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## THE IMPACT OF TEACHER LEADERSHIP IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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THE IMPACT OF TEACHER LEADERSHIP IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

by

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A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of  
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

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### **Dedication**

This dissertation is dedicated to my family. First, my wife, Jordaan, along with our kids, Hadley and Brayden. You have endured countless hours without me, while I researched and wrote. I cannot thank you enough for the love, support, encouragement... and at times a needed kick, to get me to this stage. I would not be here without your compassion, trust, and love.

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**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

Dedication .....	v
Acknowledgements .....	vi
Table of Contents .....	vii
List of Figures .....	ix
List of Tables .....	ix
Abstract .....	x
<b>Chapter 1: Introduction</b>	
Background of the Study .....	1
Statement of the Problem .....	3
Purpose and Significance of the Study .....	7
Research Design .....	9
Research Questions .....	11
Assumptions .....	12
Delimitations .....	12
Definition of Terms .....	13
Summary .....	13
<b>Chapter 2: Literature Review</b>	
Introduction .....	15
Methods of Searching .....	18
Theoretical Orientation for the Study .....	19
Conceptual Framework .....	19
Review of Literature .....	21
Teacher Leadership- History .....	22
Defining Teacher Leadership .....	23
Distributed Leadership .....	24
Teacher Leadership Roles .....	25
Climate and Culture .....	30
Communication and Feedback .....	34
Synthesis of the Review of Research .....	36
Critique of Previous Research Methods .....	38
Summary .....	39
<b>Chapter 3: Methodology</b>	
Introduction .....	40
Purpose of the Study .....	41
Research Design .....	44
Research Questions .....	44
Design Framework .....	44
Procedures .....	45
Participant Selection .....	45
Protection of Participants .....	46
Expert Review .....	47



Data Collection .....47  
 Data Analysis .....48  
 Instruments.....50  
     Role of the Researcher .....50  
 Ethical Considerations .....51  
 Summary .....51

**Chapter 4: Findings**

Introduction.....53  
 Researcher’s Role .....53  
 Description of Sample.....56  
 Research Methodology Applied to the Data Analysis .....57  
 Presentation of Data and Results of the Analysis .....60  
     Research Question 1 .....61  
         Inclusion.....63  
             Unity .....63  
             Collaboration.....64  
             Growth .....64  
             Summary .....65  
         Differentiated Leadership .....66  
             Strength .....67  
             Ownership .....68  
             Mindset .....68  
             Summary .....68  
     Research Question 2 .....71  
         Empowerment .....71  
             Support.....72  
             Ability .....72  
             Confidence .....73  
             Summary .....73  
 Synthesis .....75  
 Summary .....77

**Chapter 5: Discussion, Implications, and Conclusion**

Introduction .....79  
 Summary of Results.....79  
 Discussion of the Results .....85  
 Conclusions Based on the Results .....88  
 Comparison of the Findings with the Framework and Previous Literature.....92  
     Differentiated leadership: strength, ownership, mindset .....89  
     Inclusion: unity, collaboration, growth .....89  
     Empowerment: support, ability, confidence .....90  
 Interpretation of the Findings.....93  
 Limitations .....98  
 Delimitations.....100  
 Implications of the Study .....101

Recommendations for Future Research .....	104
Conclusion .....	105
Summary .....	105
Research Questions .....	106
Researcher's Reflection .....	109
References .....	110
Appendix A: Interview Questions .....	116

### **List of Figures**

Figure 1: <i>Teacher Leadership Four-Factor Model</i> .....	19
Figure 2: <i>Comparison: Angelle &amp; DeHart, Cheung, et al, and Sinha &amp; Hanuscin</i> .....	27
Figure 3: <i>Four-Factor Model and Teacher Leader Model Standards</i> .....	29
Figure 4: <i>Four-Factor Model and Domain III of Teacher Leader Model Standards</i> .....	29
Figure 5: <i>Moustakas Transcendental Phenomenological Approach</i> .....	60
Figure 6: <i>Themes, TLMS, Four-Factor Model</i> .....	83

### **List of Tables**

Table 1: <i>Description of Sample</i> .....	57
Table 2: <i>Participant Responses: Inclusion</i> .....	62
Table 3: <i>Participant Responses: Differentiated Leadership</i> .....	67
Table 4: <i>Participant Responses: Empowerment</i> .....	71

## ABSTRACT

The system of education in the United States needs support. Schools are at a constant struggle to maintain a positive climate and culture and retain quality educators. We now live in a world where the grades and performance measures are highly scrutinized. Schools are measured against each other and society wants to see outstanding achievement data from their school systems.

Working within Moustakas's phenomenological approach, this qualitative phenomenological study will investigate the extent to which teacher leadership advances school climate and culture. The study will be conducted in four public schools in North Dakota: Two that have teacher leadership models in place, and two that do not. The study will encompass interviews with teachers at each school. It is my hope that by understanding the influences that teacher leadership has on an organization that an argument can be made to institute teacher leadership structures and best practices into the field of education.

## CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

The system of education in the United States is in need of support. Schools are at a constant struggle to maintain a positive climate and culture and retain quality educators. We now live in a world where the grades and performance measures are highly scrutinized by the media, society, and all level of government. Schools are measured against each other and society wants to see outstanding achievement data from their school systems. This high-stakes climate is too much for administration alone to address. Effective teachers and quality school staff are crucially important to the success of a school. We are also in a time where communication and feedback can be difficult. Effective feedback to staff and teachers is a constantly moving target that has been overhauled and reworked to emphasize growth models in recent times. Many groups assessing a variety of areas judge schools: competition, student testing data, feedback, communications, positive climate/culture, and retention of teacher to name a few. To pull these measures closer together, my research will focus on teacher leadership as a possible solution to stem the tide and assist with these issues. My goal is to study teacher leadership and its impact on climate and culture and feedback processes. It is my hope that by understanding the influences that teacher leadership has on an organization that an argument can be made to institute teacher leadership structures as best practices into the field of education.

School systems have key components that can work in their favor if they are willing to break traditional molds. In a conventional model, administration spends most of their time in their offices working to stay in front of high-level challenges to operations, working on things like budgets, discipline, staffing, and scheduling. Teachers spend their time in front of students teaching their content and working through their classroom curriculum. This

traditional model can lead to a disconnected decision-making and change making process. Administrators, working under this model, make decisions without a true understanding of the impacts on teachers and students. This inherently leads to a more negative climate and culture, dissatisfied teachers, and an underperforming school system. The feedback process in such a model becomes more adversarial versus a growth-centered method.

According to York-Barr and Duke (2004), “Teachers are assuming more leadership functions at both instructional and organizational levels of practice” (p.255). Teachers are eager to have more leverage and have a greater influence on the direction and success of the institutions they work in. Lambert (2007) offers a continuation of this theme, noting, “Leading is a shared endeavor, the foundation for the democratization of schools. School change is a collective endeavor; therefore, people do this most effectively in the presence of others” (p.312).

An underlying reason for my selection of this dissertation topic is my interest in educational reform. Anecdotally, I see daily, that what we are doing in the education system of the United States is not working to an optimal level. We are not reaching every student. We are not retaining teachers. Climate and culture is a concern for every school district in their aspirations to provide high-quality educational experiences and retain great teachers.

I recently took part in a multi-district teacher leadership academy with two other area schools and North Dakota State University. As I was exposed to the concept of teacher leadership firsthand, I came to believe that the implementation of teacher leadership models could become the vehicle for change that I believe is needed in education to begin moving down a successful path. My own perceptions led me to believe that teacher leadership could be a positive change agent for school systems. What about the experiences of others? My

research aims to ascertain the experiences of others that have implemented teacher leadership models. Morrison (2014) declares, “The world of the educational researcher is different from the world of the natural science researcher – all educational research needs to be grounded in people’s experience.” (2014, p. 20).

Teacher leadership is a relatively recent movement and the literature on the topic is not expansive. However, the literature does point to several benefits of teacher leadership: improved climate and culture, teacher retention, and boosts in academic performance, for instance (Dinham, 2007; Pas, et. al, 2011; Pressley, 2017). That said, it is difficult to say definitively that teacher leadership is the remedy to each effect. What we can ascertain is that the presence of some type of teacher leadership construct is noted in much of the literature as well as the positive impact on the school district that is employing the approach.

My interest in teacher leadership is somewhat selfish. It is my belief that the way we are currently doing the work of educating the next generation is not sufficient to meet the needs of our changing world. By furthering the study of teacher leadership, it is my belief that it can be a part of the educational movement needed to rejuvenate our educational system. I do not contend that teacher leadership itself can solve all the problems within education. I do believe that the mindset that accompanies teacher leadership is one that will foster growth and necessary change.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Teacher leadership opens up additional possibilities for school districts to solve problems. At the very least, teacher leadership brings additional voices into the discussion around an issue and to the decision-making table. Infusing the teacher voice into the decisions making process leads to a higher likelihood of a quality path that staff will support (Paterson & Conway 2011). The purpose of my research is to build support for schools who

have an interest in implementing a teacher leadership construct into their daily operations. There is not a singular definition for what a teacher leader does. “Teacher leadership is unique to each school and district” (Coquyt & Creasman, 2017, p.3). While not identical, there is congruence in the literature that suggests commonalities in how school districts implement teacher leadership models. Many teacher leaders are given mentor roles, assist with communication tasks, and lead grade level or content-based teams and committees. Cheung et al., (2018) developed a teacher leadership profile for science teachers with four components: collaborating, advocating, modeling, and providing. The resulting science teacher leadership profile encompassed the crucial elements to what it means to be a teacher leader. “Science teacher leaders are classroom teachers who also serve as instructional leaders by modeling effective science instruction, collaborating with others to improve science instruction, providing resources for effective science instruction, and advocating in service of effective science instruction” (Chung et al., 2018, p.41). As Leithwood (2008) indicates, there is a wealth of literature and research to support the claim that schools should start looking to this teacher leadership model to improve their systems. There are significant benefits for schools, in both the short-term and the long-term. One of the many long-term benefits of implementing a teacher leadership construct is that it creates a shared vision and goals for those involved. This may increase job satisfaction for teachers in the short term and boost teacher retention in the long term as an impact of a more collaborative and positive culture and climate. The research needs to connect some of the short-term goals that are present in schools with the long-range plans. I hypothesize that a carefully constructed teacher leadership model can help school organizations in finding solutions in both the short-

term and the long-term. I believe that educational leadership, as it currently exists can, and should, change. Leithwood (2008) notes,

To suggest that we have a reasonable chance of predicting successful future (next) leadership practices and arming future leaders with them depends on a series of five interdependent assumptions. Each one of these assumptions is highly suspect in its own right. To imagine they will all be correct stretches credulity miles beyond the breaking point. Try them on for size: 1. We can predict, with some accuracy, the nature of our future schools; 2. Those future schools will be substantially, if not dramatically, different from current schools; 3. Something about the nature of those future, different, schools will demand successful leadership practices different from those of our current schools; 4. We can identify now who will provide leadership in those future schools; 5. We can figure out what those different practices are with enough certainty to justify spending today's resources on providing future leaders with the capacities they need to enact those "next" successful leadership practices (Leithwood, 2008, p. 76).

Leithwood (2008) also proposes that schools will be dramatically different in the future. We need them to be. By using teacher leadership as an example and as a guide, we can create schools that work better, not only for the students and communities they serve, but also for the administrators and teachers that work within them. Struyve, Meredith, and Gielen (2014) examined how teacher leadership structures impact the dynamics of a school system. Their findings indicate that implementing a teacher leadership structure does add some stress to the interpersonal relationships of staff members, it does also foster growth and change.



Sir Ken Robinson has devoted much of his life to the study of education. He is also an advocate for educational change. Robinson and Aronica (2016) state, “The fact is that our children and our communities need a different sort of education” (p. 25). Robinson advocates to a back-to-basics approach in which we stop worrying about what education is and start asking what we want education to be. “We need a radical change in how we think about and do school – a shift from the old industrial model to one based on entirely different principles and practices” (Robinson & Aronica, 2016, p. 25).

Teacher leadership occurs, to a varying degree, in nearly all schools across the United States and the world. Only small slivers of these schools are intentionally using a prescribed structure of teacher leadership. Without formal structures, teachers that are embodying the characteristics of teacher leaders are not identifying themselves as teacher leaders (Sinha & Hanuscin (2017). The construct of teacher leadership is the pillar we must develop and build upon. Education units must lay out a formal plan on how to foster and build teacher leadership to take full advantage of the benefits.

The current research on teacher leadership points to positive implications on the implementation on the usage of a defined approach to teacher leadership. My intention is to discern the benefits that teacher leadership has on climate and culture. It should be acknowledged that there is some hesitancy toward the implementation of teacher leadership, viewing it as another fad in education (Corrigan, 2013). Teacher leadership runs contrary to the norms of how school systems of operated in the past. Further, on the surface, some would claim that employing a new form of leadership structure would result in some consternation amongst the staff (Cheung, et.al., 2018). In a traditional structure of education, the administration makes suggestions for implementing new goals and objectives, and how to

attain them. In a structure that embraces teacher leadership, those lines are blurred, and initiatives and practices get rolled out in a more collaborative fashion. This shift is difficult for many teachers that are more accustomed to a traditional, bureaucratic model. I contend that continuing with conventional leadership structures, because it is familiar and comfortable, is archaic.

There is a multitude of studies pointing to the shortcomings of our current educational system (Dinham, 2007). Dinham (2007) expands upon Leadership, teaching and student outcomes; Underestimating educational leadership; and Secondary teaching success as three of these areas. The theoretical implications of my study may lead toward more schools implementing teacher leadership. I hope to show that institutions with embedded teacher leadership practices within their systems will have a more positive climate and culture than schools that do not practice teacher leadership.

The phenomenon of teacher leadership is new in the realm of educational research and study. While these studies are becoming more prevalent, it is my belief that those studies alone will not lead to a vast increase in the implementation of teacher leadership models. My study aims to show the benefits of teacher leadership. By showing the current benefits, even with a relatively small sample of research, I trust that the benefits will outweigh the concerns and hesitations toward implementation. Once that argument is settled the path is paved toward further implementation by school districts.

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

The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of teacher leadership on climate and culture of school systems. "School culture is widely recognized as a dominant influence on the success of improvement initiative in schools" (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). The emergence of millennials into the workplace have changed the dynamics. School systems are

staffed by a different type of workforce and serving a student population far different than in the past. Our current student population is vastly different than those that have been served in the past (Levine & Au, 2013). Schools have an increasing number of students that have experienced trauma in their lives and are seeking the support and emotional stability of an adult. For many students, that support is not coming from home, it's coming from teachers (Vollmer, 2010). We must be cognizant of climate and culture or be willing to live with some harsh reality. I agree with Pas et al., (2012) that teachers are not staying the field as long as they once did. "Teachers reporting high levels of burnout are often less tolerant of student conduct, which may contribute to problematic student behavior through teachers; inability to mediate and calmly pacify potentially volatile situations" (Pas et al, 2012, p.130). The challenging kids that we are dealing with today will still be back in school tomorrow. Teacher leadership is a way that we can better support teachers by bringing the teacher voice into decision making. Teachers are the ones that are building the trusting and meaningful relationships with the student population. Supporting teachers through building positive climates, cultures, and effective use of feedback is supporting students.

There are notable educational ramifications of this study aside from the example stated above. The impact of teacher leadership does not stop at the 3:30 dismissal bell or at the school walls. Teacher leadership is accompanied by a transformative thought process that will have an impact on the community the school serves along with the strategies followed by the students served within the school. Teacher leadership is foremost about trust, accountability, collaboration, and growth (Coquyt & Creasman, 2017; Detert, Schroeder, & Mauriel, 2000). Teacher leadership is a challenge to the status quo of education (York-Barr

& Duke, 2004). I believe that is a necessary and a desired outcome in the United States right now.

Employers are frustrated that the upcoming workforce struggles to communicate, take feedback, and lead (Cheung, et al., 2018). Where would they have learned such things? The truth is, we are not teaching it or modeling it. “Culture trumps strategy every day of the week. As culture of teacher leadership grows, the school culture improves” (Coquyt & Creasman, 2017, p. 2). Some people may have learned the importance of effective communication when they were younger. They were likely taught by their family and community just how to communicate and what actions and conduct was appropriate at a given time. Nevertheless, that is not true today (Vollmer, 2010). The family dynamics in our country have shifted greatly. The same is true of our concept of community. If we want something different and better for the students that are headed out into the workforce, we need to start to teach and model the behaviors and skills necessary for them to succeed.

Teacher leadership can possibly be a conduit for that process. Students should be able to see their teachers taking on leadership roles and working with the effective communication to grow and improve Teachers are models in various ways. Promoting a positive climate and culture through the means of effective communication strategies is imperative for the teacher leader. Teacher leadership lends itself to this type of approach. Teacher leadership as the potential to vastly improve the workforce skills of the students we are teaching.

### **Research Design**

Working within Moustakas’s (1994) phenomenological approach, this qualitative study will investigate the extent to which teacher leadership advances school climate and culture. The subjects were not randomly assigned, as a participation in the teacher leadership academy was necessary. “The main purposes of phenomenological research are to seek

reality from individuals' narratives of their experiences and feelings, and to produce in-depth descriptions of the phenomenon" (Yuksel & Yilirim, 2015, p.1). The study will be conducted by interviewing teachers in five public schools in North Dakota. All five schools will have been a part of the Teacher Leadership Academy through North Dakota State University. The aim of this study is to understand what teacher leadership means to those that work in a school with a formalized system of teacher leadership in place. What are their thought and feelings about teacher leadership? How do they feel that teacher leadership has changed them as an educator? What has it done for their school system? How is the climate and culture of their district now compared to before teacher leadership was present? Has there been any noticeable change in communication and feedback processes? How has teacher leadership helped move the district forward? My involvement with the first rural cohort of the Teacher Leadership Academy through North Dakota State University helped inform my focus on teacher leadership around culture and climate along with effective communication relating to feedback. Gondor and Hymes (1994) define climate as "the atmosphere in a school" (p.13). Climate is developed over time and is characterized as positive when individuals feel their contributions are valued and contributing to success. Culture is defined by shared group perceptions about the way things are done. How day-to-day decisions are made, and operations are performed (Gondor & Hymes, 1994). Feedback for school staff is the backbone of what drives an organization forward. People need to know and be taught what quality performance is and is not (Scott, K.M., 2017; Scott, S. 2017). That feedback can also place a strain on relationships and impact the climate and culture of a system. As Ryan (1999) states, teacher leaders "were available to their colleagues as a

resource in such area as instructional practice, assistance in dealing with difficult students, helping to plan new programmes and even offering advice on personal matters” (p.26).

Effectively communicating feedback is something that is at the core of successful businesses and systems. My path to this layer of this research study was also informed by my work with the rural cohort of the Teacher Leadership Academy. As a starting point, my perceptions about shared vision and decision making were focused through the lens of effective feedback. Anecdotally, I found that when administration or the school board made a decision, the general attitude of the teaching staff was negative and that something was being thrust upon them, even when well-intentioned. As I worked more closely with our TLA and other groups of teachers the perception was different. As a feedback metric, I received more communication of buy-in and could immediately focus on how to best implement a process rather than explaining why we were going to implement a process. This feedback was more effective because it helped drive the organization forward around a common vision. Goddard et. al (2015) agrees. Efficacy beliefs influence the degree of persistence and creativity with which individuals and groups approach prospective tasks” (Goddard et. al, 2015, p.507)

This study is built around exploring the feelings and perceptions of the participants. “Phenomenological research studies in educational settings generally embody lived experience, perception, and feelings of the participants about the phenomenon” (Yuksel & Yilirim, 2015, p.1). It is my hope that by understanding the influences that teacher leadership has on an organization that an argument can be made to institute teacher leadership structures as best practices into the field of education.

### **Research Questions**

Questions and areas of interest within my research are:

1. What is the impact of teacher leadership practices on culture and climate within

public schools?

- a. To what extent does teacher leadership impact the communication and feedback perceptions of teachers within teacher leadership structures?

### **Assumptions**

One methodological assumption inherent in this qualitative research involves the use of interviews to gather information from school staff. That is, the study assumes that the faculty are telling the truth and expressing reality as they perceive it. From an ontological perspective this study assumes that one person's reality, as demonstrated through their interview responses may be independent, socially constructed, or different from another person's reality. From an epistemological perspective, the study assumes the interviewer and interviewee mutually influence each other in their conversations. This may be further convoluted by the assumption that teacher leaders that are part of an established program will likely make claims that positively depict teacher leadership. This is not to say the participants will lie. Simply, that they might have a tendency to support the endeavor of teacher leadership.

Another set of assumptions concern my values as they pertain to the research topic. My interest in teacher leadership is a driving force behind this study. I hold the belief that teacher leadership is a key force to driving needed educational reform. I assert that the teacher leadership model, can lend itself toward needed changes in the culture and climate of schools.

### **Delimitations**

Delimitations for the research study were established prior to research study implementation. These delimitations include:

1. The study is delimited to four public school districts in North Dakota.

2. The study focuses only on a relatively small group of teacher leaders.
3. The participants included in the study are volunteers.

### **Definition of Terms**

The term *teacher leadership* is used to describe an array of practices. There is no agreed upon definition. Teacher leadership will look a bit different in each school, depending on the needs of that school. Creasman and Coquyt (2017) assert, “Teacher leadership is unique in each school and district” (p.3). The literature agrees with this notion. An overarching definition of teacher leadership is as, “agents of instructional change in their schools” (Cheung, Reinhardt, Stone, & Little, 2018, p.44). York-Barr and Duke (2004) connect the element of culture, stating that teacher leaders, “highlight the use of teachers’ expertise about teaching and learning to improve the culture and instruction in schools such that student learning is enhanced.

Gonder and Hymes (1994) define both climate and culture. They define climate as “a term that refers to that atmosphere in a school” (Gonder & Hymes, p.13). Additionally, they define culture as, “...the way they make decisions and conduct day-to-day operations” (Gonder & Hymes, p.15) In other words, climate is what you do, culture is how you do it.

### **Summary**

Chapter One provides the reader with a brief historical background of teacher leadership and its impact on climate and culture. DeHart’s (2011) four-factor model of teacher leadership acts as the theoretical framework that supports the study and are described along with identification of the research study and participants. The remaining content of the dissertation is followed by Chapter Two, the Literature Review, which provides greater detail and understandings from current scholarly literature on concepts teacher leadership, climate



and culture, as well as the impact of feedback in organizations that are utilizing teacher leadership.

The process for conducting this qualitative phenomenological study is described in Chapter Three, Research Method, and includes interviews of teachers that work in districts that have established teacher leadership structures, and interviews teachers employed by districts with no formal teacher leadership structures in place. Chapter Four highlights the findings of the study and Chapter Five summarizes the research process, conclusions, and recommendations. A bibliography and appendix are included at the end of the study.

## CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### Introduction

This literature review explores the model of teacher leadership in public schools. Generally, the concepts explored outline the major concepts related to teacher leadership structures. More specifically, the review begins with a historical background of teacher leadership and follows the phenomenon to why teacher leadership is implemented in school systems today. The targets, effects, and more specifically the impacts of teacher leadership on climate and culture, as well as communication and feedback will be explored at length.

While there are many benefits to teacher leadership, there are also points to consider. A district that chooses to embark on the journey of teacher leadership must be intentional about climate and culture. The practice of bringing teacher leaders into decision-making conversations that used to be done solely by administrators could have a negative impact on your culture if you do not proceed with transparency. Before you embrace teacher leadership as a practical option for your district, ensure that your administrative team has the trust of the staff. By starting with trust and emphasizing culture you can rollout teacher leadership in a way that is a benefit to your school system and community.

One major benefit of teacher leadership is the practice of having teacher voices in the decision-making process. This practice keeps the district on a course that is representative of what is best for teachers and students. One drawback of a hierarchal leadership model is that the administrators that are making the decision are two or three steps removed from the people that their decisions impact. Namely, teachers and students. By allowing teacher leaders a voice in decisions you can keep your decision-making process receptive and make fully informed decisions.

The climate and culture impacts of teacher leadership are numerous. Teacher leadership addresses several burnout factors and keeps teachers engaged in the process of leading the district or school. The communication and feedback process that are copious within teacher leadership models are, in my opinion, the Rosetta Stone in education. We need to be able to work toward a process that is best for kids. That might mean that the practices of some teachers need to be adjusted and growth needs to occur. This does not need to be a combative process. It can be a process of grace, coaching, and empathy built around a common set of values. Teacher leadership gives school systems the common language to develop these values.

The concept of teacher leadership is relatively new to the world of education (York-Barr & Duke, 2004; Thorton, 2010; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2016). There are several contributing factors that has the education world looking for answers. These include, but are not limited to teacher burnout, fewer people enrolling in teaching programs at the university level, millennials, and teacher and administrator shortages (Pucella, 2011). Teacher leadership systems can create a more positive climate and culture of the school system. When people feel they are significant and are making a difference they work hard and stay positive (Struyve et. al, 2014; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2016). There are several structures that are all leading toward some type of change. School systems simply cannot continue to function at the rates we are seeing educators leave the education field. Those who are getting their teaching credentials are leaving the field at higher levels than in the past (Pucella, 2011). A teacher leadership program can give teacher the sense of trust and empowerment that people/teachers desire and possibly convince them to stay in the profession.

There is a need to get people into the education system and find ways to help them along and stick with education. Many will point to the low salary and deficient benefit packages of those in the education field and say that those low numbers are a main reason that people are not starting and sticking with education (Pucella, 2011). That is most certainly a contributing factor. It is also something that we, meaning my fellow school administrators, have little to no control over. That begs our question: What do we do about it? There is a growing shift across schools that suggest that teacher leadership can be a catalyst to address the needs of American teachers.

The literature does not agree on the significance of teacher leadership. Angelle (2010) argues that in the complexity of today's school systems one leader cannot meet all the needs. Pucella (2011) contends that teacher burnout levels drop in institutions that foster teacher leadership. Kaine and Westheimer (2000), along with Levine and Au (2013), agree that there are shifts underway to the fundamental structure of education and that a teacher leadership model will foster more cohesive growth and change. Schrum and Levin (2013) point to the significance of increased student achievement.

Climate and culture within schools is introduced as a theme related to teacher leadership. Climate and culture are defined and illustrated within a context of their own. Climate and culture are later examined as an effect of teacher leadership structures as the impact of teacher leadership on climate and culture are examined. Consideration is given to both teacher leadership goals and the existing climate and culture of a school system.

Finally, the literature review scrutinizes communication and feedback methodology. Feedback systems are described as to their general goals as well as their effectiveness in

systems practicing teacher leadership. Feedback cycles also have an impact on climate and culture, which is briefly explored.

The organization of this literature review is intended to introduce broad concepts and narrow the focus of substance over the breadth of the materials examined. The literature review investigates the implementation of teacher leadership as it relates to climate and culture, as well as communication and feedback processes in public schools.

### **Methods of Searching**

Most of the research on this topic was performed from the many databases from the Livingston Lord library at Minnesota State University, Moorhead. A majority of research articles were found by searching within Ebsco and JSTOR. These databases are user friendly and offer the ability to save articles to printer friendly versions quickly. The ability to easily save articles for later review is essential. These databases are simple and intuitive to navigate. The initial quality of searches was sufficient. There was little need to use other databases.

My search parameter was usually “teacher leadership.” I did search separately at times “teacher AND leadership”. I adjusted these a few times as I got further into the process. As I found more sources, I began to accumulate a good deal of information on distributed leadership and quasi-related leadership topics. I did the same for “climate and culture” or “climate AND culture”. Most of my searchers were from 2000 to present. I also did a historical search, looking for definitions and original theory related to teacher leadership, where I used 1980 as the beginning date.

A large portion of my literature came from peer reviewed articles. The pieces that aren't articles are from books I've used as a Superintendent and educator. I did not do any keyword searches or use similar techniques to pull in the books as resources. These were simply things that I had previously read that had some alignment, or incongruence, with the

themes of my research. I did use books authored by Dr. Michael Coquyt in my research. I had not read Dr. Coquyt's books before beginning this study. Dr. Coquyt's writings are some of the most recent on the topic of teacher leadership. Using his writings helped to align my study within the field of teacher leadership and align my research to past findings and future examination.

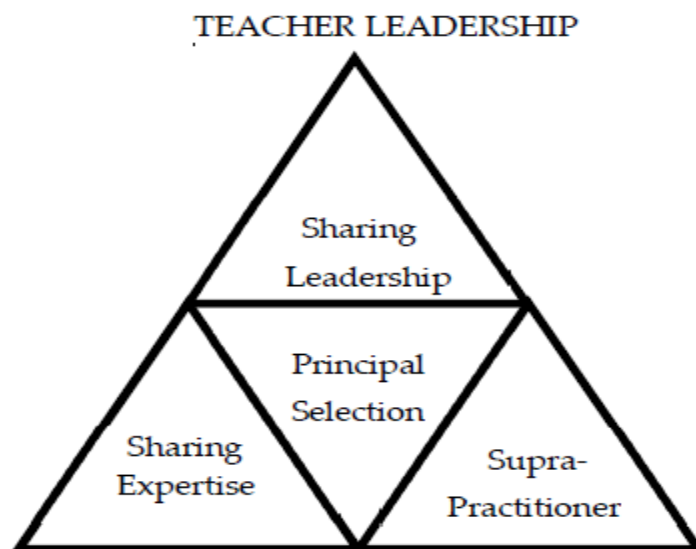
### Theoretical Orientation

#### Conceptual Framework

Currently, there is no theoretical framework found within the review of literature to aid in the research for this study. The four-factor model of teacher leadership structure established by Angelle and Dehart (2016) served as a conceptual framework for this study. The four-factor model of teacher leadership is depicted in Figure 1.

**Figure 1**

#### *Teacher Leadership: Four-Factor Model*



Dehart explains in his 2011 dissertation.

The first factor, Sharing Expertise (SE), focuses on the perceptions of teachers' pedagogical and classroom management skills as well as their willingness to share those skills with their fellow teachers. The second factor, Sharing Leadership (SL), describes a reciprocal relationship existing between the principal and the teachers in a school. This factor is composed of two sub-factors: Leadership Opportunities (SLO) and Leadership Engagement (SLE). The first sub-factor depends upon a principal's attitude toward offering opportunities for teachers to engage in leadership practices, while the second sub-factor reflects teachers' inclination to take on leadership responsibilities. The perceptions of teachers' willingness to go above and beyond their prescribed roles are indicated by the third factor, Supra-Practitioner (SP). The final factor, Principal Selection (PS), measures the teachers' perceptions that the principal controls which teachers may participate in leadership activities (DeHart, p.11, 2011).

This framework aligns itself to examine and compare models of teacher leadership. Because there is no unilateral definition of teacher leadership, it become necessary to break down teacher leadership into common themes and analyze each through a specific lens. Through these four frames, all teacher leadership methods and systems can be reviewed. In the Sharing Expertise area, one can learn how much teacher leaders are willing and allowed to share their instructional skills, along with what systems are in place for this professional learning to take place. In the Sharing Leadership quadrant, one learns the depth of the relationship of teacher leaders with administration. Again, structure is a component of this area. The Supra-Practitioner area judges the levels to which teachers go above and beyond

prescribed roles. Principal Selection is crucial, in that principals are the gatekeepers, in most districts, to teacher leadership roles and responsibilities. Having the right person in a principal role is crucial to the success of a teacher leadership model.

### **Review of Literature**

While teacher leadership is a relatively new trend in the world of education, there is a depth of research surrounding the components that are present within high-quality teacher leadership models. There are several strategies that are all leading toward some type of change. School systems simply cannot continue to function at the burnout rates we are seeing, or not seeing rather, people enter the field of education. Those who are getting their teaching credentials are leaving the field at higher levels than in the past. This literature review is designed to initially give the 30,000-foot view of teacher leadership, the history of teacher leadership, and associated themes such as distributed leadership and shared leadership. The key to this research is learning how teacher leadership affects the climate and culture of a school system. As such, climate and culture are also themes that this literature review is intended to address. Finally, the narrowest focus of my research will be brought into the light: The connection of teacher leadership with feedback and communication.

The goal in this outline is to build one concept to the next to show the connection points along the path to high quality and sustainable teacher leadership methods. Of course, any of these pieces can be present without the others. Having a teacher leadership structure in place does not guarantee a positive climate and culture. There is, however, a stronger likelihood of creating a positive climate and culture if you have a leadership model that is responsive to teachers. This outline is designed to display the best practices in constructing a quality teacher leadership model.



The intent of studying teacher leadership was a quest to determine some best practices in how to make school systems function more effectively for staff and students. The components of climate, culture, and feedback are all essential to the performance of any system and are prominently displayed through teacher leadership structures. The four-factor model studied by Angelle and DeHart (2010) connects the background of teacher leadership structures: sharing leadership, sharing expertise, principal selection, and supra-practitioner to the major elements of this research study. Effectively, teacher leadership improves the climate and culture of a system through teacher voice and shared visioning. Further, effective feedback builds off the elements of trust and unified goal setting to further enhance and sustain a positive climate and culture within the system (Angelle & DeHart, (2016); DeHart, 2011).

### **Teacher Leadership- History**

Teacher leadership is a relatively new concept in education. More clearly, teacher leadership as a defined practice is relatively new. The fundamental human desire of some people to take on additional responsibility isn't new or confined to education. As York-Barr and Duke (2004) describe, "Specifically, the concept of teacher leadership suggests that teachers rightly and importantly hold a central position in the ways schools operate and in the core functions of teaching and learning" (p.255).

Jennifer York-Barr and Karen Duke have conducted the most influential research on teacher leadership. In their work they illustrate a historical perspective of teacher leadership that stems back to education reform initiatives from the 1980's. Beginning in the 1980's, Teachers were given additional professional responsibilities in an attempt to raise the status of the profession and recruit more potential teachers into the workforce. Elmore (1990)

furthered the notion by asserting that teachers had a pivotal role in the progression of education.

The more recent works on teacher leadership focus more on actions, growth, and development. Coquyt and Creasman (2017) emphasize the importance of the intentionality and process in developing teacher leaders, stating, “growing teacher leaders is not a destination, but a journey” (p.117). Sinha and Hanuscin (2017) agree that the process to develop teacher leaders is crucially important. “We suggest that the process of teacher leadership development can be characterized as a synergistic interplay of an individual’s views of leadership, engagement in leadership practices and identity development” (p. 368).

### **Defining Teacher Leadership**

There are many accepted definitions for teacher leadership. There is a difference of opinion, if not confusion, as to what constitutes teacher leadership. Teacher leadership as a construct is just beginning to emerge. As Kahne and Westheimer (2002) put it, “Teachers must be prepared for the institutions they are likely to enter as well as those they hope to create” (p. 2). Angelle (2010) defines teacher leadership as, “the sharing, the spreading, and the distributing of leadership work across individuals and roles across the school organization” (p. 2). Schrum and Levin (2013) agree by defining teacher leadership as, “delegating responsibilities to teachers and allowing them to work within teams to guide the school” (p. 98). There are numerous models of what teacher leadership is and looks like. As the research indicates, it has as much to do with the community served and the goals of the school and program as it does about the program itself.

The literature does agree that there is a long list of benefits to teacher leadership as well as a list of positive outcomes for districts that employ some level of teacher leadership

model. Schrum and Levin (2013), catalog increased student achievement scores as well as positive school climate and culture shifts. Pucella, (2011) identified an increase in teacher retention. I found no research to indicate that teacher leadership would have an adverse impact on the results of learners, relationships with community, or the teachers themselves. From a practical point of view, there are no drawbacks to teacher leadership. Teacher leadership is about fostering growth and change from within an organization. As Coquyt and Creasman note:

Providing recognition to teacher leaders throughout the Nurture phase not only helps teacher leaders strengthen their self-confidence, but also helps to strengthen the school's support for teacher leadership. It is important that others hear about the positives of teacher leadership so that the culture of teacher leadership in your school is strengthened. (p.71)

The organic growth and change from within an organization is a notable benefit. The possible negatives may not be due to teacher leadership at all. Some would say that there is a hesitancy from peers to take direction from peers. I would contend those are the same people that don't take direction well from anyone. There are flaws in current leadership constructs; gender bias, age gap, racial injustices to name a few. The commonality in my research was that you would get different results based on the type of teacher leadership employed and to what degree it is carried out (Sinclair, p. 17).

### **Distributed Leadership**

There is not a widely accepted definition for teacher leadership. The most common references were based around definitions of leadership. As Phelps put it, "making happen what you believe in" (2008). As teacher-leaders are developed in the education system there

is more buy-in toward the concept of distributed leadership. In these models much of the power within the organization is disseminated to the employees. In an education setting some of the administrative authority is dispersed among the teachers (Schrum & Levin, p. 97).

None of them are problem and worry free. Binkhorst and Poortman (2018) do a quality job of outlining some of the needs to build from existing frameworks. They outline the need for vertical leadership, meaning that the administration does need to hold the trump card in all regards. When teams disagree or there needs to be a final decision made, that decision inevitably falls to a school administrator. There is also a need for shared leadership. They stressed the importance of team play and buy-in regarding teachers. Giving some additional power, shared power amongst the group, is good for morale and the knowledge of the group (Binkhorst & Poortman, 2018, pp 1-4).

Distributive leadership and shared leadership are two concepts that are closely related, and sometimes use synonymously with, teacher leadership. In distributed leadership, “a linear, hierarchical model of leadership gives way to a model of leadership built on task expertise and context of the problem at hand. Thus, distributed leadership focuses on the goals of the group, rather than the action of the one” (Angelle, 2010, p.3). Shared leadership is “a type of leadership where all participants are engaged in leading” (Binkhorst et. al., 2017, p.2). Shared leadership is a horizontal style of leadership. (Copland, 2003; Gronn, 1996).

Teacher leadership is not exclusively paired to distributive leadership or shared leadership. Teacher leadership does inherently call for an approach that give teacher leaders additional voice or control over conventional teaching models.

### **Teacher Leadership- Roles**

What do teacher leaders actually do? This is the rubber meets the road question in relation to teacher leadership. When the concepts of “what you do” meet “how do you use your voice” teacher leadership is occurring. Many, if not all teachers, are leaders within their classrooms. They are modeling behavior, setting limits and protocols, and other management tasks. That isn’t teacher leadership. That’s teaching. It’s the job. Teacher leadership is taking the next step in planning, training, leading, advocating, and problem solving. In a nutshell, it is a seat at the table where decisions get made a trajectory gets set. This tenant aligns with three of the four areas offered within the four-factor model of teacher leadership (Angelle & DeHart, 2016). Decision making and collegial discussion in this context tie together the factors of sharing leadership, sharing expertise, and supra-practitioner. Depending on the context of the decision-making, the fourth factor: principal selection, could also be included.

The roles of teacher leaders vary from district to district. Even the title of teacher leadership is not unilaterally used across the field of education. Distributed leadership and shared leadership models are associated concepts of teacher leadership. The nomenclature of each concept is frequently used synonymously. Because the demands and functionality of each school district is different, teacher leadership looks a bit different in each school district as well. “It’s not always clear what teacher leadership entails” (Cheung, et.al., 2018, p.40). What is agreed upon in the literature is that there are commonalities in the framework of what teacher leadership looks like. The roles and responsibilities vary from institution to institution. The roles of teacher leaders vary from those of customary teacher roles. The research of York-Barr and Duke (2004) yielded seven domains of practice that are associated with teacher leadership. They are, “coordination and management, school or district curriculum work, professional development of colleagues, participation in school change and

improvement initiatives, parent and community involvement, contribution to the profession of teachers, and preservice teacher education” (pp.265-267). While other studies have developed different nomenclature and categories, the domains laid out by York-Barr and Duke (2004) can be seen throughout the rest of the literature as well. An example of three additional structures can be seen in Figure 2.

Teacher leadership models all have some level of elevated voice, power, or ownership involved. Schrum and Levin (2013) interviewed a principal to describe how he gets teacher buy-in. His response was brilliant. “Let them build it. The only way they can do that is if you get them everything they need. The first is the reorganization, so they have the right people on the bus with them” (p.100).

Cheung, et.al. (2018) agrees with the premise that teacher leaders should have a larger voice. They characterize this under the role of advocating. Cheung and her colleagues came up with four essential components present in teacher leadership frameworks. They are collaborating, providing resources, advocating, and modeling. Sinha and Hanuscin (2017) characterize this component of teacher leadership as practices. They have the most easily relatable position to this element of teacher leadership. Both Cheung, et. al. (2018) along with Sinha and Hanuscin (2017) have research that reinforces the work of Angelle and DeHart (2016) with the four-factor model of teacher leadership. Both works fall within the bounds of the four-factor model as the pillars presented are closely associated with factors of sharing expertise and sharing leadership found within Angelle and Dehart’s (2016) four-factor model. A visual representation of these commonalities is shown in Figure 2.

**Figure 2**

<u>Angelle and DeHart</u>	<u>Cheung, et al</u>	<u>Sinha and Hanuscin</u>
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Sharing Leadership	Collaborating  Advocating	Coordination and Management  Pre-service teacher education
Sharing Expertise	Providing resources	School curriculum work  PD of colleagues
Principal Selection		Contribution to the profession of teachers
Supra-Practitioner	Modeling	Parent and community involvement  Participation in school change and improvement initiatives

The Teacher Leadership Exploratory Consortium released the *Teacher Leader Model Standards* to aid in clarifying and organize teacher leadership around seven domains. They are: (I) fostering a collaborative culture to support educator development and student learning; (II) accessing and using research to improve practice and student learning, (III) promoting professional learning for continuous improvement, (IV) facilitating improvements in instruction and student learning, (V) promoting the use of assessments and data for school and district improvement, (VI) improving outreach and collaboration with families and community, (VII) advocating for student learning and the profession. Figure 3 illustrates a

crosswalk between Angelle and DeHart's (2016) model with the Teacher Leadership Model Standards (2011).

**Figure 3**

<u>Angelle and DeHart</u>	<u>TLMS</u>
Sharing Leadership	Domain I: Fostering a collaborative culture
Sharing Expertise	Domain III: Promoting professional learning
	Domain IV: Facilitating improvements in instruction
Principal Selection	
Supra-Practitioner	Domain II: Accessing and using research
	Domain V: Promoting the use of assessments and data
	Domain VI: Improving outreach and collaboration with families.

The Teacher Leader Model Standards (2011) correlate well when compared to Angelle and DeHart's four-factor model. Within each domain of the Teacher Leader Model Standards there are functions that make a deeper comparison possible. To further illustrate this, Figure 4 represents the functions of domain III: Promoting professional learning for continuous improvement with Angelle and DeHart's (2016) model.

**Figure 4**

<u>TLMS</u>	<u>Angelle and DeHart</u>
Collaborates with colleagues and school administrators	Sharing Leadership
Responds to diverse learning needs of colleagues	Supra-Practitioner
Facilitates professional learning	Sharing Expertise



Uses appropriate technologies	Supra-Practitioner
Works with colleagues to collect, analyze, and disseminate data	Sharing Leadership
Advocates and supports colleagues work in teams	Sharing Leadership
Provides constructive feedback	Supra-Practitioner
Uses new information to facilitate professional learning	Supra-Practitioner

A quality leadership structure comes down to getting the right people in the right places. Schrum and Levin (2014) investigated the preparation for future teacher leaders. One key theme they discovered is the desire of a school district to further district goals and themes through the implementation of teacher leadership. One superintendent explained that his thought process about implementing new programs centers about furthering district goals and priorities. He said, “What does this have to do with student achievement or student engagement? The teacher leadership has been fantastic in supporting our goals” (Schrum and Levin, 2013, p.100). The work of Schrum and Levin (2014) correlate to the four-factor model of Angelle and DeHart (2016) through the lens of sharing leadership and sharing expertise. The fundamental component interconnected with both approaches is in gathering the right group of people and building a consensus direction and decision for the organization.

### **Climate and Culture**

Climate describes the shared perceptions of the people in a group or organization, while culture includes how people feel about the organization and the beliefs, values, and assumptions that provide the identity and set the standards of behavior (Stolp & Smith, 1995). Having a positive climate and culture is a key to having a thriving system. That’s true

in education as much as any other field. Gondor and Hymes (1994) defines climate as “the atmosphere of a school” and culture as “the way they make decisions and day-to-day operations.” The operational definition of climate is the feeling of a school. The vibe that’s given off when you walk the halls. Culture is the way things are done. The hierarchy or unwritten boundaries that everyone seems to know and follow. Examples of strong climate would be perseverance and confidence shown in the various parts of an organization to all do your part in getting through a challenging time and working together to produce a positive outcome. The operation of actually doing the high caliber work speaks to a strong climate. Further, excellent culture is the expectation that the trust in one another and perseverance is a given. Groups with excellent culture never have to worry about the culture being strong. They just put in the work to ensure that it stays strong. The presence of a strong climate makes the attainment of a positive and strong culture a reality. The expectation of a positive climate builds trust and leads to the positive culture.

Pas, Bradshaw, and Hershfeldt (2012) did a study on teacher efficacy and burnout. Through their study they did inventories of potential predictors to efficacy and burnout. Their longitudinal study was aimed to identify the burnout factors and provide training to raise the teachers’ feeling of efficacy. The burnout factors were categorized in three aspects: depersonalization, emotional exhaustion, and personal accomplishment. The participants perceptions of their school environment were essential pieces of their study. When a participant feels that there is a lack of funding or minimal support from administration the burn-out statistics are fated to climb. This research attempted to quantify indicators such as teacher preparedness and perceptions of teacher affiliation and leadership early in the study. Strained teacher-administration relationships have also been shown to predict teacher

pessimism (Grayson & Alvarez, 2008). This research studied both the burnout levels and the efficacy levels.

This is important research, because most studies only look at one aspect of teacher burnout. Through my lens as a school administrator, their findings were troubling. As teachers gained experience over the two years of the study the efficacy numbers climbed. That piece was reassuring. The distressing piece is that the burnout rate increased at a faster rate than the efficacy statistics. Participants showed a higher burnout factor after two years in the field, even with purposeful training in comparison to their counterparts who did not receive specified training. There were, of course, some limitations to this study. First, the sample size of 600 teachers is hardly enough to make broad-based judgements. Second, there is a gender bias within the study itself, as the researchers note. Females are more likely to indicate burnout levels or dissatisfaction vs. their male counterparts. This study was done with elementary teachers, which are overwhelmingly female (Pas et. al, 2012). Limitations aside, there's substance to this study. Teacher burnout and staff turnover has an implicit relationship with climate and culture. As described on pages 28-29, both climate and culture depend on the trust and reliability of the individuals within a group. Bolman and Deal (2013) along with Stolp and Smith (1995) agree that there is a period when new people are brought into an organization that can shift climate and culture. As new people are onboarded and brought into the group there it takes some time to absorb the norms and expectations and quality that are present within an organization with excellent climate and culture. At an overview, these schools are doing what they should in providing training and experiences for these teachers to learn and grow. Still with these practices administration saw the burnout rate and teacher rollover increase. They have taken a targeted approach to support their staff

and flatten their staff turnover curve. Even with this approach they are still seeing teacher burnout increase. The solution to this problem is in climate and culture and teacher leadership (Pas, et al., 2012).

Cooper, Brondyk, and Macaluso (2015) address the incongruence that Pas and her colleagues delineated. If your climate and culture is not strong there is no amount of training that will lead to the success of your school system. After the climate and culture has been established and trust is built, the work on leadership systems and trainings can be done with expected success. York-Barr and Duke (2004) define conditions that influence teacher leadership. They are school culture and context, roles and responsibilities, and structures. It's no mistake that York-Barr and Duke put culture at the top of that list. The teacher leader understands the principles of adult learning and knows how to develop a collaborative culture of collective responsibility in the school. The teacher leader uses this knowledge to promote an environment of collegiality, trust, and respect that focuses on continuous improvement in instruction and student learning. "School culture is widely recognized as a dominant influence on the success of improvement initiatives in schools, and certainly it is regarded as influencing teacher leadership (York-Barr & Duke, 2004, p.269). Further, they emphasize that effective teacher leaders are seen as role models and build positive relationships with other teachers and principals. Two pieces of the four-factor model of Angelle and DeHart (2016) coincide in this space. Role modeling is very similar to sharing expertise. What York-Barr and Duke (2004) characterize as building positive relationships, Angelle and DeHart (2016) would describe as a supra-practitioner. This type of connection, growth, and trust is not possible without strong climate and culture in place.

Peterson and Conway (2011) do not explicitly outline climate and culture in their piece. Their writings do draw on strands of climate and culture building. They emphasize networking and continuous improvement. Their findings describe three constructs of a continual improvement process: Advocacy, organizational self-critique, and networking. Advocacy is defined by Peterson and Conway (2011) as “taking a principled stance in support of a relatively powerless, marginalized or deprived group or individual, and then taking action on behalf of that group” (p.184). Organizational self-critique is “undertaken through processes of single and double loop learning. It involves the sharing and affirmation of newly created knowledge for purposes of affirmation and/or critique of that knowledge” (p.183). Networking is described as both internal and external to the organization. “It enables synergies to be developed through communications strategies and the ongoing sharing of professional practices” (p.183). The results show that building leadership capacity and sharing that amongst teachers in the district led to a collaborative environment that was more conducive to grow and improve.

### **Communication and Feedback**

Climate and culture can be described as the foundation of any change initiative in an organization. Without a strong and trusting climate and culture the ability to make meaningful change will be impeded. In education, along with most professional organizations, the next impactful step toward positive change is communication and feedback. This is especially the case in education. As a school administrator, I have experienced first-hand what a low evaluation does to the moral of a teacher and, if not dealt with swiftly, the climate of your building. These conversations and feedback need to be handled with care. The intention is not to damage anyone. The purpose needs to be built

around identifying areas for growth, acknowledgement, and building a plan to overcome barriers for such growth to occur. In order for this high-level type of communication and feedback to occur, an organization must have a strong climate and culture built on the fundamentals of growth and trust.

Thorton (2010) notes barriers to teacher leadership. On one hand, schools that have embedded communication practices established are typically well-run organizations. While this is a benefit to the organization, there is some risk to implementing teacher leadership structures in this type of environment. Thorton (2010) indicates that the process may lead to a fracture in what was already a well-functioning system. These organizations are not as commonplace as was we might hope. More commonly, organizations struggle with communication and as a result, battle to take discernible steps toward an articulated vision. Teacher leadership is a binding tool for such systems. The process pulls additional leaders into the discussion, which leads to more consistent and unified vision and cohesion. York-Barr and Duke (2004) noted, Specifically, teacher participation in decision making was reported to influence school-wide issues such as evaluating student achievement, strengthening curriculum frameworks, dealing with challenging student behavior, and integrating technology as an instructional tool” (p.284).

One shortcoming of the feedback process is accountability. From a traditional bureaucratic frame, this is the principal telling the teacher that they are low or deficient in an area. This can lead to contention and even hostility. The framework of teacher leadership brings feedback under its’ wing. “Leadership assumes accountability for results” (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2016, p.127). When teachers are given a seat at the leadership table, with it comes a shared responsibility and accountability. The traditional ‘lines’ of feedback

models are blurred within a teacher leadership model. DeHart (2011) distinguishes this type of feedback through the sharing expertise factor within the four-factor model. Feedback from a teacher leader is largely from the standpoint of professional growth. The feedback becomes less about what the teacher did and more about the results and impacts on students.

An effective teacher leader sets the resolution of a pressing concern as a goal, gathers data to support the need for change, engages like-minded colleagues, and secures resources to make changes. Keeping in the vision of a better world for students, teacher leaders persist to find a way to achieve their goals (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2016, p.127).

### **Synthesis of the Review of the Research**

The term *teacher leadership* means a something different to each organization that uses it. While there is not a tried-and-true definition of teacher leadership, there is some agreement as to what teacher leadership is. Teacher leadership is a collaborative leadership model that affords teacher leaders additional influence in the direction of the organization. Teacher leadership expands the decision making from a small group of administrators to include a group of teacher leaders.

The education system in the United States is at a tipping point. We are losing teachers to retirement and burnout at high rates. The flow of young people into the field is diminishing and creating teacher shortages in various fields across the country. Cooper and her colleagues (2015) classified several burnout factors for teachers along with training to further the efficacy of teachers. This had little impact on the actual burnout rate of teachers. York-Barr and Duke (2004), Katzenmeyer and Moller (2016), Thornton (2010) are among several others that stress the important degree to which climate and culture plays in the

functionality of an effective organization. The teacher leadership is a structure that can be implemented to bind these ideas together.

Corrigan (2013) draw out the limitations of educational leadership. Their position is that the attributes of teacher leadership, shared leadership, and distributed leadership are visions that are not attainable. There is truth in this stance. These models are built around the idea that there will still be administration. There will undoubtedly be storms that call for school closures or pandemics that require one person or a small group to take the initial steps for the organization. Corrigan (2013) contended that inevitably, a final decision needs to be made. The literature supports that implementing a system, such as teacher leadership, yields to greater results (Dinham, 2007; York-Barr & Duke, 2004).

Teacher leadership lends itself to a more adept and nimble approach to continuous improvement, while at the same time being a grounding force that does not chase the next shiny object in the education field. Though the work of Lambert (2007) and her colleagues they were able to study multiple schools and draw many correlations with student success, leadership capacity, and school sustainability across the districts. The problem, or concept, of the study is defined early in the piece. Lambert and her team outline several assumptions about school sustainability and leadership at the onset of their work. The importance of their work is very clear though their assumptions and their findings. “Everyone has the potential and right to work as a leader. Leading is skilled and complicated work that every member of the school community can learn.” (Lambert, 2007, p.312). The findings of this research are clear and very well outlined.

Lambert lists numerous lessons learned through the work of her team and herself. Some of the findings were specific, Lambert stated, “Roles were blended as the tasks



traditionally performed by principals were performed by other people within the school, as well as parents” (p. 321). Other findings were more generalized. Lambert drew a correlation with money was delegated for professional development was a commonality of the schools as well (Lambert, p. 321).

Teacher leadership also creates an environment for teachers to have more impact on decision making and thereby improved job satisfaction. Teacher leadership results in what Cheung (et al. 2018) describes as, “a truly collaborative effort” (p.44). Another important factor within teacher leadership is influence. Teachers have an enormous influence on the classes they teach and the students and families they work with. Teacher leaders have even further influence on their peers and the districts they work within (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2016). Lack of support and influence are two of the burnout factors that Pas and her colleagues (2012) delineate. Pucella (2011) add personal accomplishment to that list. All these concepts, along with others, factor into the overall climate and culture and staff perception about a school district. York-Barr and Duke (2004) place teacher leadership as a bridge to connect the divide between these concepts. Coquyt and Creasman (2017) suggest that communication is an essential pillar to success and further expound that teacher leadership is a vehicle for these best practices.

### **Critiques of Previous Research Methods**

The literature on teacher leadership is widespread. One common theme amongst the literature is that there is no verifiable definition, which several sources defend as best practice in this case. The other theme that is present across the literature is that the sample size of each study is relatively small. Most of the work on teacher leadership comes from a case study approach. Case study inherently has a small sample size. The larger group approaches that rely on questionnaires and surveys have had larger sizes, but not large

enough to remove it as a limitation. The largest study in my currently literature review is 600 teachers. The existing work is typically done over a few school districts within the same state or geographic region. This leads to a similar limitation as sample size. Just because something works well in these schools or areas doesn't make the practices repeatable in other areas.

### **Summary**

This chapter begins with a synthesis of the available literature dealing with teacher leadership, climate and culture, and feedback. Teacher leadership as a philosophy was born out of the education movements of the 1980s. In those 40 years teacher leadership as taken many shapes and forms. Teacher leadership needs to be adaptable to any school district. It is a system that cannot have firm boundaries and edges. The framework needs to be adaptable to meet the needs of each district so that the practice is meaningful and prosperous for districts that choose to take teacher leadership as an approach in their system. Chapter 3 outlines the methodological structure for this research study and clarifies the purpose and design of this study.

### CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

#### Introduction

The broad topic of study in this research is the examination of teacher leadership impacts on climate and culture along with communication. Many research studies have reported the benefits of teacher leadership (Detert, Schroeder, & Mauriel, 2000; Firestone & Martinez, 2007; Peterson & Conway, 2011; Spillane, Healey, & Parise, 2009; Thorton, 2010; York-Barr & Duke, 2004; ). There is limited literature dealing specifically to climate and culture or communication as they relate to teacher leadership. These tenants are present within several articles (Cooper et. al., 2015; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2016; Lambert, 2007) as being key elements of quality teacher leadership practices.

The education system in the United States is in need of support and revisions. All levels of government are placing higher scrutiny on schools and performance markers than has been the case throughout history. Families are increasingly mobile and are willing to move the families to live within the boundaries of the school they want their kids to attend. This places schools in a comparison model and a competition structure that has not been the norm up to this point. Under the intensifying need to raise performance levels and reach the increasing needs of students and communities, there is an increasing space for teacher leadership practices to take hold and have meaningful impacts on school districts.

Teacher leadership incorporates many of the fundamental necessities for schools to be successful in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. With the increasing scrutiny on school performance there is a critical need to emphasize decision making and a unified vision. The distributive leadership strand of teacher leadership correlates nicely within this framework. According to Spillane et. al, (2009) “the work of leading an managing schools extends beyond the school principal to

include other formally designated leader and indeed school staff without any such designation who take responsibility for leading and managing” (p.409). Communication process is a continual battleground for schools. Within the teacher leadership framework, the communication load is spread out. Because teacher leaders were part of the decision-making process there are a larger group of people that can disseminate communication along with widening the swath of people who are truly in the know. Anecdotally, teacher leadership expands the number of people that can have crucial conversations. Instead of being caught off-guard by a patron at the grocery store and stammering for adequate responses, teacher leaders have the background knowledge to carry out a conversation in added depth as well as the communication strategies to handle that conversation with grace and tact.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this research study was to build support for teacher leadership programs in school districts by exploring and examining some benefits of teacher leadership that are found underneath the foundational level. While these benefits are many, this research focused on improved communication and creating a positive climate and culture. It is true that while the benefits are impactful, it is also difficult to desegregate these tenants into strands. This study produced many “chicken and the egg” type ponderings, for instance, is a positive climate and culture a direct product of teacher leadership? There are dozens of possibilities as to what might improve climate and culture- teacher leadership, great communication by district leadership, a supportive community, etc. These factors will be explored at length as well.

As previously described on pages 7-11 of Chapter One, the purpose of this study is to examine the impact of teacher leadership on climate and culture of school systems. Schools

have an increasing number of students that have experienced trauma. For many students, their main support structure is coming from teachers and other school staff. Schools are occupying a space in the lives of students and families that is of the highest importance. The students in schools today are vastly different than those of the past. The evolution of students and society has always been present in schools. The speed at which technology and thereby society is changing is reaching a breakneck speed (Diamandis et al., 2019). Teacher leadership models can fill an important gap in responding to the rapidly changing world and students. Teacher leadership is accompanied by a transformative thought process that will have impacts on the community the school serves along with the pathways followed by the students served. Teacher leadership is foremost about trust, accountability, collaboration, and growth.

Teachers are leaving the field in greater numbers than we have seen in the history of education. Pas, Bradshaw, and Hershfeldt (2012) affirmed that teachers are not staying in education as long as they once did. Challenging students and families coupled with a lack of a strong support structure were noted as rationale for teachers leaving education early. Teacher leadership is a way that school leaders and administrators can better support teachers. The impact of teacher leadership does not stop at the 3:30 dismissal bell or at the school walls. Teachers are the ones that are building the trusting and meaningful relationships with the student population and making connections with whatever family is present in the home. Supporting teachers is supporting students and families.

There are noteworthy educational outcomes of this study. Climate and culture is critically important to education. When describing the importance of climate and culture to a school, Stolp and Smith (1995) state, "Each has its own distinct 'feel' or 'personality' that

can be recognized soon after entering its door” (p.11). If the climate and culture of a school can be ascertained within a few minutes of entering and walking the halls briefly, it is important for school leaders to work to make that climate and culture as cohesive as possible to ensure the best functionality of the district. Stolp and Smith (1995) later say:

Researchers have accumulated some compelling evidence in support of the proposition that deliberate changes in a school’s culture and climate can make the school a place in which teacher feel positive about their work and students are motivated to learn. (p.21)

The research is clear that climate and culture and integral pieces to a highly successful school system.

Teacher leadership is a challenge to the status quo of education. I believe change is necessary in the United States right now. Employers are frustrated that the upcoming workforce struggles to communicate, take feedback, and lead (Cheung et.al., 2018). Administration want teachers to be able to carry out these tasks. The truth is, we are not teaching or modeling communication, receptivity to feedback, and leadership. “Culture trumps strategy every day of the week. As culture of teacher leadership grows, the school culture improves” (Coquyt & Creasman, 2017, p. 2). Teacher leadership is also a conduit for the teaching and modeling of communication, receptivity to feedback, and leadership components. Angelle and DeHart’s four-factor model of teacher leadership rests squarely on. Students should be able to see their teachers taking on leadership roles and working with the feedback given to them to grow and improve. Teacher leadership lends itself to this type of approach. Teacher leadership has the potential to vastly improve the workforce skills of the students we are teaching.

## **Research Design**

### **Research Questions**

Questions and areas of interest within my research are:

1. What is the impact of teacher leadership practices on culture and climate within public schools?
  - a. To what extent does teacher leadership impact the communication and feedback perceptions of teachers within teacher leadership structures?

### **Design Framework**

The researcher used a qualitative phenomenological approach in this study. As indicated in Chapter 2, there is no theoretical framework found within the review of literature to aid as a theoretical framework for this study. The four-factor model of teacher leadership structure established by Angelle and Dehart (2016) serves as a conceptual framework for this study. The four-factor model of teacher leadership is depicted in Figure 1, which can be found in Chapter 2 on page 19.

The four-factor model offers a conceptual framework whereby the various components of teacher leadership programs may be analyzed. This is another way of stating that the four-factor model offers a lens to bring focus to the tenants of teacher leadership as they relate to the research questions of this study.

As Creswell and Poth (2017) noted, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world and researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. This research on teacher leadership reflects that definition by examining and interpreting teacher perceptions of climate and culture as well as effective communication.

The four-factor model tethers together the ever-changing definition and roles of teacher leadership into perceptible segments that can be analyzed and weighed out. For instance, feedback is a notion that seems difficult to correlate directly with teacher leadership. Effective feedback could easily be dismissed and categorized by itself and a strong practice. By using the four-factor model the view of feedback aligning with teacher leadership practices comes in to focus within the factor of sharing expertise and supra-practitioner. With very little research it could easily be said that teacher leaders are models for their students and peers. Modeling is a form of communication and would land easily within the sharing expertise quadrant of the four-factor model described by Angelle and DeHart (2016). York-Barr and Duke (2004) place this type of practice within their ‘Professional development of colleagues’ domain. Further, this type of behavior, going above and beyond the call or prescribed role is nearly the definition of the supra-practitioner section. To go just one small step further most teacher leadership models would bequeath a degree of communication onto a teacher leader as part of their role. That is shared leadership. As one begins to understand the four-factor model of teacher leadership and applies teacher leadership duties to the model, a sense of how strong or vital a practice is to the success of teacher leadership develops. If the case could be made that the practice can live within multiple areas of the triangle, the more vital the practice is to a successful teacher leadership program.

## **Procedures**

### **Participant Selection**

“A phenomenological framework requires a relatively homogenous group of participants (Creswell, 2007). Therefore, in a phenomenological study, participants should have experience with the same phenomenon” (Yuksel & Yildirim, 2015, p.9). According to



Creswell and Poth (2018) a phenomenological study describes the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences.

Within this study selective sampling will be used. Teacher leadership is at least somewhat present within most school settings. For the purposes of this research it was important to narrow the focus onto schools that had formal processes for teacher leadership in place. As such, five schools that have participated in the Teacher Leadership Academy through North Dakota State University will be selected for participation. The interviews will be voluntary and available to school faculty that participated in the Teacher Leadership Academy. There are several schools that have participated in the Teacher Leadership Academy. The researcher will work with the gatekeepers/Superintendents of selected school districts to ascertain which staff members were a part of that program and would be eligible to receive an invitation to participate in the interviews.

Participation from individuals within those districts will also be voluntary. Creswell and Poth (2018) suggest a sample size from 3-4 individuals to 10 to 15. Once a school is contacted the hope is that more than one individual will volunteer for the interview portion of the study. The sample size of schools will be between four and six yet yield 10-15 individual interviews.

### **Protection of Participants**

The researcher will work with the gatekeepers of individual school districts to seek permission to conduct research at their site and with their employees. Typically, these gatekeepers are Superintendents. The school name and other identifiable information will be de-identified. The same is true of individual participants. Names and other identifiable information will be coded and de-identified to protect participant confidentiality.

Once access to the school district is granted the researcher will work with the gatekeeper/Superintendent to email potential participants and gain access to these individuals. A draft email will be sent to the gatekeeper/Superintendent for them to pass along to participants meeting the research criteria. Contact information for the researcher will be made available so that potential participants can contact the researcher with questions or indicate their willingness to participate. Once a participant has indicated their desire to participate in the study, they will be given an informed consent form dealing with the safeguards of research. No vulnerable populations will be involved in this research study.

### **Expert Review**

The interview questions for this research study were submitted for expert review. The questions were submitted to an Ed.D. who has also authored multiple books on the topic of teacher leadership. The general feedback on the interview questions was positive. There were revisions to specific questions to narrow the focus of questions and responses to feedback leaning more toward the research question and data rather than the more general wording used in the first draft. Ultimately the expert review yielded positive results and an approved set of interview questions.

### **Data Collection**

The researcher secured permission from the school administration in the spring of 2019 to conduct this research. Approval was also secured from the University of Minnesota Moorhead Institutional Review Board. School administrators were informed about the study and received instructions on the selection faculty participants to be used in the study.

The initial phase of participant activity involved receiving a participation invitation email from the researcher. The email explained the study and an explanation of what would be involved if they chose to participate. The email also included the contact information for

the researcher, to answer any questions from a potential participant. Potential participants could reply to the email with their desire to participate or withdraw from the study. For those that did not respond a follow-up message was sent within a few days. If there were no reply to that message it was assumed the potential participant did not wish to participate.

The next phase of data collection was the interview itself. Interviews were scheduled at each school with the participants that wished to be included in the study. Participants met one-on-one with the researcher and responded verbally to the interview questions. The interviews were digitally recorded. The interviews lasted between thirty minutes and an hour.

Any information obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with the participant will remain confidential and will not be disclosed. The researcher will provide safeguards to keep personal information confidential. A participant may use a pseudonym if desired. To help protect confidentiality, storage of data and notes will be kept in a secured location accessible only to the researcher and purging of all personally identifiable information from transcripts and research reports will be purged. This project will involve making an audio recording of interview conversation. The digital audio recording, accompanying notes, and transcriptions will be kept on a password-protected computer. Information from this study will be kept until July 2021, when all information will be destroyed.

### **Data Analysis**

The initial interview questions ascertained some demographic data about the participants. These data were aggregated by the researcher and a table of these data was developed and summarized for study. This summarized participant demographic information provided a rich context for knowledge about the teachers participating in this research.

The next set of data developed were from the interview process. The interviews were

digitally recorded and transcribed. The researcher used the audio transcription available through Zoom recordings to create the initial transcription by using a transcription service, Trint. The researcher then listened to the recording and corrected errors and omissions that the program made during the transcription process.

The transcriptions were then analyzed using the phenomenological data analysis steps described by Moustakas (1994). As the transcriptions are studied the process known as bracketing will be utilized. Bracketing is a practice in which the researcher set must “aside their experiences, as much as possible, to take a fresh perspective toward the phenomenon under examination” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p.78). As Creswell and Poth (2018) continue:

Building on the data from the first and second research questions, data analysts go through the data and highlight “significant statements: sentences or quotes that provide an understanding of how the participants experienced the phenomenon.

Moustakas (1994) calls this step horizontalization. (p. 79).

The data is then broken into main themes or clusters and coded accordingly. The researcher repeats this process several times, looking for commonalities and themes within the interviews (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The four criteria for trustworthiness as laid out by Lincoln and Guba (1985) were adhered to within this study. The four criteria are: credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability. (Briggs et. al., 2014). The first technique used was member-checking. Member-checking was used to ensure credibility. The participant was given the transcription of the interview to review and clarify necessary areas. The second and third criteria of trustworthiness are confirmability and dependability. As Creswell (2018) notes, “The naturalistic researcher looks for confirmability rather than objectivity in establishing the

value of the data. Both dependability and confirmability are established through an auditing of the research process” (p. 256). Confirmability was further established through triangulation techniques. Triangulation refers to viewing something from multiple angles. The dependability of this research study is established through oversight of the research advisor and audit by the committee (Creswell & Poth, 2016)

### **Instruments**

Instruments used in this research study were as follows: recording device, field notes, transcription software, and the researcher.

### **Role of the Researcher**

The researcher conducted face-to-face interviews with participants. The researcher is qualified to conduct such research based on prior coursework through Minnesota State University Moorhead and by approval of the university’s IRB panel. The researcher was previously trained through coursework and short interviews during the doctoral program. The preparation for conducting interviews was a component of the coursework in ED 705- Qualitative Methods in Educational Research. The researcher successfully completed the coursework and trainings.

The researcher has had prior experience and holds a level of bias in the area of teacher leadership. The researcher has been a facilitator of the Teacher Leadership Academy (TLA) through North Dakota State University. Because of that implicit bias and as an ethical consideration the research was not conducted within the researcher’s school district. The research was conducted in other regional schools where the bias and knowledge of the researcher about the TLA program and the role of the researcher within the program would be an unknown to participants and yield more honest answers.

### **Ethical Considerations**

There were few ethical considerations within this research study. The participants were not from vulnerable populations or disadvantaged. The participants were not placed in any level of harm. Steps were taken to protect the anonymity of participants. This research study received approval from the Minnesota State University Moorhead IRB.

### **Summary**

Within a qualitative paradigm, this research used a phenomenological methodology featuring the four-factor model of teacher leadership as a conceptual framework. Moustakas' (1994) data analysis framework was incorporated into the study. The broad purpose of the study was to investigate the impact of teacher leadership on the climate and culture of school districts. Secondly, effective communication within schools was analyzed as it relates to teacher leadership. Using an interview process the researcher developed themes and main ideas that were drawn out from the interviews, audio recordings, and transcriptions. This is consistent with the phenomenological data analysis processes laid out by Moustakas' (1994) as well as Creswell and Poth (2018).

A set of semi-structured interview questions were developed by the researcher. The interview set was reviewed and approved by an expert in the field of teacher leadership. The questions were designed to gain an understanding on the tenants of teacher leadership within schools with and embedded teacher leadership framework as well as schools without a formal teacher leadership process in place.

Following the audio recorded interviews, a transcription was made and edited by the researcher. The transcription was then member checked by the interviewed parties to ensure reliability and credibility. The transcription was then reviewed for main ideas and themes as a part of the data analysis process by the researcher. The main ideas and themes were coded

and sorted.

This research examined the impact of the teacher leadership on climate and culture of schools as well as to what extent teacher leadership impacts effective communication and feedback processes within schools. Chapters four and five of this study will describe the findings and conclusions from this research study and recommendations are provided for schools to effectively implement teacher leadership programs and effective communication and feedback processes within them.

## CHAPTER 4. FINDINGS

### Introduction

Teacher leadership has a wide array of consequences and outcomes for a school system that employs teacher leadership within their district. To better understand these consequences and outcomes research must be conducted. Chapter Four describes the results of the study. In Chapters One through Three, the research plan was outlined. These steps will be further detailed as they were implemented with the participants of this study. The latter sections of this chapter will describe my role in the research, describe the sample of research participants, and describe the research methodology and data analysis. Finally, the data will be presented and analyzed through a phenomenological lens.

### Researcher's Role

Teacher leadership became of interest to me several years ago. Shortly after becoming an administrator, I discovered that the demands of the various endeavors encompassed by the superintendent role were nearly impossible to manage. As a new administrator, I found myself leaning on some veteran teachers for input. In time, it became clear that some teachers were willing to take on leadership roles if they were given some sort of structure to make it possible. As fate would have it, my district was given the opportunity to participate in the Teacher Leadership Academy (TLA). The TLA is a Masters' degree program offered through North Dakota State University. This arrangement leaves participants a few courses short of attaining their principal credentials. This is done intentionally. The premise is to create teacher leaders, not create more administrators. School districts partner in this process and do not want a section of their staff to be trained to leave immediately for principal positions, although some do. The goal of the TLA is to create



leaders within the classroom and school settings. In 2018 our school district was given the opportunity to be part of the first multi-district TLA. Previous participants in the TLA were from urban areas (Fargo, West Fargo, Bismarck, and Mandan) and all the participants were from the same school district. For the program to be feasible, NDSU surmised that roughly 15 participants needed to enroll. Having all the participants from the same school district was an obvious benefit. With 15-20 teachers from the same district participating in the same program, district initiatives and goals that seemed overly ambitious before were now attainable. Students who participate in the TLA are given practicum hours and their district administrator approves their practicum plan.

The rationale for participating in the TLA varies by district. For my district, the school culture aspect was very appealing. It had become apparent that there were leaders within our district that were not on the same page and at times, working in opposite directions. Many of these current leaders participated in the TLA. Through our work, we have been able to rebuild the focus and vision of our district. The TLA provides an environment for participants to get together and work through differences and district challenges in a cohesive fashion. Improving the school's culture was always on my radar, but I did not have the process or workforce to complete this arduous task. For instance, our district was overdue to review and adopt updated school policies. There was not enough time in my schedule to do this alone and the board had not expressed interest in taking this task. As a part of their practicum hours, TLA students assisted in the task of reviewing and updating school policies. An added benefit of this endeavor was obtaining teacher perspectives and input on each policy we considered. The TLA is also a great platform for administrators to explain their rationale for how the district goes about its business, and for

teachers to advocate for a change in the process. Furthermore, having a group from the same district engaged in the same conversations is beneficial from a goal setting perspective.

Student enrollment is an obstacle for NDSU due to the fact that there simply is not enough students to create the necessary enrollment for the university to offer the program to only one rural school district. To grow the program in the rural areas, it became necessary to attempt a model utilizing multiple districts that would participate in the same academy. My district participated in the first venture of the multi-district TLA that began in 2018 along with two other school districts.

My involvement with the TLA program through NDSU runs deep. District leaders are expected to participate in the TLA program in the role of district liaison. District liaisons are administrators from participating schools that attend class sessions along with the teachers/participants. The liaison position is one of facilitation. The curriculum of the TLA is designed to have a tangible impact on the participating school district. The curriculum included courses on data, leadership, law, climate and culture, technology, and curriculum and instruction. The capstone project for each TLA member was the presentation of an action research project. Participants make instructional or strategy choices and reported their results in their action research. The impacts of the action research projects remain long after the TLA is completed. The project outcomes and learning of each participant shapes their continuing choices and approaches as an educator moving forward. The most lasting impact is the process of the research. If a teacher is wondering if they should use mixed ability groups or like ability groups for your reading instruction, the TLA equipped participants on how to conduct that research, formalize a strategy, and move forward with an evidence-based approach. Firsthand, I have seen this process carry over to neighboring classrooms as well.

Other teachers have learned the research process from their peers and are better equipped to make data driven instructional choices. As liaisons, one of the responsibilities is to provide access and facilitate the potential for change and impact within the school system. Sometimes that access can be as simple as providing access to district policies. Other times it could involve assisting with the rollout of a staff or community survey.

These experiences within the TLA as well as my tenure as a school administrator and teacher help to inform this research. I know that my objectivity may be compromised in relation to this topic. I worked meticulously to ensure that the participants were describing their reality and endeavored to approach each data set with fresh eyes.

In preparation for this study, I have finished the necessary coursework in completion of this Doctoral program. These courses included supervised field studies in qualitative methodologies. I also called upon the work of Moustakas (1994) and literature surrounding the methodology of phenomenology. I have previously conducted qualitative interviews, which assisted in the development of codes and themes inherent in a phenomenological study.

### **Description of the Sample**

The participants in this study were from rural schools in North Dakota. There were five participants that were from four different school districts. Each participant had been through the teacher leadership academy program offered by North Dakota State University. Three participants were classroom teachers. Two of the participants had moved on from classroom teachers to hold formal leadership positions within their district. These participants are not administrators, but are in formal leadership positions, akin to an Instructional Coach. While they were enrolled in the Teacher Leadership Program, they were classroom teachers and later transitioned into their new role. Pertinent demographics of each participant are

described in Table 1.

Table 1

*Participant Demographics*

	Number of years at district	Level of education	School Role
Participant 1	15	Masters	Dean
Participant 2	19	Masters	Elementary Teacher
Participant 3	8	Masters	Secondary Science Teacher
Participant 4	6	Masters	Middle School English Teacher
Participant 5	11	Masters	Dean

**Research Methodology Applied to the Data Analysis**

Selective sampling was used to identify participants for this study. The researcher knew of several schools that had been through the TLA and contacted the Superintendents of four school districts to ask for permission to interview participants and seek recommendations of potential participants. The researcher then contacted five individuals who became the participants in this study. Once they indicated they would be willing to participate, the researcher followed up by sending an informed consent letter and a consent form. None of the initial contacts declined to participate. Interviews were conducted over the video streaming service, Zoom (zoom.us). Backups of the audio recording were simultaneously recorded on an iPhone and a laptop.

This study followed the transcendental phenomenological approach laid out by Moustakas. Figure 1 below provides a visual representation of this approach. The process starts with the researcher's epoche. Epoche, according to Moustakas, calls on the researcher to set aside judgement and view the phenomenon with fresh eyes (Chun, 2013). The next step of the methodological approach was to transcribe the interviews. Trint, an online

transcription service, was used to transcribe the interviews by using the audio file attained from the Zoom recording. Trint produces a rough transcription of the interview. The researcher then listened to the audio recording while reading through the transcript to ensure the transcript was authentic and true to the nature of what the participants intent. The transcript was edited to reflect these adaptations (Chun, 2013).

Once the data collection process was complete, the researcher began the data analysis process using Moustakas' (1994) transcendental phenomenological approach, starting with phenomenological reduction. The process of phenomenological reduction requires the research to group similar ideas into units. Though these processes some units start to set themselves apart in terms of the frequency they appear throughout the research analysis. Horizontalization was then completed. Creswell and Poth (2018) outline the horizontalization technique of Moustakas as, "building on the data from the first and second research questions, data analysts go through the data and highlight significant statements, sentences, or quotes that provide an understanding of how the participants experiences the phenomenon" (p. 79). The researcher performed a process of highlighting and note taking from the transcripts which allowed themes to emerge (Chun, 2013).

The third step in the process is imaginative variation. Within this procedure the textual description is used to develop a structural epitome of the experience. This requires reflection on the themes pertinent to the experience in the view of the researcher. In relation to this study, this is where the three themes: empowerment, inclusion, and differentiated leadership set themselves apart. The words and experiences of each participant in relation to teacher leadership form the three main themes (Chun, 2013).

The next step is synthesis. Within this step the textual and structural descriptions are

combined to form a deeper description of the phenomenon in conjunction with the elements of space and time (Chun, 2013). Though the imaginative variation phase and the synthesis phase the themes of empowerment, inclusion, and differentiated leadership presented themselves as the central themes discussed by participants. Within each interview these themes emerged to show the significance upon the successful implementation of teacher leadership. Participants talked about times when divisions formed among staff and emphasized the importance of inclusion to diffuse that division.

The criteria of trustworthiness, as laid out by Lincoln and Guba (1985), was attained within this study through member-checking. The participants were given the transcription of the interview to review and clarify any discrepancies.

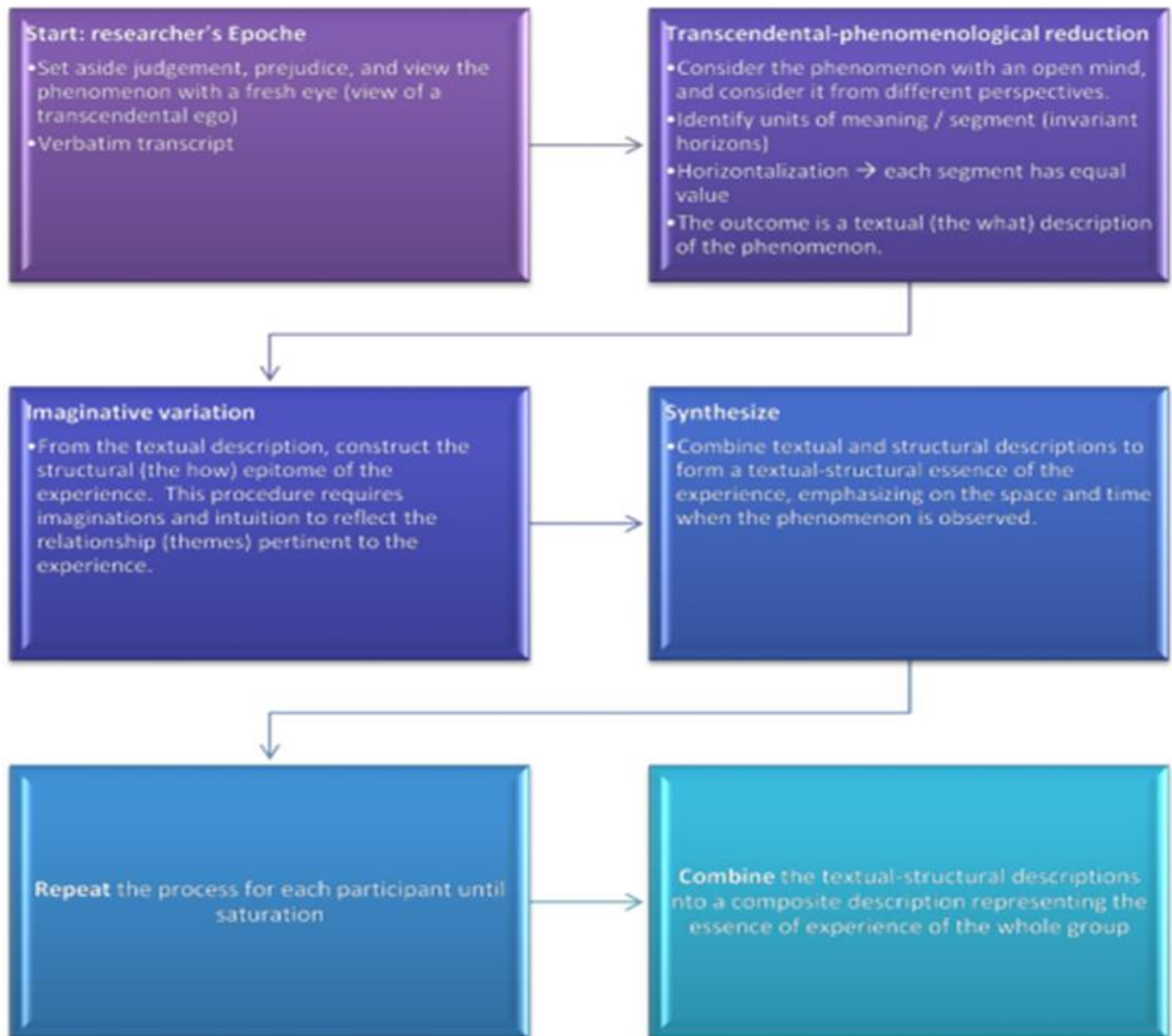


Figure 5. *Moustakas Transcendental Phenomenological Approach* (Chun, 2013)

### **Presentation of Data and Results of the Analysis**

The results and data of this study will be shared within the lens of the research questions of this study. The answers to the research questions will be detailed along with the central themes exposed through the data analysis. The three themes that emerged were empowerment, inclusion, and differentiated leadership. These themes were prevalent in the data analysis and give a true essence for how each participant viewed a successful teacher

leadership structure.

### **Research Question 1**

What is the impact of teacher leadership practices on culture and climate within public schools?

As described in Chapter One, Gonder and Hymes (1994) define both climate and culture. They define climate as “a term that refers to that atmosphere in a school” (Gonder & Hymes, p.13). Additionally, culture is defined as, “...the way they make decisions and conduct day-to-day operations” (Gonder & Hymes, p.15) In other words, climate is what you do, culture is how you do it. Teacher leadership has no accepted definition. York-Barr and Duke (2004) connect the element of culture to teacher leadership by stating that teacher leaders, “highlight the use of teachers’ expertise about teaching and learning to improve the culture and instruction in schools such that student learning is enhanced” (p. 290). As Creasman and Coquyt (2017) state, “teacher leadership is unique in each school and district” (p. 3).

Teacher leadership, climate and culture are interconnected. Teacher leadership is a fluid concept that can be tailored to the needs, goals, strengths or weaknesses, or vision of an individual school or district. Teacher leadership practices, when implemented effectively, can have a direct correlation to positive climate and culture (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). When a growth area of a school district is identified, such as culture and/or climate, the teacher leadership practices can be adapted to investigate and identify solutions. Quality teacher leadership practices lend themselves to the development of strong climate and culture. Teacher leadership has a directional relationship on what you do and how you do it, as described above.



The themes of inclusion and differentiated leadership were the most pronounced perspectives related to the first research question regarding climate and culture. A district that implements teacher leadership needs to do so within the framework that climate and culture will be impacted. This research demonstrated that teacher leadership has the potential to have an enormously positive impact if staff work cohesively and understand the roles teacher leaders will assume. Teacher leadership could also have devastating impacts on climate and culture if not implemented properly. Divisions in staff might form and leave the district negative and fragmented. To offset negative feelings and fragmentation, unifying factors, collaboration, and growth need to be attended to early on in the implementation process. Table 2 below provides a brief summary of some of the phrases and the subthemes developed during the coding process.

**Table 2**

*Participant Responses Related to Climate and Culture “Inclusion”*

Participant	Phrase	Subtheme
P1	Bridge between admin and our educators of sharing the vision.	Unity
P5	Making sure we were not the insiders and the outsiders. We just had to be really intentional.	Unity
P2	Bridge that gap between admin and staff.	Unity
P5	We are very intentional about things not being top down and just making sure educators have a say or have their voices heard.	Unity
P4	We were doing what we could to bridge that gap by then getting them involved in the things we were doing.	Unity
P1	Making sure that the vision is cohesive and everybody's working towards the same thing.	Unity
P5	Sometimes feel like we're the middleman between administrators and our educators.	Collaboration
P1	We have a lot more ownership and buy-in and collective teamwork.	Collaboration
P3	Opportunities for teachers to be able to express their opinions.	Collaboration

P2	Collaboration with our learning walks and collaborating with each other.	Collaboration
P3	PLC is really helping with the relationship between our staff members.	Growth
P4	Trying to point out leadership among my colleagues.	Growth
P1	To have a voice and some ownership in the direction of the school.	Growth
P4	We had to somehow get them involved in what we were doing to make them feel like they were a part.	Growth
P5	To make sure where we're meeting their needs and doing what they need us to do.	Growth

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\*all the subthemes form the overarching theme “Inclusion.”

**Inclusion.** As Table 2 indicates, the overarching theme of inclusion is comprised of three sub-themes. The sub-themes of unity, collaboration, and growth were established through data analysis. These sub-themes were associated together to form the overarching theme based largely off the synthesis of the data collection. The perceptions of the participants were crucial in the formation of the overarching theme and accompanying sub-themes.

**Unity.** The decision to join the TLA was voluntary. All staff were given the opportunity to apply for admittance. Some staff chose to apply, while others did not. Each participant reflected on the tension that materialized in the early stages of implementing the formalized teacher leadership program between the staff that were in the TLA and those that were not. Those who had been a member in the TLA were seen as having a leg-up on those who were not. P4 explained, “that was the hardest part going through it (TLA), because it created such a divide.” In all cases, the participants voiced that the key to overcoming this chasm and teacher leadership flourishing, was unity. P4 put unity in these terms, “we were doing what we could to bridge that gap by then getting them involved in the things we were doing.” P1 shared a very similar thought, saying teacher leaders were the “bridge between admin and our educators of sharing the vision.” P1 referred to the concept of unity by

referencing a shared vision saying the role of a teacher leader was, “making sure that the vision is cohesive and everybody's working towards the same thing.” One benefit of teacher leadership is the practice of having teachers participate in the decision-making process. While this is a positive for the teachers that are participating, it can also form a rift between those teachers that are engaged in the leadership process and those who are not. It became apparent that there was a divide formed of haves and have-nots between the teachers that were in the TLA and engage in formal teacher leadership and those that were not. P5 put unity in this perspective, “we are very intentional about things not being top down and just making sure educators have a say or have their voices heard.” P5 went on to give the greatest clarity to the importance of unity, “making sure we were not the insiders and the outsiders. We just had to be really intentional.”

**Collaboration.** The opportunity for staff to work together was a prevailing topic throughout the research and analysis. The central notion of collaboration being, as P3 stated, “Opportunities for teachers to be able to express their opinions.” Collaboration had a greater context for P1, because of the significance of collaboration to their system of teacher leadership, “We have a lot more ownership and buy-in and collective teamwork.” P5 outlined collaboration as the work teacher leaders do between administrators and staff, “Sometimes feel like we're the middleman between administrators and our educators.”

**Growth.** Another central aspect of the data analysis led to the sub-theme of growth. Growth did have slightly different meanings and contexts for each participant. The commonality was in supporting their colleagues or fellow leaders to reach their highest potential. P4 works to encourage colleagues to take on leadership roles, saying, “I’m trying to point out leadership among my colleagues.” P1 takes a similar approach, “To have a voice

and some ownership in the direction of the school.” P5 had introspective thoughts related to growth and the role of the teacher leader, “To make sure where we're meeting their (other teacher's) needs and doing what they need us to do.”

**Summary.** Unity, collaboration, and growth are the sub-themes that combine to form the overarching theme of inclusion. These sub-themes are closely associated with one another, so much so that one can very easily argue that statements categorized in one sub-theme could be placed in another. The overtone of these sub-themes spoke to the overarching theme of inclusion. Unity, collaboration, and growth and the sentiment of the participants resulted in the theme of inclusion. The data suggests that positive climate and culture is a result of inclusion. Inclusion is a result of unity, collaboration, and growth.

As described earlier in this chapter, sometimes inclusion involved asking for feedback or participation from other members of the staff. Other times it was giving updates on what was being learned and discussed in the TLA courses to share some of the learning encompassed by the TLA program with all staff. Inclusion of all staff was the key to developing stronger teacher leadership practices and furthermore, a more positive climate and culture. P2 described asking for help from her peers that were not involved in the TLA as a collaboration strategy and include more of their non-TLA peers, “I learned we needed to find their strengths, then I was asking them for help.” This inclusion technique helped to dispel staff resentment. P2 also noted the importance of modeling for peers to build trust, “When we modeled first, they could come into our classrooms and then eventually they realized it wasn't that bad.” The modeling techniques and collaboration shared by P2 her attempt to use inclusion strategies to overcome some of the climate and culture shortfalls they were experiencing in implementing their teacher leadership structure. P2 described part

of the role of a teacher leader was to support other staff and help them grow. Continually including staff and making their voices feel valued and appreciated a more collegial and positive climate and culture formed, “we work together to help other see their positives and their strengths and then get them to be a voice.”

All mentioned a process for inclusion prior to the implementation of a change. P3 described a process where the administration will develop a survey and “use a PLC for discussion of that just to bounce ideas off of each other.” P4 had a similar experience, “When we were going to move through that there was a survey that was sent out and it was going to be if the majority want to do it, we’re going to move forward with that because we want a united front.” P1 added some depth in the theme of inclusion:

We do some activities that would go through the planning stages, so everybody has some voice and ownership in it. We know that even though you allow people to be part of the planning process, it doesn’t always mean that whatever they come up with is going to be the end result, but at least they had a say in a part to play in it.

**Differentiated Leadership.** Differentiated leadership was the second overarching theme related to research question one that was discovered after the coding process. As described in Chapter Two, the Four-Factor Model developed by Angelle and DeHart (2016) focused on four central areas of teacher leadership. Three of those four areas: sharing expertise, sharing leadership, and supra-practitioner are very similar in notion to the theme of differentiated leadership. The analysis of the research data shows that the development of a teacher leadership system where in which teachers have the ability to lead within their own comforts and strengths leads to both quality teacher leadership practices and positive climate and culture. The overarching theme of differentiated leadership is comprised of three sub-themes:

Strength, ownership, and mindset.

**Table 3**

*Participant Responses Related to Climate and Culture “Differentiated Leadership”*

Participant	Phrase	Subtheme
P1	It fit more with being able to do it, apply it and implement it within your own district.	Strength
P2	Leading in things that you're passionate about or have a good strength in.	Strength
P2	Leaders in different aspects of their strength. Curriculum, technology and so on.	Strength
P3	Completely led by teachers.	Ownership
P4	We learned to seek out more people in our district to solve the problems that we have here.	Ownership
P5	We have experts in our building and those experts, our people, are now the ones that are leading our professional development and our professional learning.	Ownership
P4	We started using our people for more leadership roles.	Ownership
P4	Everybody has the capability to become a leader.	Mindset
P5	We changed our mindset on what a leader is and who can be a leader.	Mindset
P2	Encouraged us to step outside our comfort zones.	Mindset
P5	You all can be leaders in your own way.	Mindset

\*all the subthemes form the overarching theme “Differentiated Leadership.”

**Strength.** The sub-theme of strength was derived from the notion from participants that teachers should be afforded the opportunity to lead in their areas of individual strength. P2 depicted strength as, “Leading in things that you're passionate about or have a good strength in.” P1 shared similar thoughts, “It fit more with being able to do it, apply it and implement it within your own district.” There is a comfort in relation so climate in culture for operating in areas of strength. “Teacher can lead efforts related to goal accomplishment must be generated, recognizing that specific leadership functions and needs that are well served by teacher are fluid” (York-Barr & Duke, 2004, p. 290). P1 shed light on strength areas they have noticed in staff, stating that teacher leaders can be “leaders in different aspects of their

strength. Curriculum, technology and so on.”

**Ownership.** The sentiment shared by participants that led to the formation of the sub-theme of ownership was centered around a sense of, as P3 so eloquently asserted, “this is ours.” In many cases ownership was explained through a using their own staff to lead. P4 stated, “We learned to seek out more people in our district to solve the problems that we have here.” P5 agreed, “We have experts in our building and those experts, our people, are now the ones that are leading our professional development and our professional learning.” There was a pride that was noticeable when participants reference the climate and culture of their school and ownership. P4 shared, “We started using our people for more leadership roles.” P3 exclaimed, PD is “completely led by teachers.” The fact that these ownership efforts were “home grown” with a grass roots approach resulted in a sense of pride and satisfaction from participants was easily perceptible during the interviews.

**Mindset.** The sub-theme of mindset is on plane with creating your own reality. Mindset is the willingness to support a given concept or idea. In relation to differentiated leadership mindset is the support for a set of norms developed within a district. P5 introduced mindset this way, “We changed our mindset on what a leader is and who can be a leader.” P4 expressed a similar notion, “Everybody has the capability to become a leader.” These concepts are not necessarily good, nor bad. It is notable that they are accepted within these districts. In many school systems the concept that everyone can lead would likely be met with some resistance. In these districts there was a common belief built around a set of norms that leadership could and should be shared and distributed amongst staff. The buy-in to those ideas as a belief system is a mindset.

**Summary.** The sub-themes of strength, ownership, and mindset comprise the

overarching theme of differentiated leadership. These three sub-themes complement one another in that they are each centrally focused on positioning each person within a system appropriately for the benefit of the system. When there are common norms or mindsets that are supported by an organization to position each person in an area of strength, these systems are primed for differentiated leadership.

**Differentiated leadership.** There was an overwhelming sense that teacher leaders should be allowed to lead in different ways. As P1 said, “It doesn’t have to be this big vocal person and this visionary person that we usually associate with leadership.” For some, that is encouraging their peers, as P4 noted, “a lot is instilling some of those leadership qualities in some of my colleagues that don’t feel like they are leaders.” P5 continued, “Our school has opened up opportunities for us to lead on a bigger scale. On a smaller scale, leading a PLC or team or being a voice when we need a representative.” P1 shared this belief, “It doesn’t have to be a ‘position’ of leadership.” Rang true in all of the interviews.

Differentiated leadership looks different for different people. Each participant had committees or groups that are tasked with soliciting feedback. Surveys are also conducted within each district. The opportunity to have your voice heard is a central theme. P3 summed the concept up, “I feel that there have been opportunities for teachers to be able to go and express their opinions about things and get some things changed.”

Every participant felt their school had a strong or positive climate and culture. P3 described their school culture as, “phenomenal. I think that culture was there before we started the Teacher Leadership Academy. I would say it (TLA) definitely helped with continuing with the culture that we have.” Each participant did note that COVID-19 has made interactions with other staff, students, and the community more difficult. When



discussing the difficulty with climate and culture this year, P2 said, “I do think the climate is a little bit different than it has been in the past. I would say that’s every school.”

It was important for the researcher to establish how climate and culture was assessed within each district. Most participants referenced surveys done throughout the course of the year. P2 said, “We do a survey and then we take that survey, and we talk about it, the strengths and weaknesses.” P4 agreed, saying, “We do surveys with our kids and then we look back at them.” P4 went on to discuss more informal strategies for gauging climate and culture. “I do a lot of checks with my students...how are things going? What could be going better? And just seeking out those conversations.” When asked what measures they used to get a pulse on climate and culture, P3 had this to say:

For me, probably kids more than anything. They are the ones that we are here for, so they’re the ones that are upset if something’s not going correctly or they don’t feel like they’re being heard. I think that’s important as far as climate as well as culture.

Each participant said that the TLA had a positive impact on the climate and culture of their district. P2 noted that the strong culture was in place prior to the onset of the TLA but stated that the TLA had played a positive role since implementation, noting the skills gained from the program have been vital in working with and approaching administration. That was a sentiment shared by P4. P4 expressed the conduit to the administration through the teacher leader, “I feel like people really rely on that a little bit more because they know that I have that relationship with the principal because I’ve built that up.”

Differentiated leadership is an essential function of quality teacher leadership. Good leadership cannot come when people are completely out of their element. Differentiated leadership provides a framework for staff to lead within a system that supports their own

ability and capacity. Differentiated leadership provides opportunities for staff to lead, seek input, and move through the decision-making process. Climate and culture flourish in systems that emphasize differentiated leadership. Those that seek to have input and lead are afforded an opportunity to do so. Others that may prefer to lead in other ways and simply provide feedback are comfortable within this system because they are not pushed beyond their capacity but are encouraged to engage in leadership and have the structure in place to participate if the need or desire should arise.

### **Research Question 2**

To what extent does teacher leadership impact the communication and feedback perceptions of teachers within teacher leadership structures?

Imaginative variation was crucial to understanding the relationship between the participants and how communication and feedback had evolved since teacher leadership practices were established in their districts. The overarching theme of empowerment was created by analysis of three sub-themes: support, ability, and confidence, see Table Four below. As these sub-themes emerged, it became clear that the participants had experienced a change in themselves regarding giving and receiving feedback. Further, it was ascertained that the establishment of the teacher leadership practices associated with empowerment within the school districts had positive impacts for all staff.

**Table 4**

*Participant Responses Related to Communication and Feedback “Empowerment”*

Participant	Phrase	Subtheme
P1	Support is built in and they can keep working towards their professional goals.	Support
P3	PLCs have really opened communication between everybody.	Support
P4	There was a large group of us and the teamwork that we've built throughout that and relying on each other for feedback	Support

P1	You're trying to help them find solutions to their problems.	Support
P4	We would send out what we were doing and ask for feedback before we finished doing any of it so that people felt like their voice was heard.	Support
P1	Giving people guidance and focus of what to do.	Support
P2	Help others see their positive and their strengths and then getting them to be a voice.	Support
P3	Kids know when you're a hard worker and you'll do what needs to be done.	Ability
P1	Defining your own leadership and in your own ability to lead and understanding that.	Ability
P1	Your ability to lead can come in multiple forms. It doesn't have to be a position of leadership.	Ability
P3	We now can have a conversation with the administration. I feel when teachers are not trained in confrontation or hard conversations, sometimes it can sound like complaining.	Confidence
P5	I think a huge instrumental change at our school is our professional learning or professional development is now led by our people.	Confidence
P4	Being willing to take feedback in order to better yourself to lead in a more efficient way.	Confidence
P5	Empowering educators to lead in other facets other than just in their own learning center or their own classroom.	Confidence

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\*all the subthemes form the overarching theme "Empowerment."

**Support.** Support, as a sub-theme, was the most easily identified. Through the data analysis it was clear that there was prevailing sense from participants that teacher leaders want to help their colleagues. P1 said, as a teacher leader "you're trying to help them (other teachers) find solutions to their problems." P2 referenced supporting others, teacher leaders "help others see their positive and their strengths and then getting them to be a voice." P4 explained a system of support that is present within their district, "There was a large group of us and the teamwork that we've built throughout that and relying on each other for feedback." P1 echoed the value of a support system, "Support is built in and they (teachers) can keep working towards their professional goals."

**Ability.** The sub-theme of ability is centered around the concept of reflecting on your

own abilities as an educator. P1 stated, “Your ability to lead can come in multiple forms. It doesn't have to be a position of leadership.” This requires self-awareness and consideration. P1 clarified, “Defining your own leadership and in your own ability to lead and understanding that.” Ability is crucial to empowerment. Without awareness of your abilities the step toward empowerment is much larger. Knowing your ability helps bring focus to your role within a system and what you can offer to bring the organization forward. As P3 explains, “Kids know when you're a hard worker and you'll do what needs to be done.”

**Confidence.** The sub-theme of confidence gave a notion of “look at me now.” The participants projected a sense that their experiences had resulted in a confidence that has helped to shape themselves and the systems they are a part of. P3 expressed some of their personal growth, “We now can have a conversation with the administration. I feel when teachers are not trained in confrontation or hard conversations, sometimes it can sound like complaining.” P4 put confidence in the lens of feedback, “being willing to take feedback in order to better yourself to lead in a more efficient way.” P5 took the idea of confidence to the next level by showing confidence in their peers, “Empowering educators to lead in other facets other than just in their own learning center or their own classroom.”

**Summary.** Support, ability, and confidence are the sub-themes that make-up the overarching theme of empowerment. These sub-themes are interwoven. The three sub-themes work in sequence to result in empowerment. A person with a lower ability level can be supported by their system and colleagues to produce a subsequently higher level of confidence. Further, a person within a supportive system will have more confidence to develop expanded abilities and take initiative. The sub-themes of empowerment work in unison to raise the level of empowerment.

**Empowerment** as a theme was prevalent within the communication and feedback components of the interview. A component of this was presented by P3 and P4 as they described the importance and necessity of peers engaging in crucial conversations. P4 was encouraged by the principal to have a fierce conversation with a colleague that was depicting school issues negatively. The conversation centered around school norms, “that’s not how we like to talk about things” and had a positive outcome:

Now her and I have become very good friends and we work really well together. I don’t think that would have happened without learning how to have those fierce conversations because I would have just avoided having conversations with them, versus having those.

P2 also expressed the necessity for holding difficult conversations, “I feel when teachers are not trained in confrontation or hard conversations, sometimes it can sound like complaining as opposed to, ‘here’s what the issue is’.”

All participants expressed that structures were in place within their school systems to facilitate some of the inner workings of the school. P5 explained, “Our school has opened up opportunities for us to lead on a bigger scale. We’re leading little (professional development) sessions and people are rotating between so we can all lead in that facet.” Each participant also noted the presence of a leadership team, built of both administrators and other staff, that met on a regular basis. All participants explained a professional learning community structure that was vital to the success of each district. “Often times we’ll use a PLC for discussion of that just to bounce ideas off of each other,” said participant three. Participant two agreed, “It’s not just coming from the top down, it’s developing teams.”

The intentionality of the administration in building a system for teacher leadership

was another instance of empowerment. With only a portion of school staff involved in a formal leadership program, it is easy to see how some staff could build resentment or create a divide amongst the staff. In the interview process, this came up several times and participants explained how they worked through this hurdle with their administration and colleagues. Full staff inclusion and communication was expressed throughout the interviews. This was a notable example of communication and feedback. P3 shared, “I think our teachers who didn’t do TLA are learning that their opinions are valid, they’re important, and how to communicate those with the administration as well as other teachers.” P4 concurred:

I feel like that was the hardest part (staff divide) of going through (TLA). Any time we were working on something that was directly related to the district, we would send out what we were doing and asked for feedback before we finished doing any of it so that people felt like their voice was heard.

P3 shared similar thoughts, “We really tried to include those people in everything that we did. It wasn’t a ‘this is a TLA led’ thing.” They also recruited non-TLA staff into teams to “make sure they are on this committee and helping with this as well.” P5 expressed the importance of administration support, “they try to be very intentional about things not being top down and just making sure educators have a say or have their voice heard.”

### **Synthesis**

The essence of this research study is attempting to express the extent to which teacher leadership bolsters climate and culture. One of the biggest indicators of climate and culture is communication practices and feedback perceptions. In this area of each interview, it was apparent that each participant had a strong sense that teacher leadership has enhanced the communication and feedback of their school systems. P4 shared:

Our administrator is in my room at least once a week, just popping in to see what's going on, what's happening. Then having a conference with me afterwards to tell me what he saw happening in my room, the positives and then the things that maybe could be worked on for the next time.

Participants noted that they felt there were open lines of communication between teachers and administration. P2 stated, "I think it's pretty much an open-door policy. We have a scheduled staff meeting every Wednesday. We also have a leadership committee that has a variety of teachers involved that meet once a month." P3 agreed, saying, "I think we have really good, open lines of communication between all teachers and our administration."

The presence of some type of leadership committee was a concept that surfaced in all five interviews. Each of these districts had a group, or committee, in place that would meet regularly. The groups varied in composition, but always included administration and teachers. One also included support staff. The leadership team, or committee, is a place where difficulties that teachers are experiencing get shared back to administration. P5 explained:

Educators are on staff advisory and they can share thoughts, concerns, feelings from the whole staff. I'm not a member of that, but if I had a concern I needed to share, I would go to a leader that's on that team and they would be my voice at that team.

The idea of a more present teacher voice was also shared by P4, "I know that going through the leadership academy gave me a lot more confidence as a teacher. I felt like it showed me that I have good ideas, that my opinion mattered and that I needed to speak up when I felt like I needed to."

The participant perceptions of teacher leadership were ascertained through data

analysis and imaginative variation. P1 portrayed teacher leadership by saying, “part of that is defining your own leadership and in your own ability to lead and understanding that your ability to lead can come in multiple forms. It doesn’t have to be a position of leadership.” P5 agreed, “Teacher leadership is empowering educators to lead in other facets, other than just in their own learning center or their own classroom.” P2 continued, “You can’t do everything. You have leaders in different aspects, whether it be curriculum, technology, or other things.” P3 defined teacher leadership, in part by stating, “It’s when you’re willing to go out of your comfort zone to do things for the better of who you’re serving.”

Through a synthesis of the interview findings, broad themes emerged. These structures provide further depth to the study and offer a lens to answer the research questions.

### **Summary**

The predominant answer to the first research question is that teacher leadership does have a positive impact on climate and culture. The importance of the themes developed from this research is not that the positive relationship exists. That is logical at the surface. The significance is to realize the themes that must accompany a teacher leadership structure to ensure the success. The interview participants all expressed positive acclaims for teacher leadership within the right system and framework. The interviews suggest that a system missing the components of empowering, inclusion, and differentiated leadership would not be a success.

The answer to the second research question is that teacher leadership has a profound impact on communication and feedback perceptions. As with the first research question, the answer is not a surprise. The answer to the question is important, but the goal is to position the system of teacher leadership within a school district to yield the most positive results. To achieve that end, the structures of empowering, inclusion, and differentiated leadership need



to be paramount in the development of the leadership structure.

Conclusions and practical pathways will be laid out in relation to the findings of the study in Chapter Five. Additionally, Chapter Five contains further clarification of the findings in relation to the literature review and the theoretical framework. The researcher will also present a self-critique, examine limitations, make suggestions for further research, and provide final thoughts.

## **CHAPTER 5. DISSCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSION**

### **Introduction**

Throughout this study, teacher leadership was examined through the impact on climate and culture as well as its effects on communication and feedback perceptions. The perspectives of teacher leaders on these topical areas was the primary focus of this research. The purpose of Chapter Five is to evaluate the work of the researcher and provide personal insight into interpretation of the results. The primary function of Chapter Five is to accomplish two objectives: 1) assess whether the research addressed the needs that precipitated the study, and 2) make recommendations for future study.

To align with the first objective, the answers to the research questions will be scrutinized. The implications of the research questions will be discussed along with how the results align with previous literature. Specific attention will be made to analyze the findings of this research through the conceptual framework discussed in Chapter Two, the Four-Factor Model outlined by Angelle and DeHart (2016). The wider interest in this research study, along with the impacts, will also be reviewed. The researcher will demonstrate how the research questions were answered and the meaning within the overall positioning of teacher leadership as it relates to inclusion, differentiated leadership, and empowerment.

The second goal of Chapter Five is to make recommendations for future research on this important topic. Recommendations regarding design and potential methodological improvements will be suggested and additional data sources will be identified. Further research questions, as well as additional research problems to address will also be suggested.

### **Summary of the Results**

The need for this study was derived from a practical application of teacher leadership

systems. In essence, what could teacher leadership do for your school system. While teacher leadership practices vary from district to district, the literature suggests commonalities in how school districts implement teacher leadership models. Many teacher leaders act as mentors, lead grade level or content teams, or assist with communication tasks. Teacher leadership is also used as a vehicle to reach a variety of objectives within school districts.

Coquyt and Creasman (2017) help to outline some of these objectives:

More collaboration among teachers. A positive school culture, Teachers taking more risks and becoming more creative and innovative. Improved student achievement and professional practice. Empowerment of other stakeholders. Increased capacity for school transformation. Improved school leadership (Coquyt & Creasman, 2017, p.2).

The bulk of teacher leadership research is focused on the development of teacher leaders and the work they do (Cooper et. al., 2015). While these are important topics, the practical application of how teacher leadership practices impact the school system, is not as widely researched. Climate and culture, along with communication and feedback, are pillars of any organizational system (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2016; York-Barr & Duke, 2004)). The goal of this study was to determine to what extent a structure like teacher leadership would affect the system of a school district by focusing on climate and culture along with communication and feedback.

The need for this study (see Chapter One, pp.7-9) was to examine the relationship between teacher leadership and key areas of a school system. In essence, this study sought to explain the outcomes associated with the utilization of teacher leadership and explore how to reach the highest potential for an organization. One critical outcome of teacher leadership is stemming teacher burnout. “Teachers reporting high levels of burnout are often less tolerant

of student conduct, which may contribute to problematic student behavior through teachers; inability to mediate and calmly pacify potentially volatile situations” (Pas et al., 2012, p.130). This speaks directly to this research via the sub-theme of support, within the overarching theme of empowerment. In a system of teacher leadership, when a teacher is struggling with student behavior, there should be a system available to support that teacher. The system can offer support in the form of conversation, mentoring, or demonstration/observation.

As mentioned above, this study was designed to fill a gap within the research outlining the impacts of teacher leadership. Teacher leadership is a relatively new research topic. Most of the existing research on teacher leadership revolves around the training of teacher leaders and what teacher leaders do (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). There is not a wealth of knowledge on the impacts, both positive and negative, of incorporating a teacher leadership system. “The literature is relatively rich with claims of the potential and desired effects of teacher leadership and relatively sparse with evidence of such effects” (York-Barr & Duke, 2004, p.282). The results of this study were relatively positive. There were, however, some noted areas of concern and areas that need to be navigated to allow teacher leadership to flourish. Systems that implement teacher leadership reach their highest potential when the system has a framework of inclusion, differentiated leadership, and growth. The significance of the study (see Chapter One, pp. 8-9) is to determine if the added elements of teacher leadership could create a more desirable professional atmosphere and induce teachers to remain in the teaching profession. Teacher leadership is a way that we can better support teachers by bringing the teacher voice into decision-making, creating a higher sense of shared goal setting and visioning. Teacher leadership is a conduit to overcome many issues like teacher burnout, facing American schools today with potential solutions (Pas, et. al, 2011;

Sheppard & Dibbon, 2011).

The literature review encompassed several central themes: the history of teacher leadership, defining teacher leadership, distributed leadership, and teacher leader roles. The conceptual framework, the four-factor model of teacher leadership structure established by Angelle and Dehart (2016), was explored at length. The four-factor model of teacher leadership is depicted in Figure 1 (see Chapter Two, p. 19). Second, the history of teacher leadership was analyzed through the works of York-Barr and Duke (2004), Coquyt and Creasman (2017), and Sinha and Hanuscin (2017) to name a few. The literature review also addressed an array of teacher leadership definitions (Kahne & Westheimer, 2002; Angelle, 2010; Schrum & Levin, 2013). For the purposes of this research, Angelle's (2010) definition was most suited, "the sharing, the spreading, and the distributing of leadership work across individuals and roles across the school organization" (p. 2).

Distributed leadership was also clarified. Distributed leadership is one of the more noticeable outcomes from implementing teacher leadership constructs into a school's organizational structure. Teacher leadership inherently calls for an approach that give teacher leaders additional voice or control over conventional teaching models. Angelle (2010) defined distributed leadership as:

A linear, hierarchical model of leadership gives way to a model of leadership built on task expertise and context of the problem at hand. Thus, distributed leadership focuses on the goals of the group, rather than the action of the one (Angelle, 2010, p.3).

Additionally, the literature review focused on teacher leader roles. The work of Cheung, et.al. (2018) and Sinha and Hanuscin (2017) were compared with the four-factor

model of Angelle and DeHart (2016) (see Figure 2, pp. 27-28). The literature review also investigated the Teacher Leader Model Standards TLMS (2011) (see Figure 3 & 4, pp. 29-30). There is an undeniable overlap between the TLMS, the Four-Factor Model, and the themes of this research study. The components of inclusion, differentiated leadership, and empowerment are directly associated with the TLMS, and Four-Factor Model. In Chapter Two, Figure 3 showed the comparison of the TLMS with the Four-Factor Model. Figure 5 below incorporates the overarching themes of this study with the TLMS and Four-Factor Model.

**Figure 6**

<u>Research Themes</u>	<u>Angelle and DeHart</u>	<u>TLMS</u>
Differentiated Leadership	Sharing Leadership	Domain I: Fostering a collaborative culture
Inclusion	Sharing Expertise	Domain III: Promoting professional learning
		Domain IV: Facilitating improvements in instruction
	Principal Selection	
Empowerment	Supra-Practitioner	Domain II: Accessing and using research
		Domain V: Promoting the use of assessments and data
		Domain VI: Improving outreach and collaboration with families.

Phenomenological methodology was used to conduct this study. One-on-one interviews were conducted with five teachers. The interviews were used to bring the participant experiences with teacher leadership to light. The researcher was the primary

instrument and data was collected through video (Zoom) conferencing. Selective sampling was used to select participants. Superintendents, known to the researcher, were contacted and were asked to recommend participants for the study. Those recommended individuals became the participants in the study.

The data analysis methods for phenomenological research outlined by Moustakas (1994) along with Creswell and Poth (2018) were followed. The interviews were transcribed using the transcription program, Trint. The researcher listened to the audio recording and edited the transcription, as needed. The researcher used a system of open and axial coding. This system helped move into epoche. Phenomenological reduction, a system of grouping like ideas, helped form the horizontalization of significant statements. From the horizontalizations, the broad themes, or imaginative variation, were formed.

The findings indicate that teacher leadership has a positive impact on both school climate and culture, and it also enhanced communication and feedback. While the summary answer is that both research questions showed a positive relationship to teacher leadership, there were noticeable landmarks that need to be illuminated. The most prominent area of clarification focused on inclusion. For teacher leadership to yield positive outcomes the whole staff needs to be communicated with and included, at some level, of the process. Having a group of teacher leaders operate in a silo, apart from the rest of the staff, will likely lead to a more fractured climate and culture. This will be described in greater detail later in Chapter Five.

Differentiated leadership and empowerment were also overarching themes that were present throughout the analysis of research data. Providing opportunities to lead, or differentiated leadership along with empowerment, or building a system in which teachers

feel the support and confidence necessary to grow into a successful teacher and/or teacher leader.

### **Discussion of the Results**

This section relates and interprets the results of the study to the initial hypothesis of the researcher. The initial hypothesis and research questions will be construed based on the personal and professional experiences of the researcher. The aim of this section is to enlighten the practical and theoretical implications and meanings of the study for the reader. Three primary themes emerged as pivotal components of teacher leadership structures. Each of those components was comprised of three sub-themes. Inclusion: unity, collaboration, and growth. Differentiated leadership: strength, ownership, mindset. Empowerment: support, ability, and confidence.

Two research questions drove this study. The first research question was, “What is the impact of teacher leadership practices on culture and climate within public schools?” The second research question was, “To what extent does teacher leadership impact the communication and feedback perceptions of teachers within teacher leadership structures?” These questions were offered to gain an understanding of the core impacts of teacher leadership from the perspective of a teacher leader. “School culture is widely recognized as a dominant influence on the success of improvement initiatives in schools” (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). The interpersonal dynamics of a school system are the true drivers of climate and culture, as well as communication and feedback. How did teacher leadership affect the daily operation of the school system? In essence, did teacher leadership make it easier, or harder for teachers to work within the school system?

Communication and feedback, in terms of this study, are based around the



perceptions of the teachers within the school systems. Teachers receive communication and feedback at every school system. This research focused on what the group perception is about the goals of communication and feedback. The results of this study, outlined by the theme of empowerment, spoke to the nature of communication and feedback models related to teacher leadership. Feedback, or teacher evaluation, is purposeful, to the point of growing the skills and ability of the teacher and creating better learning environments for students. Feedback and evaluation is not a way to punish the teacher. Feedback cycles are critical to the development of every teacher. If a teacher were newer to the profession or not as skilled in a particular area, they would need more support. With a support structure in place, they can practice skills and receive feedback to build confidence. If the teacher is adept to a given area they would be used as an example to outline the necessary abilities and provide the necessary supports.

The short answer to both research questions was that a teacher leadership system had a positive impact on climate and culture, as well as communication and feedback. As expected, the interview results revealed more than a simple answer for the research questions. When the answers were in the affirmative, there were more practical impacts derived from the participants. Participants outlined specific examples of what quality teacher leadership looked like. The sub-themes were developed from these examples. P5 said, “We changed our mindset on what a leader is and who can be a leader.” This fell under the mindset sub-theme of differentiated leadership. P2 said, “We had to somehow get them (others) involved in what we were doing to make them feel like they were part of it.” This speaks to growth and inclusion. Each interview participant stressed that the whole staff needs to be included and become aware of the work that teacher leaders are doing. When the entire

staff is not included it creates a divide between the teacher leaders and the rest of the staff. This sentiment aligns with Thorton's (2010), assertion that the teacher leadership process may lead to a fracture in what was already a well-functioning system. Participants in this study referred to a fracture or rift forming when their teacher leadership program began. As P4 noted, "The first couple of things, we didn't really take any feedback. It wasn't until after that we started to notice a little rift."

Through the eyes of the participants, there was a clear benefit to teacher leadership. Having lived this experience, the participant's views on how to navigate the "rift" were intriguing. While participants did not use the same words to describe overcoming staff division, they did use statements related to the sub-themes of unity, collaboration, and growth. Inclusion surfaced as a necessary component to make teacher leadership successful. In some cases, it was the teacher leaders approaching the administration and discussing possible solutions from the standpoint of the teacher leader. Other times, the intentional intervention of administration was vital in the creation of teams of teachers. This ensured that it was not only the teacher leaders having a voice and doing all the work.

The common strand that surfaced was in order to have a teacher leadership system that works with high levels of effectiveness, you cannot allow those teacher leaders to operate in isolation from the rest of the staff. There are numerous ways a system can be developed to gather input or to carry out the work of the district. How these are implemented is different in each district, similar to the differing roles of teacher leaders. What needs to be constant is the overarching theme of inclusion. Open dialogue about the work being done and inviting in and soliciting input from other staff helps build inclusion. Additionally, this has the potential to foster the growth of more teacher leaders. Teachers can see the value of their

input toward the work being done. This can encourage more teachers to step forward to participate.

The participants in this study were all a part of the same TLA program and had somewhat similar experiences. The remedies for how to get the most positive results from the program are parallel with each other. Most importantly, the results turned out as they did for a simple reason, teacher leadership works.

### **Conclusions Based on the Results**

The conclusions based on the results section of this chapter will be presented over two sections. First, the findings will be examined using the conceptual framework and previous literature of this study. Second, the interpretation of the findings.

The conceptual framework for this study was the Four Factor Model. Dehart explained the components of the model in his 2011 dissertation.

The first factor, Sharing Expertise (SE), focuses on the perceptions of teachers' pedagogical and classroom management skills as well as their willingness to share those skills with their fellow teachers. The second factor, Sharing Leadership (SL), describes a reciprocal relationship existing between the principal and the teachers in a school. This factor is composed of two sub-factors: Leadership Opportunities (SLO) and Leadership Engagement (SLE). The first sub-factor depends upon a principal's attitude toward offering opportunities for teachers to engage in leadership practices, while the second sub-factor reflects teachers' inclination to take on leadership responsibilities. The perceptions of teachers' willingness to go above and beyond their prescribed roles are indicated by the third factor, Supra-Practitioner (SP). The final factor, Principal Selection (PS), measures the teachers' perceptions that the

principal controls which teachers may participate in leadership activities (DeHart, p.11, 2011).

### **Differentiated Leadership: strength, ownership, mindset**

The theme of differentiated leadership is quite similar to the domain of sharing leadership defined by Angelle and Dehart (2016). The participants in this study advocated for individual teachers to be afforded the opportunity to lead from where they were at. P4 said, “We learned to seek out more people in our district to solve the problems that we have here.” This statement fit the sub-theme of ownership. P2 said, “Leading in thing that you’re passionate about or have a good strength in.” This sentiment fit the sub-theme of strength. P5 said, “We changed our mindset on what a leader is and who can be a leader.” P5 went on to say, “You all can be leaders in your own way.” This fit the sub-theme of mindset. These statements developed into the sub-themes of strength, ownership, and mindset to form the overarching theme of differentiated leadership. This theme shows many similarities to the sharing leadership domain of the Four Factor Model. “While leadership in an organization should be viewed as a group effort, there can exist situations which demand a closer inspection of specific individuals within the group” (Angelle & Dehart, 2016, p.107). Participants noted the leadership opportunities were not the same for all and that people should lead where they are comfortable, such as PLC groups or serving on committees that were near a passion or strength area for the individual teacher. Angelle and Dehart (2016) agree, “leadership activities outlined in the four-factor model include those of both formal and informal teacher leaders” (Angelle & Dehart, 2016, p.107)

### **Inclusion: unity, collaboration, growth**

The theme of inclusion runs parallel to the domain of sharing expertise within the

four-factor model. The sub-themes of unity, collaboration, and growth formed the theme of inclusion. P1 described, “Making sure that the vision is cohesive and everybody’s working toward the same thing.” This was categorized to the sub-theme of unity. P2 said, “Collaboration with our leaning walks and collaborating with each other.” This was labeled as collaboration. P1 stated, “To have a voice and some ownership in the direction of the school.” This was characterized as the sub-theme of growth. Statements, such as these, helped to form the sub-themes of unity, collaboration, and growth. These sub-themes led to the overarching theme of inclusion. Inclusion is parallel to the four-factor domain of sharing expertise. Angelle and Dehart (2016) argue, “Sharing Expertise describes teachers; willingness to share skills and knowledge with their colleagues” (p.107).

**Empowerment: support, ability, confidence**

Supra-practitioner is another domain within the Four-Factor Model that is closely aligned with a theme within this research study, Empowerment. The supra-practitioner is defined as going above and beyond their prescribed roles. It is common to find strands of the supra-practitioner in other areas and domains of leadership. This was true of empowerment as well. The sub-themes of empowerment are support, ability, and confidence. P1 said, “You’re trying to help them find solutions to their problems.” This type of response fit nicely in the sub-theme of support. P3 spoke to the sub-theme of ability in her response, “Kids know when you’re a hard worker and you’ll do what needs to be done.” P4’s response related to the sub-theme of confidence, “Being willing to take feedback in order to better yourself to lead in a more efficient way.” These statements were categorized under the sub-theme of empowerment but have undertones of other sub-themes as well. Angelle and Dehart (2016) describe a similar premise, “behavior that is discretionary, not directly or explicitly

recognized by the formal reward system” (Angelle & Dehart, 2016, p.108).

While there were numerous commonalities between the research findings and the Four-Factor Model, there was some incongruence. The fourth factor of the model, principal selection, did not associate with any of the overarching themes of this study. Angelle and Dehart (2016) defined principal selection as, “perceptions that the principal selects specific teachers to engage in leadership activities while restraining others from those same responsibilities” (Angelle & Dehart, 2016, p.108). There were no statements from the participants in this study that associated with this idea.

It is entirely possible that the participants of this study have not seen or experienced this because they are often chosen to participate in leadership tasks. Within this study, it is more likely that the selection of those to participate in leadership or not was done by the teachers themselves when they made the choice to join the teacher leadership academy. Angelle and Dehart (2016) go on to explain something very similar to what the participants of this study experienced, “a principal creates an in-group, excluding other teachers who are then considered part of the out-group. Out-group members may feel resentment towards members of the in-group and may downplay the importance of leadership activities” (Angelle & Dehart, 2016, p.108). This rift was discussed above under the theme of inclusion. While the theme was set apart, the sentiment of the participants appears to be a close match.

Another notable divergence between this study and that of the four-factor model is that the four-factor model was developed as a tool to partially measure the effectiveness of teacher leadership. The themes and findings of this study went a step further. The aim was not in assessing teacher leadership, the goal of this study was to ascertain the depth of impact of teacher leadership on climate and culture and communication and feedback. The notable

themes that emerged: differentiated leadership, empowerment, and inclusion are certainly themes present within effective teacher leadership systems but the themes themselves are describing the impact of teacher leadership toward climate and culture.

### **Comparison of the Findings with the Framework and Previous Literature**

This study leans on the four-factor model, developed by Angelle and DeHart (2016), as the conceptual framework. Angelle and DeHart (2016) laid out four areas of teacher leadership to assist in building improved systems and an assessment tool for teacher leadership. Briefly, the components of the four-factor model are: Sharing Expertise, Sharing Leadership, Supra-Practitioner, and Principal Selection. Each of the four areas were evident in this research study. The area that stood out the most was the Supra-Practitioner. A Supra-Practitioner is a teacher who goes above and beyond their prescribed role on a regular basis. Sometimes those efforts spill into another area, like sharing expertise, but many of the positive impacts of teacher leaders originate from the supra-practitioner zone. This aligns with the related literature on teacher leadership. Part of this alignment may be due to a lack of a universal definition of teacher leadership. The supra-practitioner domain does not have a strict definition. Several actions taken by teachers fall under the supra-practitioner heading. As noted in Chapter Two, more recent works on teacher leadership focus more on actions, growth, and development. Coquyt and Creasman (2017) emphasize the importance of the intentionality and process in developing teacher leaders. Sinha and Hanuscin (2017) agree that the process to develop teacher leaders is crucially important. Pointing to the processes of teacher leadership, in effect, points toward the area of the Supra-Practitioner.

As it relates to this study, participants did note areas where the other areas of the four-factor model are prevalent in the teacher leadership systems of their schools. Leading staff

professional developments, participating in committees, and being involved in professional learning communities were all examples. There were continual references from participants that fall under supra-practitioner. The elements that really make a system effective are within the domain of the supra-practitioner. Pieces such as communicating with administration, encouraging peers to participate/lead, and gauging students for the climate and culture of the building. There was a strong presence within this area of teacher leadership present in this study.

These definitions given by the participants are consistent with the literature on teacher leadership. There is not a consistent definition. There is agreement that teacher leaders impact an area outside of their classroom and are willing to get involved in other growth areas of a district. This is consistent with the domain of the supra-practitioner within the four-factor model and the overarching theme of empowerment.

### **Interpretation of the Findings**

This study asserts that there is a correlation between teacher leadership and positive climate and culture along with improved communication and feedback perceptions. The previous literature supports this claim. The Teacher Leadership Exploratory Consortium (2011) offered substantive support to this concept stating, “This new paradigm of teacher leadership requires a transformation of the culture of teaching and the organizational structures of schools” (p. 27). Angelle and Dehart (2016) agree with their statement, “Besides the teacher leader, colleagues are positively affected by teacher leadership in the forms of assistance with instructional practice, support with disruptive students, and overcoming resistance to organizational change” (p.91). These ideas interconnect with the themes of inclusion and empowerment.



The sub-themes under inclusion: unity, collaboration, and growth share several components with the domains contained in the Teacher Leader Model Standards (TLMS). Specifically, Domain I: Fostering a collaborative culture to support education development and student learning and Domain III: Promoting professional learning for continuous improvement can be associated with some of the results from this study, specifically, the theme of inclusion. The utilization of group processes, modeling effecting listening, presenting and discussion skills, along with employing facilitation skills to create trust among colleagues are tightly associated with the sub-themes of inclusion: unity collaboration, and growth. The functions of Domain III are further examples of commonalities and similarities between the literature and the research. Collaborating with colleagues and school administrators, facilitating professional learning, provides constructive feedback to colleagues (TLMS, 2011). These functions are further supported by this research.

York-Barr and Duke (2004) connect the concept of climate and culture to this study, “Overall, the research on teacher leadership effects on colleagues and their classroom and school-level practices suggests that school culture is a considerable obstacle to be overcome if the potential positive effects are to be realized” (p.285). The statement by York-Barr and Duke is the foundation of what the participants of this study said. There is great impact with teacher leadership, as long as the proper groundwork is laid.

The theme of empowerment was the sole idea that rose to the level of a theme to be associated with communication and feedback. Empowerment is a critical component of this research. Coquyt and Creasman (2017) state, “there is a fine line between abandonment and trust. Too much freedom and not enough influence doesn’t equate to empowerment” (Coquyt & Creasman, 2017, p.75). This statement is reinforced by my research. Empowerment is a

cyclical process. The sub-themes of support, ability, and confidence build off one another. “Teacher leadership is too critical not to have a plan of empowerment that includes support” (Coquyt & Creasman, 2017, p.75). P4 stated, “There was a large group of us and the teamwork that we’ve built throughout and relying on each other for feedback.” P1 agreed, “Giving people guidance and focus of what we do.” There is an interplay between the sub-themes of empowerment. “Teacher leaders during the Empowerment phase must have the ability to experience leadership and also the added support that is meant to help, not smother, their leadership development” (Coquyt & Creasman, 2017, p.75).

Coquyt & Creasman (2017) also use confidence as a component of their study on teacher leadership. “Empowerment is achieved when the teacher leader has acquired the proper skills needed to make informed decisions (individually or as part of a group) that affect their school or district” (p.77). This sentiment aligns well with the findings of this study. P5 said, “I think a huge instrumental change at our school is our professional learning or professional development is now led by our people.” That statement was given as a reflection of where their district was prior to teacher leadership compared to where they are now. Teacher leadership empowers individuals to take on leadership. The sub-theme of confidence is integral to that process. “The hand-holding is over and the training wheels are off. A word that embraces this phase is confidence” (Coquyt & Creasman, 2017, p.77). Not only is the administrator showing confidence in the teacher leaders, but also the teachers and teacher leaders are showing confidence in one another that they have the support and ability to complete the assigned task.

York-Barr and Duke (2004) give some insight into why this study yielded these results. “The most consistently documented positive effects of teacher leadership or on the

teacher leaders themselves, supporting the belief that leading and learning are interrelated” (p. 288). This study asked teacher leaders about teacher leadership. As York-Barr and Duke exhibited, the teacher leadership themselves see the greatest positive impacts of teacher leadership structures.

Much of the literature associated with teacher leadership is supportive of this study. York-Barr and Duke (2004) along with Edmore (1990) outline the growing professional responsibilities of teachers and the pivotal role they have in education. These statements support the themes of differentiated leadership and empowerment. Coquyt and Creasman (2017), Phelps (2008), and Sinha and Hanuscin (2017) emphasize the importance of the process in the development of teacher leaders. This is synonymous with the theme of inclusion. Kahne and Westheimer (2012) as well as Schrum and Levin (2013) both emphasize the importance of the teacher leaders’ impact on their current setting along with their future impact to guide the school system forward. This ideal shares commonalities with all the sub-themes of empowerment: support, ability, and confidence.

The shared leadership dynamics outlined by Angelle (2010), Binkhorst et al. (2017) Copland (2003) and Gronn (1996) run parallel to the key components of this study. These researchers reference a horizontal approach to leadership where much of the leadership work is shared across the group. This type of leadership structure matches the components of differentiated leadership in which people lead in areas of their strengths. It also speaks to the theme of inclusion in with collaboration within a group is emphasized.

Stolp and Smith (1995) and Gondor and Hymes (1994) highlight the importance of climate and culture within an organization. This notion was evident throughout this study. The participants each noted the initial turbulence they experienced when their teacher

leadership systems were established. Inclusion was the main overarching theme that participants referenced as the major assistance to overcome the negative issues and divide they were experiencing as a staff.

Cheung, et al. (2018), York-Barr and Duke (2004) along with Coquyt and Creasman (2017) agree on the premise that teacher leadership is malleable and differs in look and feel from district to district. This truth is aligned with the theme of differentiated leadership. The theme is built from the idea that teachers are best suited to lead in areas of strength. The research supports this concept.

Pas, et al. (2012) exposes a system that is flush with training and leadership experiences that are also experiencing high levels of teacher turnover and burnout. Cooper, Brondyk, and Macaluso (2015) contend that if climate and culture are not strong, there is no amount of training that will overcome this hurdle. The first step has to be in building the climate and culture to a point where teacher leadership can be introduced. This can be done by focusing on the three themes of this study. Placing and emphasis on inclusion, empowerment, and differentiated leadership will have a positive impact on climate and culture. Growing the climate and culture is a critical step. If the system has a weak foundation the introduction of new plans, however well intentioned, will result in negative outcomes. Peterson and Conway (2011) frame this concept in the context of continual improvement.

There are areas where the literature and this study do not match. One such area is associated with strained teacher-administrator relationships. Grayson and Alvarez (2008) studied burnout and efficacy levels of teachers. Their research suggests that the combination of teacher preparedness and perceptions of teacher leadership perceptions led to strained

relationships with teachers and administration. This study found no such correlation. This study found that administrators were integral to the success of teacher leadership systems and played a large role in the implementation of all three overarching themes. It is reasonable to assume that if administration did not actively participate and help lead the teacher leadership effort that the claims made by Grayson and Alvarez (2008) would come to fruition.

Another area of divergence is associated with teacher burnout. Pucella (2011) along with Pas et al (2012) provide an overview of teacher burnout factors. Teacher leadership does provide a framework to avoid several burnout factors such as additional support and enhanced collaboration. Teacher leadership itself is one-step removed from factors associated with teacher burnout.

Finally, Thornton (2010) demonstrated a system that was functioning well that had negative impacts from teacher leadership. This study indicated that a well-run system could experience shortcomings and growing pains and that taking the risks associated with teacher leadership may not be worth the reward. This study finds the contrary to be true. In well-run systems, the benefits are enormous. This is not to say that attention to detail is not necessary. Even in an already flourishing system it is necessary to have solid groundwork laid and emphasize the themes of inclusion, differentiated leadership, and empowerment. If these themes are fostered and cared for, the benefits to the system stand to be great. If they are not given due diligence, there could very well be a negative impact on the system. That is not a downfall of teacher leadership. Not planning appropriately or doing the necessary work to push an organization to the next level, whatever that level is, should be the goal of leadership. To not engage in that growth is a failure in leadership.

### **Limitations**

While this study did produce the necessary data to answer the research questions, there were also limitations to this study. This phenomenological study was designed to show the real-world connections of teacher leadership to the inner workings of school districts' systems, largely the climate and culture along with communication and feedback components.

The first limitation is the size of the sample. While the information gathered from the participants was powerful, having a larger number of participants would help to bolster the credibility and vibrance of the study. The larger sample could have resulted in a different research technique. Having survey data and a larger sample size could have added a depth and richness that this study lacks.

The structure of the interviews in this study was also a limitation. The questions asked during the interviews did an adequate job in drilling into aspects of teacher leadership. To go a bit deeper, the structure of the questions could have been improved to elicit further explanation from the participants. This was especially evident when completing the data analysis around the research question on communication and feedback. The participants offered wonderful insights. The questions did not fully engage the participants toward the end result of answering the research questions. The questions were better suited for gaining insight into teacher leadership and less toward communication and feedback or climate and culture.

Another area of improvement in this study was the lack of field observations. The process of interviewing teacher leaders and gaining their insights was invaluable. To get a deeper understanding of the impacts of teacher leadership observations of the school systems would have provided even further data and context. To best understand the lived experiences

around teacher leadership, and go beyond a base level of understanding, field observations would have made a great deal of difference.

Finally, the participants all had a similar lived experience with teacher leadership. The participants had all completed the Teacher Leadership Academy through NDSU and therefore had shared experiences and opinions. Their shared ideals and shared experiences resulted in a rather homogeneous data set. The selection of the TLA program through NDSU was something that the researcher knew about and was comfortable with. Had a different set of criteria been used to recruit and select participants, then a broader set of viewpoints would have been brought into the study. As it was completed, the viewpoints are rather limited.

This study also only looks at the impacts of teacher leadership through the eyes of the participants, who were teacher leaders. To get a truer sense of the impact of teacher leadership on climate and culture including interviews with teacher who are not engaged in formal or informal leadership would have added a sense of depth. Do the “regular” teachers that work alongside teacher leaders look upon teacher leadership with such a positive perspective? This study did not take that under consideration.

As a researcher, I felt a need to conduct this study as a qualitative study and learn about teacher leadership impacts through the eyes and experiences of teacher leaders through a conversation with them. A different design approach could enhance the quality of results. Creating a quantitative study dealing with more survey results and response data could result in a larger data set and a more robust inventory of reactions.

### **Delimitations**

This research study focused on the connection between teacher leadership with climate and culture, along with communication and feedback. There were delimitations, that

if investigated further, may add to the understanding of quality implementation of teacher leadership. This study was not designed to expand on the best practices in implementing a teacher leadership system. There were noticeable themes that emerged throughout the interview and data analysis process that pointed to implementation and best practice. However, the interview question set was not designed to expand upon these areas.

### **Implications of the Study**

The implications of this study are two-fold. First, the implications and knowledge base for teacher leadership. Second, the practical implications this research has for the wider community of stakeholders. The purpose of this study was not to create a new theory, nor to prove any theory right or wrong. The goal was to understand the phenomena of teacher leadership and how it affects climate and culture and communication and feedback. Teacher leadership through the overarching themes of inclusion, differentiated leadership, and empowerment have a positive impact on climate and culture and communication and feedback.

This study added to the literature available on teacher leadership. It filled a gap in the literature related to the impact of teacher leadership on climate and culture and communication and feedback. This study showed the positive connection between teacher leadership and climate and culture and communication and feedback through inclusion, differentiated leadership, and empowerment. The previous research outlined a variety of teacher leadership roles and definitions along with a history of teacher leadership. This study connected the school climate and culture with teacher leadership systems. The same is true for communication and feedback systems and teacher leadership.

This study deepened the understanding of teacher leadership as it relates to climate



and culture and communication and feedback by illustrating a positive correlation. According to the participants, teacher leadership is a valued system, with several advantages. A more positive climate and culture will help to reduce several teacher burnout factors (Pas, et al. 2012; Pucella, 2011). Further, creating an environment with a shared and unified vision leads to higher workplace satisfaction and improved morale (Schrum & Levin, 2013).

To the wider community of stakeholders, this study not only depicted the connection of teacher leadership with climate and culture and communication and feedback practices, but it also outlined a set of necessary practices to implement in order to get the highest impact from implementing a system of teacher leadership. These practices include, but are not limited to, identifying leadership and leading professional learning from within your own school system, collaborating between teacher and administrative teams to reach a shared vision of the school system, and displaying confidence in the structures and systems put in place within a school system to accomplish their desired goals.

Participants agreed that teacher leadership has had a positive impact on their school districts. Teacher leadership promotes shared responsibility and leadership tasks throughout a group of teacher leaders and actively involve all teachers. Participants also agreed that without giving proper attention to the system of teacher leadership, there could be negative results. Quality teacher leadership systems require purposeful communication with the whole staff. This is not to say that every teacher needs to be directly involved in each conversation, but an awareness that these conversations are happening is important. A system of communication needs to be implemented so that the whole staff is aware of the conversations taking place and have opportunities to offer input. This creates a two-way street that is necessary to avoid division amongst staff. Scenarios that can adversely impact culture and

climate are more easily avoidable when everyone is aware of their roles and responsibilities and there is a clear pathway to offer input.

Soliciting input is crucial to the success of a teacher leadership system. Teacher leaders need to reach out to those that are not on a given committee or group to hear their voice. When that is done in a systematic and trusting fashion, others can plainly see the power of their voice and more fully trust and support the system. Both the teacher leaders and administration must be intentional in this process. Once a system is in place, it is easy to allow the system to run and omit the feedback process in favor of more speed and efficiency. In the case of teacher leadership, this will lead to division amongst staff and have a negative impact on climate and culture of the school setting.

This research is crucial for those that are considering implementing a teacher leadership system within their school system. First, it is important to understand the benefits of what a teacher leadership system can bring to a school district. The positive relationship between teacher leadership and climate and culture along with communication and feedback are massive selling points to bring a system of teacher leadership to a school system. There is also a domino effect of what a positive climate and culture has on the retention of quality teachers, student achievement, community support and so on. Equally important is the understanding of what must be present to effectively implement a teacher leadership structure. If the administration and teacher leaders are not prepared to be intentional about communication and inclusion of the rest of the staff, the district would be better served by avoiding teacher leadership and adhering to more traditional bureaucratic practices. Without those inputs, teacher leadership will likely have a negative impact on climate and culture and result in negative outcomes for the school system. The benefits to teacher leadership are

sizable. The setting and implementation must be built and supported properly in order to realize those benefits.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Recommendations for future research related to the impact of teacher leadership were drawn from the data and from the design of the research study. This study used the researcher and interviews as the main data collection resources for the study. A future study could incorporate journaling by the participants or the use observations by the researcher. A fundamental shift to a quantitative study would rely on more survey data and offer a whole new set of data to review. In-person observations would also gain some insights to the impact of teacher leadership through observing tone and body language of interactions, like staff meetings where teacher leadership is being discussed that include the entire teaching staff.

Slight adjustments to the research rationale could yield different results. This study focused on schools that had teachers participate in the teacher leadership academy program offered through NDSU. If a researcher broadened the potential sample group, you would likely get a different data set in return.

Another recommendation to gain further insight on the impact of teacher leadership is to study those that work with teacher leaders. How do teachers that are not in teacher leadership roles or programs feel about teacher leadership? A separate study could also target this population as the sample of a study to gain further insights. Teacher leaders seem to feel that the practice of teacher leadership has an impact on those around them and the district. Do those that are not teacher leaders feel the same way?

### **Conclusion**

The conclusion section begins with a summary of the study, followed by concise

answers to the research questions, and ends with a reflection and concluding thoughts of the researcher.

### **Summary**

Teacher leadership, as a system, has been evolving for many years to meet changing needs of teachers, students, administrators, and communities. Each teacher leadership system is unique to the school and community it serves. While the uniqueness of teacher leadership does present some holistic challenges in training and implementation, the uniqueness is also what makes quality teacher leadership systems flourish.

This study consisted of interviews of five individuals who had previously participated in the Teacher Leadership Academy, a Master of Education program offered through North Dakota State University. The literature review explored prior research on teacher leadership, climate and culture, and communication and feedback. This included the conceptual framework for this study, the four-factor model of teacher leadership, developed by Angelle and DeHart (2016).

This qualitative study used a phenomenological approach to achieve a further understanding of teacher leadership on those that had participated in a teacher leadership program. Specifically, the researcher was looking for relationship of teacher leadership with climate and culture, as well as communication and feedback. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to gain insight from the perspective of the teacher leader. The phenomenological approach developed by Moustakas (1994) was followed to identify themes.

Three major themes emerged from the data analysis of the interviews. The themes were: inclusion, empowerment, and differentiated leadership. Elements of these themes were

prevalent throughout the coding process. Each overarching theme was comprised of three sub-themes. The theme of inclusion was developed from the sub-themes unity, collaboration, and growth. Differentiated leadership was comprised the sub-themes strength, ownership, and mindset. Empowerment encompassed of the sub-themes support, ability, and confidence. The three overarching themes clarify the connection of teacher leadership with climate and culture and with communication and feedback. In doing so, the research questions of this study were directly addressed.

### **Research questions**

This study was dedicated to two overarching research questions designed to investigate the impact of teacher leadership and the outcomes or results provided a series of best practices for instituting a teacher leadership system.

The first research question was: What is the impact of teacher leadership practices on culture and climate within public schools? The findings related to this question were clear. There is an impact of teacher leadership on the climate and culture of the school system. How positive or negative that impact is relies on the groundwork and the commitment of the teacher leaders and administrators. Research participants in this study all had positive experiences with teacher leadership and said that teacher leadership had a positive impact on their school system. The participants also experienced some short-term fractures and drawbacks during the process. The nature of teacher leadership is that the system elevates a group of teachers to participate in additional leadership work.

The positive impact of teacher leadership on climate and culture tethered to the central themes of the data analysis: empowerment, inclusion, and differentiated leadership, emerged as overarching themes. The themes of inclusion and differentiated leadership were

more closely associated with the first research question. Each of these themes was comprised of three sub-themes. Inclusion is comprised of the sub-themes: unity, collaboration, and growth. After experiencing the drawbacks of teacher leadership and the rift with colleagues, teacher leaders and administration began to intentionally work to include a large portion of the staff in leadership. At times, this was just through communication and seeking feedback, other times it was gathering additional participants for a committee. What the result of their work will be. The purposeful and intentional practice of including all staff as some level within the decision-making process proved to be valuable. In environments where all staff are included and feel their voice is valued, climate and culture soar.

Differentiated leadership consisted of the sub-themes: strength, ownership, and mindset. The participants in this study believed that leadership is everywhere and developing a system for each teacher to lead, in their own way, was crucial to the success of the system. Some teachers may seek more conventional leadership opportunities like leading PLC groups or presenting at state conferences. Others may lead by helping refresh school policy or being an instructional leader within their curriculum team. The participants acknowledged these levels of leadership, that are sometimes overlooked, as an essential component to the success of a teacher leadership system.

The second research question was: To what extent does teacher leadership impact the communication and feedback perceptions of teachers within teacher leadership structures? Teacher leadership does have an impact on communication and feedback perceptions. Again, how great, or how positive the impact was dependent on the formal implementation of the system. In response to the second research question, empowerment was the major theme. In this case, participants defined empowerment through the sub-themes of support, ability, and

confidence. For each study participant, there was a system in place for a concern to be brought to the administration or decision maker. This system is laid out for all staff so they can make their voice heard to the proper individuals. This system of communication is vitally important to the success of teacher leadership. Without an intentional system designed to gather concerns, the views of teacher leaders owning the power of the whole system will develop and form rifts among staff.

The intentionality of the administration in building a system for teacher leadership is the cornerstone of the empowerment theme and central to the issue of communication and feedback. Successful teacher leadership models are built in a fashion in which teacher leaders are given roles. Sometimes these roles come with a title or an increase in pay. Sometimes they come with a seat on a committee or being asked to share feedback on a specific issue. In any case, the system is developed around the empowerment of teacher leaders to work within the system to yield more positive outcomes for the district. Within these systems the end goal of positive outcomes of the district is the undeniable desired outcome. With that, growth feedback is more readily received and given. Feedback is not delivered in a manner that suggests “you are a poor teacher”. Often, it is given in a way that suggests, “our students will be more successful if...”. This is a meaningful and powerful difference. The success of the overall unit is driven by the growth of the teachers and adequate feedback is necessary for growth.

Teacher leadership has an impact on climate and culture along with communication and feedback processes. How immense that impact is, is largely characterized by the systems put in place to support teacher leadership along with the efforts of the teacher leaders themselves in concert with administration. Teacher leadership, when implanted successfully,

has the potential to have incredibly powerful impacts on school systems.

### **Researcher's Reflection**

In completing this study, several skills were improved by the researcher. A study, such as this, puts the researcher in a place to reflect and remove existing thoughts and perceptions on a given topic. As a novice scholar, my research skills were improved. The process to undertake the wealth of available literature and synthesize information into usable segments for this study was invaluable. As a novice researcher, my interview skills were improved. The temperament necessary to step out of the spotlight and allow the participant to fully articulate a response and then dive a bit deeper with a follow-up question was another area of improvement.

The literature review provided a history of teacher leadership. The review also offered definitions of teacher leadership and outlined the roles of teacher leaders. Most importantly, the literature review provided a synthesis of prior study to help position this study within a gap of research, relating teacher leadership impacts on climate and culture and communication and feedback.

As a practitioner, this study had a profound impact. Listening to teacher leaders reflect on the components that make a teacher leadership system successful was profound. The emphasis on inclusion and continued commitment to the process of teacher leadership was career altering. There is a temptation to build the system and eventually remove pieces for the sake of speed and efficiency. From the mouths of teacher leaders, this will lead to failure. Teacher leadership has the potential to have a profound impact in any school district. Creating the right communication and leadership systems to support and complement teacher leadership and the benefits can be enormous.



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**Appendix A****Interview Questions**

1. How long have you worked here?
2. What made you want to participate in the TLA?
3. What is different about how your school operates since TLA?
4. What opportunities are there for teachers to participate in leadership?
5. Explain to me what you know about teacher leadership? How would you define teacher leadership?
6. How would you characterize the climate and culture of your school?
7. What measures do you take to get a pulse on the climate and culture of your school?
8. What impact do you think teacher leadership has on your climate and culture?
9. What does teacher leadership look like in your district?
10. How do “big changes” get rolled out in your school? What role to teachers have in that process?
11. What sort of communication/collaboration is there between teacher leaders and administration?
12. What about between the rest of the teaching staff and those teachers that have been involved in teacher leadership?
13. What shortcomings or growing pains have you witnessed or experienced with teacher leadership?
14. Overall, how would you describe or assess the effectiveness of teacher leadership?