadership” by T. Bockelmann (2021).

**Table 3**

*High School Participants’ Responses to Purpose of the Teacher Leadership System*

<i>Participant</i>	<i>Phrase</i>	<i>Theme</i>
Social Studies Teacher	• To help you grow as a professional	Teacher Development
Social Studies Teacher	• We want teachers to be leading professional development of teachers	Teacher Development
Social Studies Teacher	• More honesty and growth oriented	Teacher development
Mentor	• Take care of teacher’s needs	Teacher Development
Math Teacher	• Empowering people	Teacher Development
Peer Coach (former)	• Continual process of improvement	Teacher development
Principal	• Become better teachers	Teacher Development
Mentor	• To come together and have that support to work together	Collaboration
Peer Coach (former)	• More of a collaborative	Collaboration
Peer Coach (former)	• If we’re all aligned...	Collaboration
Principal	• Teachers working in Teams	Collaboration
Principal	• Want to be more collaborative	Collaboration
Principal	• Get teachers out of their silos	Collaboration/Unity
Mentor	• Working as a team instead of doing our own thing	Unity
Mentor	• Common ground	Unity
Math Teacher	• Empowering teams	Unity
Mentor	• To meet the students’ needs	Student Needs
Peer Coach (former)	• It’ll be a better experience for the kids	Student Needs
Principal	• Address student learning	Student needs
Principal	• Help our kids get what they need	Student needs

<i>Participant</i>	<i>Phrase</i>	<i>Theme</i>
Math Teacher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>When people have some skin in the game they have a lot more desire to see things through and be part of solving problems rather than just complaining about them.</li> </ul>	Ownership
Math Teacher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Certainly takes a lot more ownership over everything.</li> </ul>	Ownership
Peer Coach (former)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>From “I really wish admin would take care of this” to “how does this get taken care of?”</li> </ul>	Ownership
Social Studies Teacher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teacher rather than an admin evaluating you, Less worry about what might happen</li> </ul>	Take Risks
Social Studies Teacher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>You’re willing to maybe take some risks in the classroom</li> </ul>	Take Risks
Peer Coach (former)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Motivational</li> </ul>	Self -Efficacy
Peer Coach (former)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>New and interesting model – change from traditional hierarchy to student up support model</li> </ul>	Change of Leadership Model
Peer Coach (former)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Free money from the state</li> </ul>	Money
Social Studies Teacher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Secure funding</li> </ul>	Money
Social Studies Teacher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Everybody knew that the state was going to be requiring some kind of teacher development and evaluation</li> </ul>	State Direction
Principal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>PLCs were really taking off at the time</li> </ul>	State Direction

*Note.* The Principal is the same for both the high school and elementary. The information from the Principal was taken directly from Table 4 and included here to compare for alignment. The themes of *money* and *state direction* were not included in the visions as they are no longer current parts of the vision, only pertaining to initial implementation of the system. From “The Effects of a Shared Vision of Teacher Leadership” by T. Bockelmann (2021).

### ***Status of Teacher Leaders***

The participants were asked to describe whether or not the teacher leaders were fulfilling the philosophy or rationale of the teacher leadership system according to their own beliefs, and to describe teacher leaders on a spectrum of being administrator-like to teacher-like. The elementary teachers agreed that the teacher leaders were absolutely teacher-like and fostered collaboration. Elementary teacher leaders sensed the same and felt they were teacher-like and worked hard to maintain this status, thus alignment was achieved. The Second Grade Teacher stated it best:

I don't think anybody looks at it like 'I'm higher up the totem pole than you are.' I mean we're basically all on one path, that it's not, 'Look at me, I get all the attention.' That's not it at all.

The high school teachers on the other hand were not in alignment regarding fulfillment of the rationale, or teacher and administrator qualities. As seen in Figure 4, one high school participant felt teacher leadership positions were part of a hierarchy, two participants felt the teacher leaders were teacher-like, and one felt that the Peer Coach was administrative, and the PLC facilitator position was characteristic of both a teacher and an administrator.

### ***Ownership and Relevance***

Finally, participants were asked who assumed ownership of the direction of the PLC and professional development activities. The elementary participants' responses indicated agreement that the facilitator assimilated district requests into the PLC process, was responsive to the needs and input of the teachers, and fostered ownership of the process. Alignment was further evidenced as the principal readily identified the onus for the direction as the teachers' and teacher leaders' with support from the Coordinator:

They really do have a lot of ownership in that area, it's not driven from admin, the teachers really drive that learning time for themselves. So, as far as my role, it's a little different because I'm not leading that area. I'm just kinda there to support them.

In the high school, the position of the PLC facilitator as a dichotomous leader and "not leader" was puzzling and led to a lack of alignment between high school participants. The high school teachers unanimously expressed their need for professional development activities, goals, and topics to be relevant to each member of the PLC, however teachers saw misalignment of initiatives from the district level. Issues of relevance and ownership were fully expressed through

the dichotomy of how the PLC facilitator was to handle this situation through seemingly opposite means: either helping to set a direction for the PLC and broker initiatives, or not lead by simply keeping track of records.

**Research Question 2:** How does the coherence of a system of leadership impact classroom teachers' abilities to engage with formal teacher leaders?

The first step in answering this question was to read through the data and apply a system of open coding including criteria for those codes and participant responses associated to those codes as a result of a constant comparative method. From this deductive reasoning process, axial coding took place in which the open codes were grouped into themes (see Table 4).

**Table 4**

*Axial Coding: Elementary and High School Themes derived from Open Codes*

<i>Elementary</i>		<i>High School</i>	
<i>Theme</i>	<i>Open Code</i>	<i>Theme</i>	<i>Open Code</i>
Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trust</li> <li>• Loneliness</li> <li>• Respect</li> </ul>	Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relationship</li> <li>• Trust</li> <li>• Respect</li> <li>• Risk Taking</li> <li>• Communication</li> </ul>
Collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaboration</li> <li>• Team</li> <li>• Common Goal</li> </ul>	Collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaboration</li> <li>• Unity</li> <li>• Team</li> </ul>
Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Culture</li> <li>• Efficacy</li> <li>• Mindset</li> <li>• Continual Improvement</li> <li>• Buy-in</li> </ul>	Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Culture</li> <li>• Self-efficacy</li> </ul>
Productivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Productive</li> <li>• Relevant</li> <li>• Focus</li> </ul>	Ownership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ownership</li> <li>• Control</li> <li>• Buy-in</li> </ul>
		Relevance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relevance</li> <li>• Productivity</li> <li>• Purpose</li> </ul>

*Note.* In the high school, the open code *risk taking* was described by participants as manifestation of trusting relationships, which is also indicative of a culture of learning, however participants

did not associate risk taking with culture. From “The Effects of a Shared Vision of Teacher Leadership” by T. Bockelmann (2021).

### ***Relationships***

Elementary participants repeatedly stated that they felt comfortable taking risks, respected the teacher leaders, and had confidence in each other’s abilities. The elementary teacher leaders themselves stated other teachers seemed comfortable whether working one-on-one or in groups with them.

High school participants valued the relationships built with each other. The peer coaches were described as “highly respected teachers”. The Social Studies teacher commented that he felt comfortable enough to take risks in his classroom when being observed as he believes the peer coach would give honest feedback. The Peer Coach commented that “the change and the connection with people and the things we’re trying and the comfortableness since when I started to the district to like what we have now is tremendous.”

However, in the high school, the positive relationships were not free of trials. The group valued trust, communication, and unity, however, as stated in the *Ownership* section of the first research question, the strained relationship between the administration and teachers regarding who was driving the professional development in the PLC had affected some relationships. “Sometimes,” the former Peer Coach explained, “it depends who is in the role” and, “if I don’t have a great relationship with that person, sometimes I don’t understand, and then I check out.” Furthermore, the former Peer Coach put it succinctly, “There’s got to be trust you know- it’s awkward at times.”

### *Collaboration*

The elementary participants recognized and valued their collaborative efforts as the term *collaboration*, or related phrases, were mentioned frequently. The elementary teachers felt PLCs were not only were they collaboratively planned, but there was time to share ideas, brainstorm to improve existing programs, share concerns, get clarification about initiatives, and reflect together on students and their school. The peer coaching process was mentioned during the elementary interview discussions regarding collaboration, but not specifically labeled as a collaborative event. Rather, the receiving of feedback was valued and regarded as productive.

The high school group recounted working on inter-curricular units and rubrics, whole-school motivational activities for students, student engagement, and even rearranged their schedules to make events happen for students. When there was an issue the Math Teacher stated, “We find a way to tackle it.” The Mentor commented that “it’s really nice having other teachers to work with so that way we can figure that out, what’s working and what’s not working and be successful...We’re very fortunate to have all of us together as a team.”

The elementary Peer Coach stated that even though she didn’t have another same grade level teacher to engage with, she could reach out to other schools, but that was not during PLC time and was not as common. She noted that the new teachers “wouldn’t know any different” and would adjust to a small school setting, learning to use the human resources around them. Similarly, the high school Math Teacher felt a combination of meeting with in-building colleagues and others outside the building would be best. He recognized that building relationships with colleagues in the building is important during PLC time, but also expressed loneliness:

...Like there is no one doing life with me. It feels like you are doing this race alone. Who is there to celebrate with you when you win? Who is there when you are struggling to encourage you to keep running the race? PLC needs to be that place.

**Culture.** The elementary participants described their culture as supportive, informal, family-like, and focused on improvement. The Principal and Q Comp coordinator attested to the positive elementary culture and buy-in from the group. Pertinent to the development of this culture in the elementary was the recent turnover and retirement of veteran staff who may not have agreed with the implementation of the Q Comp structure.

The Second Grade Teacher, the newest teacher, picked up on the positive culture and reiterated it several times during her interview: “It creates such a good support system, and we're able to work together and how to improve, because we really want to see each other as being successful.” Moreover, when the Kindergarten and Second Grade Teachers described times of feeling overwhelmed or unsure, their self-efficacy was elevated when they observed “everyone else feels the same way,” and the “weight of the world doesn't have to be on your shoulders”.

Despite the complications and improvements needed as cited by the high school participants, the culture was indicative of continuous improvement. The fact that the teachers spoke so passionately about driving learning and growth indicates the seriousness of continuous improvement efforts. The former Peer Coach stated that “people still get on board with trying to improve things,” seeking their own growth and that of the students and school. Some egalitarian remarks were made, and while it is an influencer of the culture, teachers seemed to be overall unified despite this occurrence.



### ***Productivity***

This theme was detected in both the elementary and high school, though the high school emphasized ownership and relevance regarding productivity which will be discussed in the next section. Productivity in this case was described by the elementary participants to mean the ability for teachers to use ideas gained from discussions, perform tasks, plan together, or reflect upon their practice to be more intentional practitioners. According to the elementary participants, productivity stemming from collaborative efforts varied over the life of the teacher leadership system. The principal reflected, “Some years PLCs accomplish a whole lot and they meet some really good goals, and some years they just can’t seem to get off the ground, and that’s constantly being assessed, like how do we make this better?”

Teachers and teacher leaders in the high school and elementary felt that when focus, common goals, and relevance was present, the productivity was the highest. Peer coaching was also coded into the productive theme as elementary participants stated they valued the feedback given to them by the Peer Coach. Ownership and relevance, the next two sections, were emphasized in the high school.

### ***Ownership***

The high school Participants’ tones of voice shifted to one of disappointment and frustration when they felt they were pressured to focus on certain mandates. Ownership surfaced as a major theme related to the research question regarding a coherent system’s impacts on teacher-teacher leader engagement and was also a theme in understanding the alignment of rationales. The themes of collaboration and ownership appeared simultaneously during the data analysis of the transcriptions, so much so that a predominant finding of this study is that collaboration was associated ownership: the idea is that the decision on what to collaborate on

needs to be owned by the group taking the action. As described in the previous section on Ownership, it is evident that this concept put the PLC Facilitator in a very difficult position, impacting relationships with other team members. The researcher attempted to contact the current and previous high school Facilitators but one declined and the other did not return communication. The Social Studies teacher offered this final statement in his interview that summarizes the need for ownership:

When teachers get the ability to lead, like what's on the agenda, I feel like we've put out some really good things through Q Comp, and it's when, you know, we get bogged down with some of the state mandates, or district mandates or whatever. When we have a voice in helping shape some of those mandates, we have ownership of it, or a stake in the game. Like we can live with that; we can work through that. But when it's kind of forced down the pike — 'This is what you're going to do'— it's just, it's absent, it honestly drains any value.

### ***Relevance***

This statement by the high school Social Studies teacher underscored the theme of relevance. All high school participants (teachers, teacher-leaders, Principal, and Coordinator) mentioned that it is very difficult for a PLC with such diverse members, all from different subject areas from band to science, to find specific tasks relevant for all members. The relevance of the tasks directly impacted the productivity and focus of the group. The Social Studies teacher observed that the group's root cause analysis pointed to student engagement as a unifying issue on which the group could focus. The group has split into smaller groups (math and science, and social studies and English) to focus on subject specific tasks and has continued to try this method periodically.

Relevance of feedback from high school peer coaches seemed to be in the eye of the beholder. Most high school participants stated the peer coaches provided relevant feedback, while the math teacher argued that it varied. The math teacher also viewed the peer coaches as a non-collaborative position and functioned in an administrative capacity. Other participants spoke on behalf of the band director and other teachers stating the same concerns and advocated for differentiated professional development.

**Research Question 3:** How does the coherence of a system of teacher leadership impact classroom teachers' abilities to implement instructional changes?

This question reached for the heart of the research problem, which concerned how teachers changed their practice based on their interactions with a system of teacher leadership that may or may not have exhibited coherence. From the scenario described by the elementary participants, it would seem that elementary teachers, teacher leaders, and administration were in agreement about the rationale and purpose of the system of teacher leadership and related teacher leader roles. From the scenario described by the high school participants, it would seem that the high school teachers, teacher leaders, and administration were largely in agreement about the rationale and purpose of the system, however ownership was a driving factor that led to incongruence between the expectations of the teacher leader roles and what was experienced. Additionally, participants reported leadership styles varied among teacher leaders, which, according to participants, may be driven by the teacher leaders' philosophies of leadership.

Teachers were asked to reflect upon recent changes they implemented into their instruction. Elementary teachers mentioned: classroom management improvements (no specific strategy); technology; implementation of the Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports system (PBIS); reading incentives, relationship building with students, understanding and use of

data from district benchmarking tools, becoming more reflective, becoming more flexible and responding to students in the moment. Responses from high school teachers included: continual changes when teaching new subjects; becoming more inter-curricular; using the same language between teachers; reinforcing academic language; implementing complex discussions; using technology and implementing protocols due to COVID-19 restrictions; implementing more word problems in math; and becoming more student-centered.

The specific items the Q Comp Coordinator listed (breaking down standards, getting at the right DOK [Depth of Knowledge] level, learning targets, success criteria, best practices with formative assessment versus summative assessment) were not mentioned by the teachers. Though these were not mentioned, they simply may not have been at the forefront of teachers' minds during the interviews. However, broadly, meeting the needs of students and being student-centered, and specifically PBIS, was a priority for the Q Comp Coordinator and Principal. These priorities were evident in teachers' self-reports but were not conveyed as top-down driven mandates in the interviews. The coherent system of teacher leadership at the elementary seemed to contribute to the culture of support and trust needed to increase the likelihood these priorities were acted upon as and described in the changes teachers made in their classrooms. The Social Studies teacher mentioned breaking down standards as a top-down mandate and labeled it "the worst hour of the week." Other high school teachers mentioned the disconnect between mandated reading and math goals and activities and a variety of curricular areas such as band and art. To answer the third research question, it is evident teachers are passionate about collaborating with each other to address student needs and agree this is the purpose of a system of teacher leadership, and indeed, collaboration resulting in changes in instruction did manifest, but *how* they collaborate and *what* is collaborated on is a point of contention.

### ***Reverse Validation***

Coherence, up to this point, has been examined from a “top-down” linear approach: from philosophy and rationale of a system, role descriptions, role enactments and interactions, to the products from interactions with those roles. The last questions regarding who or what influenced instructional decision making the most were asked to illuminate the role of the administration and teacher leaders in the development of teachers by asking in reverse order what the products of teacher development were (changes in instruction) and who or what influenced teachers most.

When asked who or what influenced instructional decision making the most, aside from the COVID-19 Pandemic, elementary participants stated student needs first, then peers, and administration last. The elementary facilitator stated that administration may dictate non-negotiables such as standards, “but *how* we approach those things and *how* we get there is really driven by what’s happening in our classrooms.”

In the high school the prioritization of influencers was mixed. Three teachers stated that the needs of students influenced their instructional decisions most, while the Social Studies Teacher stated feedback and collaborating with peers was the most influential, and the former Peer Observer prioritized the administration as second over peers. The Mentor found it difficult to prioritize and instead described the relationship between them as equal, stating,

Students are number one, but I can’t meet the student’s needs if I don’t have the support of my teachers...In order for teachers to be successful we need that structure that administration provides, and without that structure and that core we can’t do our jobs.

### **Discussion**

This study demonstrated how a shared vision and shared expectations of a formal system of teacher leadership aligned or misaligned among a principal, teacher leaders, and teachers in

the same system. The coherence of the system affected teachers' abilities to interact with teacher leaders and implement instructional changes in the classroom.

An examination of the results through the lens of role theory revealed the interplay between the coherence of a shared vision or function of the system of teacher leadership and its roles, how those roles are enacted, and how teachers engage with those roles based on the shared vision and expectations of those roles. Regarding the elementary, the function of the system and the expectations of the roles from teachers, principals, and teacher-leaders themselves aligned. Furthermore, the roles were enacted in accordance with those expectations, and teachers reported high levels of engagement and productivity. Role conflict was not mentioned or found during data analysis in the elementary.

Regarding the high school, the function of the system was mostly aligned, save for the additions of unity and ownership. Largely, role ambiguity was evident in the descriptions of the PLC facilitator, resulting in intra-role conflict and varied levels of engagement between the facilitator role and the participants. One account of role conflict was present regarding the peer coach role and had a profound impact on the engagement of the participant with the peer coach. When productivity (changes in teacher practice) was high, collaboration was also high. At the same time, when the group felt more ownership and relevance in the tasks, the teacher leaders were fulfilling the teachers' expectations of promoting collaboration and unity for the benefit of teachers and students, which in turn fulfilled the philosophy and rationale of the system of teacher leadership. Through a lens of role theory that a coherent system, (shared and met expectations of roles), produces more positive engagement between members of the system (less role conflict) and influences productivity (function and purpose of the system). Biddle (1979),

Katz and Kahn (1978) and Turner (2002) forewarned that the implementation of roles may create role conflict as people examine current roles, philosophies, and functions of the role.

The findings from this study are also consistent with the previous teacher leadership literature. Positive outcomes of a system of teacher leadership included increased teacher participation in and ownership of change initiatives which led to a decrease in resistance to change; increased sense of self and collective efficacy; and increased morale and positive culture (Barth, 2001; Fullan, 2008, Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Conditions that were found to support these outcomes were an established culture of trust and collaboration; skilled and supportive teacher leaders who led beside teachers rather than sought power over them; supportive principals; and sufficient time to collaborate (Barth, 1999; Knight, 2018; Senge et al., 2012; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Overall, participants of this study made it clear during their interviews that they value the opportunity to collaborate and learn from colleagues, the increase in collegiality and supportive relationships, and times of productivity. Both the elementary and high school participants reported feeling ownership and positive culture, however, in the high school these seemed to ebb and flow.

Alternatively, according to previous research, negative outcomes of a system of teacher leadership included power struggles and distrust between teacher leaders and administrators, and between teacher leaders and teachers, between teachers and principals, and subsequent confusion regarding improvement initiatives and roles (ASCD, 2014; Bosso, 2017; Kraft et al., 2018; Mangin, 2005; Margolis, 2012). Conditions that were found in prior research that contributed to negative factors were a lack principal support, teacher leader training, and trust; conflicting philosophies and beliefs; lack of communication regarding goals, procedures, and roles; forceful, top-down mandates; egalitarian cultures that stifle growth; and teachers' seniority and autonomy

(Blase, & Blase, 2000; Fullan, 2008; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009; Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015; Liethwood et al., 2007). While none of these conditions were explicitly reported in the elementary, high school participants articulated the need for increased communication, relevance, and ownership of initiatives. The extent of the Principal's, and in this case the Coordinator's, involvement in the collaborative design, implementation, training, and continual guidance had both positive and negative effects on the teacher leadership system. While coherence seemed to have manifested in the elementary, autonomy and ownership seemed to be key issues in the high school impacting the system of teacher leadership.

The difference between the elementary and high school scenarios exemplified research regarding leadership in general. Leadership theorists concluded that the more top-down directives are given, the more push-back will be manifested (Marion & Gonzales, 2013). Instead, as Fullan (2016) stated, leaders need to “use the group to change the group”; invoke moral imperatives; and ignite autonomous motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Additionally, Knowles (1978) insisted that adult education be relevant, practical, and self-driven. Finally, Whitaker and Gruenert (2005) suggested that before any change take hold, the culture of the building must be developed. The strategic advice and findings from the literature state that the more the visions, roles, and initiatives can be developed jointly with stakeholders, the more stakeholders will feel ownership of them, understand them, justify them to others, and see they succeed.

Participants in the high school reported both ownership and a lack of ownership in their professional development: Teachers had input into the direction of the PLC, igniting autonomous motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000), yet there were still directives that did not seem relevant or practical to all members (Knowles, 1978). A facet of the Q Comp system was to garner more involvement from teachers, creating an element of teacher-led decisions in union with the



administration, not to the exclusion of administration. In regard to the issues of shared ownership, the PLC Facilitator role was cast into a dichotomous situation or inherent role conflict (Biddle, 1979). As a result, the high school participants reported that productivity varied.

The culture of the high school seemed to be one dedicated to students but steeped in teacher ownership of how best to meet students' needs. Ownership and unity could be traced to the highest level of abstraction, teachers' philosophies a system of teacher leadership. It may be that the shared vision of the system of teacher leadership, roles of all members in the system, not just the facilitator, needed to be revisited to understand these dynamics.

### **Limitations**

Indicative of a qualitative case study, the generalizability of this study was bounded by the context of the participants and data gathered (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This case study was to serve as an instrumental case study in which a real-world bounded case was selected to illustrate an issue or concern, in this case the coherence of system of teacher leadership upon teachers' instruction (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 98) with these particular participants in this particular school. Other settings and participants may produce different results.

Interviewing the current or past PLC Facilitator in the high school (or both) may have added more clarity and a deeper understanding of social and psychological dynamics of the PLC, allowing the researcher to construct a more complete reality. However, the reports from the participants seemed to align regarding the successes and struggles of the PLC and understanding of the role of the facilitator.

### **Implications**

The importance of shared decision making and visioning using dialogue and shared leadership, as opposed to debate and mandate cannot be overstated (Fullan, 2016, 2018; Knight,

2018; Scott, 2002; Senge, 2006, Senge et al., 2012). This study did not examine how the district initiatives were decided upon, but did examine how the system of teacher leadership, upon which those initiatives were placed, functioned. Shared ownership and relevance were key issues.

This study exemplifies the need for differentiated professional development. The idea of differentiation may be a shift in mental models of professional development, but may create relevance, ownership, and growth, innovation, risk taking, and team building for teachers (Coquyt, 2019, p. xi; Fullan, 2016; Harris & Spillane, 2008; Leithwood et al., 2007; Senge, 2006). Coherence is not a place of arrival, but a continual process impacted by systemic learning, shifting needs, and entrance or exodus of professionals (Biddle, 1979; Fullan, 2016; Senge, 2006). Continual training for principals, teacher leaders, and staff is necessary to maintain growth. Leaders cannot assume that teacher leaders and teachers know how to work with each other; understand, plan for, and assess change; or deal with conflict (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009, Cooper et al., 2016, p. 89; Dozier, 2007). Utilizing frameworks such as the Teacher Leader Model Standards may help create common language, vision, and discussion points as all three groups (administration, teacher leaders, and teachers) reflect upon their system of teacher leadership (Coquyt, 2019; Coquyt & Creasman, 2017). Furthermore, referring to shared expectations, trainings, and a common framework may help teacher leaders advocate for their own positions and maintain relationships (Reay et al., 2006; Struyve et al., 2014).

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

This study added to the knowledge base of educational leadership as it filled gaps in the literature. Previous research focused on the voice of the administrator or the teacher leaders themselves, however the voices of the teachers were amplified in this study. Furthermore, to achieve coherence of a system, all relevant voices must be considered. This study included the

perspectives of the principal, teacher leaders, and teachers as well as the coordinator and sought alignment among them as an indicator of coherence. Additionally, this study added to the knowledge base of how teacher leadership functioned in a small, rural school as opposed to urban or suburban schools.

This study used the researcher and interviews as the main instruments for collecting data. Other methods of data collection may be used in future studies such as participant journals or observations. Participants could be asked to keep journals to reflect upon their PLC meetings and peer coaching meetings, summarize those encounters, record anything they did or did not implement in their instruction, and reflect upon why it was or was not implemented. Reflection data would then be collected closer to the actual events and enhance the connection between engagement with teacher leaders and changes in practice. On-site visits to attend PLC meetings, observe peer coaching meetings, or trainings may add another dimension of triangulation to the study. Furthermore in-person observations allow a research to record such dimensions as body language, tone of voice, topics of discussion, and participation patterns that may add to the evidence of culture and engagement (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Future studies may include more participants in order to investigate the depth and breadth of coherence. The rural school in this study was small and reports of the teacher leadership situation in both the elementary and high school aligned between participants. Similarly, a cross-case study may be conducted in which the coherence of similar formal teacher leadership systems from more than one school may be compared across multiple dimensions. Studies such as this must continue in order to intentionally examine these adult behaviors and skills, and the system itself, before meaningful child outcomes will be realized (Kauerz & Coffman, 2013).

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