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Los Angeles

Teacher Leadership:

Exploring what supports and sustains elementary teachers as leaders

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements for the degree Doctor of Education

by

Kristin Stacy Artim

2015

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## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Teacher Leadership:

Exploring what supports and sustains elementary teachers as leaders

by

Kristin Stacy Artim

Doctorate of Education

University of California, Los Angeles, 2015

Professor Megan Loef Franke, Chair

Teachers as leaders may provide additional leadership to build school capacity, but there is minimal understanding of how to cultivate teacher leadership. Twenty-seven elementary teacher leaders in southern California were interviewed about what experiences led them to become and supported them as teacher leaders. Ideas around how they became teacher leaders, who and what influenced their leadership, and why they pursued certain leadership roles were collected. The findings showed how these teachers had a passion in education that drove them to lead and sustained them as a leader; relationships formed the foundation of why and how they led; and their leadership journeys had unique nuances, but were similar in the patterns of their development. These stories showed that leadership can be cultivated and challenged the idea that leaders are born.

The dissertation of Kristin Stacy Artim is approved.

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2015

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## **Chapter One: Introduction**

Teacher leadership leads to productive work for the school and the teachers themselves. When the school I worked at changed from a half to full-day kindergarten program, two additional teachers were added to make a team of five and none of us had experience teaching full-day kindergarten. Through an initial collaborative meeting we discussed how to best meet the needs of our students as we transitioned by 1) developing a kindergarten curriculum for the full-day program, 2) attending professional development around balanced literacy, and 3) observing kindergarten programs that transitioned to full-day and asking the kindergarten teachers and principals questions regarding this experience. After discussing our plan with the principal, she provided funds for us to attend a balanced literacy conference led by Lucy Calkins and arranged observations of two schools with a similar student population that had recently implemented a full-day kindergarten program.

Our collaboration centered on how to best meet our students' needs. We chose to put in the extra time and effort because we knew it would support improving student outcomes. Our observations of full-day kindergarten and discussions with the kindergarten teachers and principals helped us determine the best way to approach the transition to full-day kindergarten. Based on this information we made a few suggestions that our principal honored. The balanced literacy conference allowed us to reflect on our practice. After which, we met as a team three times during the summer to develop our full-day curriculum. Previous curriculum plans, state standards, professional books, and the conference we attended guided our thinking in these productive meetings. While

many issues were anticipated and addressed prior to the school year starting, there were times we had to modify or change the decisions we initially made.

We continued some of the traditions we had formed during our summer sessions. For our weekly level meetings, we had an agenda and created a new agenda at the end of each meeting, came prepared with ideas regarding our agenda, and brought snacks to enjoy. We also started a new tradition, where our whole team – teachers and T.A.s – went out for dinner each month. We recognized the importance of understanding one another professionally and personally, and respecting how each of us had talents to offer our team and students. We built relationships, appreciated each other's expertise, and organized our thoughts collectively as a way to take onus of the changes, which provided great benefits of reflecting and refining our practice to support our students.

### **The Problem**

School leaders have increasingly demanding roles (Bottoms & O'Neill, 2001; Combs, Edmonson, & Jackson, 2009; Fullan, 1998; Queen & Queen, 2005; West, Peck, & Reitzug, 2010; Whitaker, 1995) and their job stress keeps growing over time (Boyland, 2011; Brock & Grady, 2002; Cushing, Kerrins, & Johnstone, 2003; Queen & Queen, 2005; Whitaker & Turner, 2000). With the growing roles and stress of a school leader, viewing a principal as the sole, hierarchical leader responsible for school climate is an unrealistic expectation. The role of teachers in leadership then becomes critical for building school capacity (Leithwood, Seashore-Louis, Anderson & Wahlstrom, 2004; Spillane, 2006). However, little is known about what drives teachers to take on leadership opportunities and what supports teachers to do so. Thus, through this qualitative research

study, I analyzed what elementary teachers said about the experiences and opportunities that led them to become teacher leaders.

### **The Need for Teacher Leadership**

With rising pressure and responsibilities, a principal is unable to serve as the only instructional leader in a school, but requires the participation of other educators (Lambert, 2002). Lambert argues that other instructional leaders, such as teachers and curriculum coordinators, and additional leadership roles are needed for positive student and teacher learning. Starting in the 2000s, the teacher leadership role developed to include structural and regulatory activities and evolved to conceptual and visionary activities (Leon & Davis, 2009). Evidence shows that teacher leaders share in school wide decisions regarding the mission, goals, policies, programs, operations, and assessments, and are deeply invested in promoting collaborative cultures of inquiry and learning organizations focused on better teaching and learning for all students (Silva, Gimbert, & Nolan, 2000; Spillane, 2006). Considering the various ways teacher leaders may be involved in a school, teacher leadership may entail informal leadership or formal leadership, such as holding a specific leadership role.

### **Benefits of Teacher Leadership**

Fostering the development of teacher leaders builds sustainable school capacity. Nurturing all school employees as reflective and skillful leaders, improving student achievement, and developing schools and districts as sustainable organizations, expands leadership capacity (Lambert, 2003). Teacher leaders can improve instruction (York-Barr & Duke, 2004) and student learning and outcomes (York-Barr & Duke, 2004; Reeves, 2008) and influence colleagues toward better educational practice (Katzenmeyer &

Moller, 2009; Reeves, 2008). Teacher leadership creates a fluid, reciprocal, and interactive relationship, in which those involved influence one another (Anderson, 2004). The benefits of teacher leadership include professional efficacy, teacher retention, adaptability to change, career advancement, improvement of practice, ability to influence other teachers, accountability for results, and sustainability (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009). Barth (2001) found teacher leadership improves student outcomes, engages teachers in professional learning and decision-making, and helps alleviate some of the principal's responsibilities. Teacher leaders choose to take on more responsibility due to many factors such as a desire to make a larger impact beyond their class and to construct understanding and continually improve practice.

### **My Study**

Since the focus of this study was on what experiences and opportunities elementary teachers had that led them to become and supported and sustained them as teacher leaders, I interviewed teacher leaders. This exploratory, qualitative research study provided evidence to support an understanding of how we can nurture and cultivate teacher leadership as a means to present other forms of leadership needed to build school capacity. I investigated what experiences and opportunities teachers said influenced them to become teacher leaders in relation to shared decision making, collaboration, active participation, professional learning, and activism such as using data to inform practice and/or mentoring fellow colleagues. I collected stories from teachers representing a variety of both formal and informal leadership roles. I also studied what they found supportive and challenging in becoming leaders. Acknowledging teachers' voices regarding their experiences that led and sustained them to lead is key because teachers

have the biggest in-school impact on student learning. Leveraging their voice and providing leadership may improve teaching practices and encourage collaboration and growth at a school.

### **Research Questions**

This study answered the following research questions:

- 1) What leads elementary teacher leaders to take on leadership roles, and what importance do they attach to these?
- 2) What experiences and opportunities do elementary teacher leaders perceive as supporting and sustaining their roles as teacher leaders? Do they report that certain experiences were critical for supporting and sustaining their leadership roles?

## **Chapter Two: Literature Synthesis**

### **Introduction**

School principals' responsibilities continue to grow (Bottoms & O'Neill, 2001; Combs, Edmonson, & Jackson, 2009; Queen & Queen, 2005; West, Peck, & Reitzug, 2010) and so does their stress level (Boyland, 2011; Brock & Grady, 2002; Cushing, Kerrins, & Johnstone, 2003; Queen & Queen, 2005). The belief that the principal should be the only leader in a school becomes more impractical as the needs and accountability of schools increase. Distributed leadership helps address the challenges faced by principals in schools today (Leithwood, Seashore-Louis, Anderson & Wahlstrom, 2004; Spillane, 2006). This type of school leadership supports the idea of having teacher leaders who can build sustainable school practices. Teacher leaders implement school reform, revise instructional programs, coach fellow teachers, foster a school environment conducive to learning, or assume other leadership tasks (York-Barr & Duke, 2004).

Teacher leadership has the potential to positively impact the school climate by improving students' learning and the professional work of principals and classroom teachers.

Currently, the research provides information regarding the different types of leadership in education, but there is a lack of information regarding how educators become leaders and what supports leadership.

In this literature review I focus first on principal turnover and their overwhelming and demanding roles, which present challenges in sustaining positive school change.

Next, I discuss how principal leadership has evolved from a top-down model to more collaborative models, such as distributed leadership, and how this model supports the idea of teacher leadership to assist principals. Then, what teacher leadership entails and how the focus of one leader has changed over time are discussed. Subsequently, I focus on what the roles of the teachers and principals are to support teacher leadership. After which I discuss how teacher leadership impacts the instructional program and school climate in building school capacity. Lastly, I share what may promote the development and sustainability of teacher leadership.

### **Principals' Demanding Roles and Their Limitations in Leading**

#### **Stress of increased responsibilities.**

School principals experience increasing stress from their many responsibilities in which one hierarchical leader can no longer address all the demanding needs in a school. Besides principals' expanding and extensive duties (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003), they face demands from government policy, parents and community, corporate interests, and technology (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1997). Affected by high stakes accountability, school leaders feel the pressure and responsibility for schools' academic performance,

which is reflected in students' test scores (Cushing, Kerrins, & Johnstone, 2003; Perlstein, 2007; Schoen & Fusarelli, 2008; Shipps & White, 2009). In addition, principal stress has increased because of extra demands placed on school leaders regarding accountability and students' academic performance (Sogunro, 2012). In fact, ninety percent of principals feel pressured in dealing with challenging policy demands and mandates from the government (Sogunro, 2012).

As such, many principals report increased pressure and serious concerns with demands on their time (Cushing, et al., 2003; Friedman, 2002; Queen & Queen, 2005). Even working 60 - 70 hours per week, many principals still feel that they are not getting the job done (Cushing, et al., 2003). Di-Paola & Tshannen-Moran (2003) found that 84% of principals worked more than fifty hours per week, and 66% stated they didn't have sufficient time or personnel to fulfill their duties. Trenberth and Dewe (2005) had a similar finding in that 89.6% of the principals studied stated they worked an average of 62 hours per week and had very high stress levels. Sogunro (2012) found that of the 52 principals studied, more than 96% reported experiencing work-related stress that impacted their work habits and productivity, mental and physical health, and social life. Furthermore, elementary principals may have an increased risk for job stress because they generally do not have the support of personnel, such as assistant principals (Combs, et al., 2009; Doud & Keller, 1998).

### **Principal burnout and turnover.**

School principals today face stress from these increased responsibilities that may lead them to switch schools or jobs. While some levels of stress are expected, chronic stress may have a negative impact on job performance and can lead to principal burnout

or position change (Brock & Grady, 2002; Combs, et al., 2009). Growing numbers of principals in the U.S. are considering leaving the profession due to the stress of their occupation (Mitchell, 2010; Rayfield & Diamantes, 2003) and already 8.8% of the elementary school principals are experiencing job burnout caused by stress (Combs, et al., 2009). Continually losing school leadership due to principal stress and burnout may have a negative impact on school improvement. Principal turnover can negatively affect school climate, which largely impacts student achievement (Mascall & Leithwood, 2010). When principals transfer to another school or leave the profession within two to three years, the work initiated is halted and will not reach the stages of continuation or refinement (Mascall & Leithwood, 2010). Thus, for long-term, positive transformation to occur where schools have the ability to protect and sustain improvement, teacher leaders are essential.

By not building school capacity in its teachers, teachers have to adapt and change to a new leadership each time. However, teacher leadership shows promise in mitigating the negative affects of principal turnover. Teacher leaders serving as a collective network to support school leaders may positively affect school climate and student achievement, thus, building sustainable school capacity that will continue to grow even if the principal leaves the school. A change in viewing school leadership as hierarchical to a different perspective of collaborative teacher leaders is necessary to move schools toward improvement.

## **Models of Leadership**

### **Instructional leadership.**

Initial research on instructional leadership emerged in the early 1980s as a way for principals to provide focus on curriculum and instruction to promote effective schools (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Leithwood & Montgomery, 1982; Purkey & Smith, 1983). The change came about because of demographic shifts and more demanding accountability measures, resulting in ethnic minority growth and a need to address the challenges created by these shifts (Ruff & Shoho, 2005). Instructional leadership research from the 1980s to 1990s focused on effective principal leadership, looking at a principal's role in supervising and developing curriculum and instruction (Bamburg & Andrews, 1990; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Leithwood & Montgomery, 1982). These principals were seen as culture builders who promoted high expectations and standards for students and teachers (Mortimore, 1993; Purkey & Smith, 1983). However, this narrow focus on the principal as the experienced educator evoked criticism about the lack of scope of the leadership model (Barth, 1986; Cuban, 1988).

Early research found a minimal relationship between a principal's instructional leadership and classroom instruction, teacher effectiveness, and student achievement (Hallinger & Heck, 1996). Some scholars viewed this leadership approach as top-down (Barth, 1986; Cuban, 1988) since it focused on the principal's role in instruction (Cohen & Miller, 1980). Some more recent research clarifies that this minimal relationship occurred because early developments of instructional leadership focused on the principal as the only instructional leader (Copland, 2001; Lambert, 2002).

To address this concern, a shift from viewing instructional leadership as a bureaucratic, top-down model to a more participatory systems model of the learning community evolved (Hallinger, 2003). The principals' positively influencing school effectiveness and student achievement (Hallinger, 2003) and shaping the purpose of the school (Bambung & Andrews, 1990) are some of the strengths of instructional leadership. By aligning the school structures with the school's mission, instructional leadership influences school outcomes (Hallinger & Heck, 1996).

There are multiple conceptualized models of instructional leadership, but there are also some recurring themes. The common understandings and functions of an instructional leader include having a clear vision and shared goals (Bambung & Andrews, 1990; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Leithwood, Leonard, & Sharratt, 1998); working with teachers on curriculum and instruction (Cuban, 1984; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985); establishing high expectations for students and teachers (Leithwood et al., 1998; Mortimore, 1993; Purkey & Smith, 1983); building a positive school climate or culture (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Leithwood et al., 1998); and providing intellectual stimulation such as professional development (Barth, 1990; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Leithwood et al., 1998). Some additional functions mentioned by one or two researchers are offering individualized support to teachers (Leithwood et al., 1998); modeling (Leithwood et al., 1998); providing incentives for teachers and learning (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Leithwood et al., 1998); and maintaining high visibility (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). By incorporating instructional leadership functions into practice, a principal will influence the school outcomes (Hallinger & Heck, 1996), promoting effective teaching practices and improving student achievement.

However, as a result of other principal responsibilities (Lambert, 2002) and principals' lack of skills and knowledge of instruction in all areas (Leithwood, 1992), a principal is unable to serve as the only instructional leader in a school, and requires the participation of other educators (Lambert, 2002). Lambert (2002) concludes that other instructional leaders, such as teachers and curriculum coordinators, and additional leadership roles are needed for positive student and teacher learning.

### **Transformational and collaborative leadership.**

The concept of transformational leadership emerged in the 1990s as a means to improve schools with low academic scores. According to Leithwood and Jantzi (2000) in a study that included approximately 3,000 teacher surveys from 655 schools, transformational leadership has three components: setting direction, developing people, and redesigning the organization. This form of leadership has shown a significant relationship with institutional change and student engagement, and has a relationship with creating a school climate that positively affects student participation and achievement (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000). Unlike instructional leadership, transformational leadership does not focus on instructional knowledge, but rather focuses on inspiring others to develop the individual and build capacity toward a mission.

Considering the benefits of transformational leadership, Mark and Printy (2003) found transformational leadership to be important, but not a sufficient factor in improving school performance. Their study looked at shared instructional and transformational leadership as separate and combined entities by analyzing teacher surveys, classroom observations, and student work at 24 nationally selected schools. In this study, shared instructional leadership is defined as collaboration between the principal and teachers on

curriculum, instruction, and assessment for school improvement. High quality pedagogy empowering teachers and high student achievement were found in schools employing transformational leadership with shared instructional leadership (Mark & Printy, 2003).

Similar to transformational leadership, collaborative leadership affects school achievement. Collaborative leadership focuses on the importance of collaboration among stakeholders. Hallinger and Heck (2010) conducted a longitudinal study of 192 elementary schools analyzing collaborative decision-making, staff empowerment, and involvement of all stakeholders in evaluating the school's academic development. The researchers found collaborative leadership impacts school performance, and has an indirect effect on initial academic performance and academic growth.

#### **Distributed leadership.**

Distributed leadership views the organizational structure as an interconnected approach that creates positive change (Leithwood, Mascall, & Strauss, 2009). Nonetheless, the literature on distributed leadership shows a lack of clarity and consistency in defining this form of leadership (Harris, 2007; Lakomski, 2008; Mayrowetz, 2008). Some researchers suggest shared leadership is synonymous with distributed leadership, while others feel there are distinctions. Distributed leadership is a practice distributed among leaders, followers, and the school's contexts (Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2004). Comprised of teams, this leadership has a hierarchical organization (Woods, 2004), in which leaders work toward a shared goal (Spillane et al., 2001) to accomplish interdependent tasks (Leithwood & Mascall, 2008; Spillane et al., 2001). Multiple sources of influence within an organization are utilized in a distributed model (Spillane, 2006).

To enact distributed leadership effectively, the formal leaders in schools must employ structural and cultural conditions that support this model (Ban Al-Ani & Bligh, 2011; Day, Jacobson, & Johansson, 2011). Such conditions involve the distribution of tasks and distributed influence processes (Robinson, 2008). Considering these elements, those in formal leadership positions have the ability to influence others. Distributed leadership encompasses facilitating and supporting the leadership of others (Harris, 2013), but it does not mean everyone will lead or hold a leadership role (Spillane, 2007). Formal and informal leadership practice can take form. The leadership is distributed among these leaders and the followers, where the followers are not just doers, but are an essential part of leadership activity (Gronn, 2003; Spillane, et al., 2004). This form of leadership changes the power relationship (West, et al., 2000), where the distinction between leaders and followers are not easily identified (Gronn 2003).

Working together and sharing goals are essential elements that define and strengthen distributed leadership. Baloglu (2012) found four dimensions for distributed leadership: team work, support, vision creating, and control. Leadership practice occurs in the interactions of people and their situation, instead of the individual leader's actions (Spillane, et al., 2004). The focus is on the leader and followers working together toward a common goal (Spillane, 2005; Spillane, et al., 2004). Heck and Hallinger (2009) found shared leadership and the school's academic capacity can reinforce and increase student achievement.

With increasing demands on principals to improve student achievement, school leaders are encouraged to increase school capacity. To meet this demand, distributed leadership is seen as a promising approach (Day, et al., 2011; Stoll & Bolam, 2005).

Currently, bureaucratic and traditional models are being disregarded as unrealistic, and democratic, collective, and shared models of leadership are gaining support. These newer approaches “foster greater participation on the part of their school communities and create conditions that encourage teacher empowerment and leadership through individual and collective capacity building” (Leithwood, Jacobson, & Ylimaki, 2011, p. 20).

While distributed leadership shows promise, many researchers have questioned the motivation behind it (Hargreaves & Fink, 2009; Hartley, 2009; Hartley 2010). Hargreaves and Fink (2009) caution that distributed leadership may in fact be just another way to employ top-down policies. Another criticism is that creating and sustaining learning communities present a challenge (Louis, 2008). With the emergence of distributed leadership, comes the necessity of conceptual clarity (Leithwood, et al., 2009) and empirical evidence (Harris, 2005; Leithwood, et al., 2009) for support. Additional studies should analyze the challenges of implementing and sustaining an effective distributed leadership model.

High performing organizations that use distributed leadership practice do so in a way that builds lateral and vertical teams with accountable measures (Hargreaves, 2011). Evidence also shows that how leadership is shared and if opportunities for others to realize their leadership potential is provided will influence school outcomes (Hargreaves, 2011). Many studies demonstrate a positive relationship between distributed leadership and student learning outcomes (Camburn & Han, 2009; Hallinger & Heck, 2009; Leithwood & Mascal, 2008), as well as improved organization outcomes (Harris, 2011; Leithwood & Mascal, 2008). Among teachers, involvement in leadership has shown to enhance teachers’ self-efficacy and motivation (Day, et al., 2011) and increase their

commitment to the school and its performance (Hulpia & Van Geer, 2011; Harris & Muijs, 2004). Distributed leadership shows promise for student, teacher, and school improvement.

Many principals are being encouraged to build organizational capacity through the use of distributed leadership in order to support student achievement (Crow, Hausman, & Scribner, 2005; Day, 2007; Day, et al., 2011; Leithwood, et al., 2011). By involving teacher leaders in the decision-making process, the teacher leaders will be more willing to support the shared values and develop trust in administration. This support from teacher leaders will lead to greater acceptance of decisions and responsibility to accomplish organizational goals (Louis, Dretzke, & Wahlstrom, 2010). When teachers work together in a meaningful way, their job satisfaction increases because they feel valued and supported in their work (Beane, 1998). Through distributed leadership, school leaders have the ability to improve student achievement and build teacher capacity.

While the empirical research on distributed leadership is promising and increasing, further research on how distributed leadership functions and its effectiveness within education is needed (Harris, 2007; Hartley, 2007; Leithwood & Mascall, 2008; Woods & Gronn, 2009). Spillane & Louis (2005) found the need for analysis of how the capabilities of other leaders can be enhanced in distributed models, and Harris (2004) found more studies on the relationship of distributed leadership and school improvement were needed. Considering the complexities of implementing and sustaining distributed leadership, additional research should look at effective practices that support distributed leadership (Gronn, 2008; Leithwood, et al., 2004). The idea of teacher leadership has emerged as one way to support school leaders and build sustainable school capacity.

## **Teacher Leadership**

### **Definition of teacher leadership.**

Teacher leadership has emerged to help address the complexities faced by school principals in public education today (Leithwood, et al., 2004; Spillane, 2006). While there are varying definitions of teacher leadership, a common understanding is this form of leadership goes beyond the boundaries of the classroom (Beauchum & Dentith, 2004; Hargreaves & Fullan, 1997). Teacher leaders work toward improving students' educational experiences and academic achievement school-wide (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Some definitions of teacher leadership stem from the idea of influencing instructional practice in and outside the classroom (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001), while other definitions focus on teacher leadership as a role, such as grade-level leader (Ash & Pershall, 2000). Yet, other definitions describe teacher leaders as those who work with the principal to envision improvement, overcome barriers, and build community while improving the school climate (Cranston, 2000). Teacher leaders assume greater leadership for the organization of the school (Crowther, Kaagan, Ferguson, & Hann, 2002; Little, 2003). Lambert (2003) uses a constructivist approach by defining teacher leadership as purposeful, reciprocal learning. Teacher leadership entails teachers sharing their expertise as instructional leaders and supporting organizational change. To build leadership capacity, Lambert (2003) identifies goals to develop reflective, skillful leaders in all teachers, improve student success, and create sustainable schools and districts.

### **Evolution of teacher leadership.**

The concept of teacher leadership emerged a couple of decades ago (Birky, Shelton, & Headly, 2006). Initially, there was a push for formal teacher leadership roles

(Mangin & Stoelinga, 2008) such as department chairs or union representatives, in which individual teachers would take on managerial roles (Hart, 1990; Smylie, 1996). Then, with school reform movements and legislative mandates, such as No Child Left Behind, teachers were seen as essential for making sustainable growth in student achievement (Birky, et al., 2006; Muijs & Harris, 2007; Scribner, Sawyer, Watson, & Myers, 2007). With this focus, teacher leadership evolved into a role of an instructional leader where teacher leaders aim to improve instruction and collaboration (Hart, 1990; Smylie, 1996). These teacher leaders are meant to raise students' academic achievement by improving teachers' instruction (Smylie, Conley & Marks, 2002) and reducing the principal's responsibilities (Camburn, Rowan & Taylor, 2003; Crowther, et al., 2002; Murphy, 2005).

Finally, another model of teacher leadership emerged where teacher leaders share in school-wide decisions about the mission, goals, policies, programs, operations, and assessments, and aspire for better teaching and learning (Silva, et al., 2000; Spillane, 2006). Research suggests school leadership should be enacted as a collaborative team effort and distributed to staff with leadership potential (Dantley, 2003; Hallinger, 2005; Hargreaves, 2004; Harris, 2004; Fullan 2003).

### **Roles of teacher leaders.**

Teacher leaders may be thought of as instructional experts, reflective practitioners, action researchers, collaborators, mentors, risk takers, professional development instructors, and/or curriculum innovators (Mimbs, 2002). Colleagues may perceive them as teacher advocates (Beauchum & Dentith, 2004). Teachers wish to expand their influence beyond the classroom and assume more responsibility (Ackerman &

Mackenzie, 2006), but the roles of teacher leaders may be dependent on the school context. Of the many roles teacher leaders can serve, Lieberman and Miller (2004) identify three: advocates, innovators, and stewards. Advocates look out and speak up for improving student learning. Innovators make suggestions and implement new practices in order to transform schools. Stewards serve as models of continued improvement.

Harris (2005), in contrast, identifies two roles: informal and formal. Informal roles involved classroom-related functions, such as planning (Harris, 2005). Younger teachers can more easily attain informal leadership roles (Anderson, 2004) because they have less work experience and may not possess higher degrees (Camburn, 2009). These informal teacher leaders possess personal power, in which their colleagues value their expertise and strength of ties with administration (Spillane, 2006). Informal teacher leaders may not identify themselves as ‘leaders’ because they believe leaders hold formal roles like principals or supervisors. Formal roles signify specific positions that may remove a teacher from the classroom, such as coaches or content coordinators (Harris, 2005). As such, teacher leadership may exhibit positional power from a formal role, or personal power from social interactions about organizational activities such as curriculum reform and instructional strategies (Yukl, 1998). Both formal and informal teacher leadership were studied in order to gain a wider view of how to cultivate all forms of teacher leadership.

#### **Activities of teacher leaders.**

The activities of teacher leaders or what teacher leaders do entail supporting change, such as initiating professional development and planning. Their activities tend to focus on teaching and learning, where they may provide professional development of

colleagues by observing other teachers, teaching demonstration lessons, attending conferences, and developing curriculum (Day and Harris, 2003; Feiler, Heritage, & Gallimore, 2000; York-Barr and Duke, 2004). Teacher leaders not only help their colleagues, but assist and implement the school improvement plan (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Thus, teacher leadership supports the involvement of the school community to improve instructional capacity (Spillane, et al., 2004).

Muijs & Harris (2007) identified five dimensions of teacher leadership: shared decision-making, collaboration, active participation, professional learning, and activism. These five dimensions, along with other activities mentioned, will be used as a way to elicit nominations in this study. Factors that enhance the development of teacher leadership are supportive structures and culture, strong leadership, commitment to action, inquiry and data richness, innovative professional development, coordinated improvement efforts, high teacher participation and involvement, collective creativity, shared professional practice, and recognition and reward (Muijs & Harris, 2007). The factors that led, supported, and sustained these teacher leaders were asked of them in this study.

### **The role of the principal.**

Research suggests that principals' understanding and support of the role of teacher leaders is an essential way to improve teacher leaders' effectiveness (Barth, 2001; Murphy, 2005). To employ teacher leadership effectively, teacher leaders and principals need to challenge traditional norms of leadership, including the role of the principal (Crowther, et al., 2002; Stoelinga, 2008). Power needs to be seen as an investment toward achievement and accomplishment (Sergiovanni, 1987). In this way, principals and

teachers may lead and work together to build a sustainable school climate. With a clear purpose and roles for teacher leaders, the principal can validate these teacher leader roles (Murphy, 2005) and facilitate more positive relationships among teacher leaders and their colleagues (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Principals can support teacher leaders by providing an understanding of how their roles relate to the school goals (Donaldson, 2001; Mangin, 2007). Support from administration can strengthen the effectiveness and impact of teacher leaders on the school community, and as such, this study offers recommendations on how administration can support teacher leaders based on their experiences.

#### **Benefits of teacher leadership.**

Teacher leadership has potential to improve the quality of teachers by expanding the role of a teacher, increasing school effectiveness by putting teachers in positions of influence, creating new professional development opportunities for teachers, and collaborating to improve instruction (Datnow & Castellano, 2001). Research shows that teacher leaders can serve as influential resources that support instructional change (Putnam & Borko, 2000; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). When teachers lead, the principal's capacity is extended to benefit the school (Barth, 2001; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009). Other advantages of teacher leadership include lower teacher attrition, better instructional decision-making and efficiency, and higher student achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Johnson & Birkeland, 2003; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009). Schools with higher levels of achievement also were more likely to have higher levels of influence from teams of staff (Leithwood & Mascal, 2008). Katzenmeyer and Moller (2009) suggest even

more advantages of teacher leadership include professional efficacy, career advancement, lowered resistance to change, accountability for results, and sustainability.

### **Support needed for teacher leadership.**

Limited research has been conducted on what supports teachers to take on or sustain their leadership. To enrich and support teacher leaders, an understanding of teacher leadership and an ability to develop their leadership potential are essential (Katzenmeyer and Moller, 2001). Despite the limited research, there are indicators as to what might be important. Teacher leadership can be viewed as encompassing six aspects: values and expectations, structures, training, resources, incentives and recognition, and role clarity.

First, values and expectations refer to the school norms established, such as the importance of establishing community (Barth, 2001; Smylie, 1996). However, the norm of autonomy and isolation for teachers inhibits teacher leaders' work with other teachers (Clandinin, 2001; Leithwood, Jantzi, Ryan & Steniback, 1997). Also, the norm that teachers are followers and should comply with directives (Ackerman, Katzenmeyer, & Moller, 1996; Wasley, 1991) can limit the emergence and work of teacher leaders. Instead school culture should encourage teacher collaboration, decision-making, and reflection that foster leadership in teachers (Silva et al., 2000).

Second, structures that support building and sustaining organization capacity support teacher leadership (Copland, 2001; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001; Liberman, 1992; Murphy & Datnow, 2003). The current organizational structure of many schools presents an obstacle on teacher leaders ability to perform and improve outcomes because they have limited teacher agency (Hatch, 2000; Silva, et al., 2000; Smylie, 1996). A

structure that encourages teachers to develop and use their professional knowledge and discretion improves the quality of students' education (Scribner, 2006) and will allow teachers to become leaders within their schools (Harris, 2005).

Third, training on leadership capabilities as teacher leaders will support their growth and impact (Crowther et al., 2002; Liberman & Miller, 1999). Fourth, resources are needed, such as sufficient time to fulfill both their classroom obligations and leadership responsibilities (Barth, 2001; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001; LeBlanc & Skelton, 1997; Lieberman, 1992). Fifth, teacher leaders need to be provided incentives and recognition to accomplish their added responsibilities (Ackerman, Katzenmeyer, & Moller, 1996). They desire respect, appreciation, and peer acceptance and recognition (LeBlanc & Skelton, 1997).

Lastly, role clarity relieves stress around role ambiguity and conflict, while providing clear expectations for teacher leaders (LeBlanc & Skelton, 1997; Smylie, 1996; Smylie et al., 2002). Many studies suggest that principal understanding and support of teacher leadership helps teacher leaders be more effective in school reform (Crowther, et al., 2002; Harris, 2005; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001; Murphy, 2005). To utilize teacher leadership effectively, teacher leaders and principals must challenge the traditional view of educational hierarchy and the role of principal (Biegen & Kennedy, 2000; Crowther, et al., 2002; Stoelinga, 2008).

Finding ways to transform school cultures and structures, redefine leadership, and manage and best take advantage of time are key to improve the effectiveness of teacher leaders and the long-term impact that these teacher leaders can have on schools. Teacher leadership not only provides support for the principal, but also enriches the school

community. Research demonstrates the various ways teachers lead, the valuable benefits of teacher leadership, and the perceived supports needed for teacher leaders.

Despite the increasing interest and research on teacher leadership, limited research has examined what drives and sustains teachers as teacher leaders. This research studied what experiences and opportunities led and sustained teacher leaders in their roles. Knowing there are many definitions of teacher leadership and varying ways to lead as a teacher, this exploratory study included all forms of teacher leadership. The activities and supports of teacher leadership identified were used to elicit nominations and guide the interview questions.

### **Chapter Three: Methodology**

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to understand why teachers took on leadership roles and what supported and sustained them as they continued to lead. In this exploratory, qualitative research study, I examined elementary teacher leaders' perceptions of the opportunities that led them to become and sustained them as teacher leaders. My research addressed the following questions:

- 1) What leads elementary teacher leaders to take on leadership roles, and what importance do they attach to these?
- 2) What experiences and opportunities do elementary teacher leaders perceive as supporting and sustaining their roles as teacher leaders? Do they report that certain experiences were critical for supporting and sustaining their leadership roles?

## **Research Design**

This study sought to identify elementary teacher leaders' reasons for taking on leadership roles and what supported and influenced them to become teacher leaders. The goal was to understand what drove and most influenced teachers to take on particular leadership roles and what they saw as supporting them to engage in these roles and sustaining them over time. This qualitative study focused on the understandings and perceptions held by elementary teacher leaders around teacher leadership. Participants shared their thoughts through interviews where they had the opportunity to share this detailed information (Creswell, 2014; Maxwell, 2005; Merriam, 2009). As such, the semi-structured interview questions remained flexible and broad so the elementary teacher leaders involved in the study could share their own meaning of teacher leadership (Creswell, 2014).

## **Data Collection**

### **Participants.**

The participants were recruited with the help of two organizations that support teacher leaders in southern California. One of the organizations offers mentor training and professional development opportunities. The other organization provides professional development for teachers and principals through a local university. The teacher leaders nominated by the leaders of these organizations then nominated other teacher leaders as potential participants in this study.

When I elicited nominations, I asked the leaders of the organization and the teacher leaders to provide both formal and informal teacher leaders who participate in collaborative design and decision making, involvement in shared decision making, take

on professional learning or a school based issue, lead professional development, lead a school/district based committee, or perform similar activities. They were informed that some examples might include involvement in refining and improving of teaching practices, chairing a school based committee, taking on a school based issue to support change, or mentoring or supporting in other teachers' development.

Of the elementary teacher leaders interviewed, 63% percent held a master's degree, 4% held two master's degrees, and 4% held a doctorate degree. Twenty-two percent were nationally board certified and 22% had an administrative credential. The years of teaching experience ranged from 9 to 29, with a mean of 16 and a standard deviation of 4.72. Twenty-six percent of the elementary teacher leaders had worked at one school, 59% had worked at two to four schools, and 15% had worked at five or more schools.

The participants for this study were elementary teacher leaders, who embodied varying qualities of formal and informal leadership. For the purpose of this exploratory study, all forms of teacher leadership were included. Informal teacher leaders are well liked and respected as professionals by their colleagues and as such impact the practice of teachers and the school, such as gaining support from their colleagues to try a new teaching approach. Formal teacher leaders hold a position, such as curriculum specialist, or they perform a role, such as providing professional development for their school.

Teacher leaders support principals in the role of instructional leadership, where by they mentor and support teacher development, and use data from assessment to improve practice and student learning. Teacher leadership empowers teachers and provides sustainable school growth despite principal turnover. Some examples of observable

behaviors of teacher leaders included developing curriculum with other teachers that differentiates and supports student learning, attending conferences and employing new strategies gained in the classroom, setting and attaining individual goals for improving teaching practices, and mentoring and supporting novice teachers' development.

### **Data Collection.**

First, the interview process was piloted with six diverse elementary teacher leaders at the same school that were identified by one of the administrators. The interview protocol was modified based on their feedback. Following the pilot, I reached out to the leaders of the two organizations to help identify and provide names of five elementary teacher leaders in southern California. They each nominated six teacher leaders. I contacted these twelve teachers by e-mail regarding the purpose of the study, answered questions they had about the study, and asked them if they would be interested in participating. Nine out of twelve chose to participate.

After interviewing, each of these nine teacher leaders were asked to identify three other teacher leaders they knew who demonstrated leadership in another way. Collectively they were only able to nominate eleven teacher leaders. These additional eleven teachers then were contacted by e-mail regarding the purpose of the study, and I answered questions they had about the study and asked them if they would be interested in participating. Eight of the eleven teacher leaders chose to participate.

To obtain more teacher leaders to interview, I reached out again to the leader at the university. She put me contact with some other leaders in the department at the university and they made nine nominations. Five of the nine teacher leader nominations chose to participate. These five teacher leaders then were asked to make nominations and

collectively they made nine more nominations, five of which agreed to participate in the study. Overall, 14 of the 21 teacher leaders nominated by leaders from an organization and 13 of the 20 teacher leaders nominated by other teacher leaders participated in the study. A total of 66% chose to partake in this research.

Those who agreed to participate were given a choice of having a phone interview or meeting in person. All the participants chose to have a phone interview. Once phoned for the interview, I reminded the participants about the study and answered any additional questions they had. The interview consisted of questions regarding the experiences and opportunities the teacher leaders perceived as having supported their development and sustaining their involvement as teacher leaders. Questions were asked about how they became teacher leaders, who or what were the most significant people and resources that influenced them as they became teacher leaders, how the most supportive school and/or administrator had shown support to them as leaders, how their current school influenced their role as a teacher leader, what leadership roles they pursued and why, and if they had anything else they wanted to share about their journey as a teacher leader. The interviews lasted approximately 30 - 50 minutes, depending on the additional probing questions asked and their responses.

### **Data Analysis Methodology**

The interviews were recorded using an iPhone and a backup recording device and then were transcribed. First, I wrote an individual reflection memo summarizing the big ideas after each interview. Then I e-mailed the individual reflection memo to the interviewees and asked for the interviewees to verify these memos. Next, I continually read the transcriptions and individual memos to accurately understand and depict each

teacher leader's story. Then after collecting all the data, I coded the data for patterns in interview responses and identified reoccurring and unique themes that emerged. Lastly, I organized the data into increasingly more abstract units of information (Creswell, 2014). While determining patterns was mostly an intuitive process, this process was also methodical and informed by the study's purpose, my orientation and knowledge, and the meanings shared by the participants (Merriam, 2009).

### **Summary**

This exploratory, qualitative research study asked elementary teacher leaders to identify the experiences and opportunities that led them to become teacher leaders and continued to sustain them as teacher leaders. Studying the teacher leaders provided insight into teacher leadership that did not currently exist on how different forms of teacher leadership are nurtured, established, and sustained.

## **Chapter Four: Findings**

### **Introduction**

Twenty-seven elementary teacher leaders in southern California shared their stories of how they became leaders and what supported and sustained them in their leadership roles. These elementary teacher leaders found a passion to develop and used the knowledge gained as a way to lead and impact education. They felt supported and sustained as leaders by working in a cohesive, collaborative environment; connecting and sharing ideas with educational experts and colleagues; and having opportunities to pursue and lead as they chose. Their connections and relationships with other educators proved to be an overarching theme that influenced how and why they developed and grew as

leaders. These stories demonstrated how the common themes identified interacted in different ways and impacted the individual paths they took in leadership.

First, I discuss what these 27 elementary teacher leaders said about leadership and the importance they attached to these ideas. Next, I highlight four stories representative of the diverse teacher leaders interviewed and demonstrate how these teachers' leadership emerged and grew based on a range of relationships. Lastly, I will identify the additional findings that represent a few teacher leaders' experiences that differed from the patterns of others.

### **Findings Across Teachers**

The 27 teacher leaders presented leadership paths shaped by relationships and had similar views about leadership. These teachers held informal roles, formal roles, and formal positions as leaders. Informal teacher leaders possessed personal power and influence, such as gaining support from their colleagues to try a new teaching approach. Formal teacher leaders held a formal position, such as curriculum specialist, or they performed a formal role, such as providing professional development for their school. Twenty-two percent of the teacher leaders said they did not see themselves as leaders until they were in a formal role and 7% of the teacher leaders stated that they continue to not see themselves as leaders. These teachers demonstrate that they view leadership more traditionally as having a formal position or title and not as one with personal power or influence. Seventy-four percent of the elementary teachers started their journeys leading in an informal way and informal leadership led to formal leadership with 52% of the elementary teacher leaders. There were also individuals who went from formal roles or positions to informal positions. At the time of the interview, 19% of the elementary

teacher leaders were in a formal leadership role leading professional development for the district or an organization; 41% were in formal leadership positions leading as an instructional coach, program coordinator, or curriculum specialist; and 41% were in informal leadership roles. However, many have held more than one of these kinds of roles or positions in the past.

A number of common themes emerged around what the teacher leaders reported led them to lead and supported and sustained them as teacher leaders. Relationships with other educators proved to be an overarching theme in their journeys as teacher leaders. These connections impacted how and why they developed and grew in their leadership. The coding showed that role models, a desire to impact education beyond the classroom, professional development, collaboration, networking, and opportunities to lead influenced the individual paths each of these elementary teachers took in leading.

Table 1

What Led, Supports and Sustains These Elementary Teachers as Leaders

Influences in Leading, Supporting and Sustaining These Elementary Teacher Leaders	Percent Stated This	Percent Stated This as One of the Most Influential Factors
<b>Role Models</b>		
Role models believing in their ability or expecting them to lead	82%	48%
Being surrounded by dedicated and involved educators	44%	7%
<b>Desire to Impact Education Beyond the Classroom</b>		
Interest in having an effect beyond the classroom	85%	74%
Having a voice in their school and district decisions	37%	15%
<b>Professional Development</b>		
Participating in professional development opportunities	74%	33%
Wanting to share their personal expertise gained from professional development opportunities	63%	48%
<b>Collaboration</b>		
Working with a collaborative team	78%	63%
Developing a shared vision and goals from collaboration	33%	26%
<b>Networking</b>		
Networking with like-minded educators at workshops, institutes and/or conferences	78%	44%
Principal connecting them with other educators in the district	26%	11%
<b>Opportunities to Lead</b>		
Administration providing opportunities and choice in leadership	82%	37%

**Role models.**

The elementary teacher leaders in this study shared how veteran role models inspired and guided their development as a leader. Eighty-two percent of the elementary teacher leaders noted that their role models in education believed in their ability or

expected them to lead, which led them to take on leadership roles. One elementary teacher commented how her role model recognized and helped her discover her strengths.

This teacher stated,

“She noticed and named certain things that I was doing. It gave me a little bit of encouragement and a desire and a belief that maybe I could do something a little bit more and help in a greater way.”

Another teacher leader stated how her role model believed in her and encouraged her to lead. This teacher leader reported, “She had so much confidence in me... she, as a leader, saw something in me that I didn't see myself... She gave me many opportunities. She encouraged me to go for grants. She encouraged me to try new things.” Forty-eight percent of the teacher leaders expressed how their role model's belief in them was one of the most influential factors in their development as a leader. One teacher leader acknowledged how important her role model's support was in her becoming a teacher leader. She said, “[My role model] was most supportive in encouraging and giving me the opportunity to be a leader, and then of course, making sure I was successful at that. She was a real big influence.” These role models provided encouragement, support in the teacher leaders' development, and/or opportunities to lead.

Colleagues who showed dedication to their professional work, also served as role models. Some teacher leaders were inspired by their colleagues' efforts and this motivated them to do the same. Forty-four percent of the elementary teacher leaders noted that being surrounded by other educators who were dedicated and involved influenced their initiative to lead, seven percent of which stated that this was key to their growth as a teacher leader. The teacher leaders mentioned that they might not have taken the initiative to lead without these colleagues' dedication and influence. These educators

served as role models and inspiration. One elementary teacher leader shared how a colleague inspired her to reflect on her practice and help students. She said, “I just felt she really loved the kids, and she really wanted each and every one of them to succeed. That was contagious for me, because it's honorable. It's very respected.” This teacher leader went on to lead the same way as her role model by assisting teachers in their practice to improve student outcomes. Another teacher leader reflected that her colleagues inspire her to always learn more. She stated, “Teachers at my school are all very similar as far as our work ethic. So, we push each other. We're pretty intense as far as learning... This school has really impacted my role as a teacher leader.” Role models played a part in the development and nourishment of these elementary teacher leaders. They reported that their dedicated colleagues inspired them to lead and take initiative in their own learning.

### **Impact beyond the classroom.**

The most common reason why the elementary teacher leaders chose to take on leadership was to positively impact the school and/or district. Eighty-five percent of elementary teacher leaders’ interest in having an effect beyond the classroom drove them to pursue leadership opportunities. This reason also represented the highest percentage of teacher leaders, 74%, who felt it was one of the most important reasons they took on leadership roles. One teacher leader shared, “Part of the reason I wanted to be a instructional coach was because in the classroom, I can affect 35 kids. If I'm in a leadership role, I could have a larger effect on more kids and teachers.” This teacher stressed how helping teachers, helped more students succeed. Another teacher leader demonstrated how her leadership evolved from looking at the bigger picture to effect

education. She said, “I want them to be successful in all areas of school... So they did in my classroom year to year, but it was having the opportunity to impact more students by impacting teachers.” These teacher leaders saw an opportunity to help a larger number of students by supporting teachers.

Thirty-seven percent of elementary teacher leaders stated that having a voice in their school and district decisions had an impact beyond the classroom and led them to lead. Noted but not central to their leadership development, 15% reported that this was one of the most significant factors for why they chose to lead. One teacher leader stated, “[I take on leadership roles] if it's decision-making leadership... If it is doing some work with the PTA where we're going to be deciding how we could best use technology in the classroom, or those types of things.” These elementary teacher leaders desired to have a positive influence on the school and/or district by providing input on decisions.

### **Professional development.**

Professional development led elementary teacher leaders to alter their pedagogical approach and built their confidence in leading other educators. Seventy-four percent of the elementary teacher leaders said professional development opportunities influenced why they chose to lead, and 33% reported that this was one of the key influences. One teacher leader explained, “I enjoy learning about new processes and ways to learn, ways that I can help them exceed better, new standards... I want to dive in and learn as much as I can, and help other people also achieve that.” Another teacher leader noted, “I've always sought out opportunities to increase and encourage better practices for myself as well as others.” These teacher leaders sought opportunities to grow professionally and deepen their knowledge.

Most of these teacher leaders developed an expertise from professional development that inspired them to share it with their colleagues. Sixty-three percent of teacher leaders said they wanted to share their personal expertise that they gained from professional development opportunities. Forty-eight percent felt this was one of the most important reasons why they took on leadership roles. “I really was passionate about the work. I wasn't necessarily like, ‘Oh, I really want to go and teach other teachers.’ I just love the work that I was implementing as a teacher and I wanted to share that,” reflected one of the teacher leaders. Another teacher leader said, “The reason I have taken on those roles of sharing teaching practices through professional development and modeling lessons is to just support other teachers' growth and open other teachers' minds to different ways of teaching that can be effective.” The knowledge these leaders gained excited them, which led them to want to teach other educators. These elementary teacher leaders found professional development impacted their interest in leading by nurturing their expertise and raising their desire to share it with their colleagues.

### **Collaboration.**

According to the teacher leaders, collaborating with other educators involved sharing ideas, which led to improving teaching practices and developing a shared vision and goals with colleagues. Seventy-eight percent of elementary teachers acknowledged how a collaborative team supported their professional and leadership growth, and 63% of the teacher leaders stressed that collaboration was essential to supporting and sustaining them as leaders. One of the teacher leaders demonstrated this by summarizing how she felt about her collaborative experience. She reported, “I felt sorry for the people that didn't know, because they were on their own island. With my grade level, we would just

continually bounce back different ideas... We were collaboratively doing it, and growing exponentially.” Another teacher leader reflected on how collaboration supported her to be a better teacher leader. She said, “It helped me further refine my practice... my thoughts on pedagogy and... how I can best teach my students. [Collaborating] opened up the door for what I was able to then share with other teachers as a teacher leader.” According to these leaders, collaboration supported their growth as professionals and leaders.

Thirty-three percent of the teacher leaders said collaboration supported and sustained their leadership because it led to a shared vision and goals, and 26% of the teacher leaders felt this widely influenced their leadership. One teacher leader stated, “We had this strong belief that we can make a huge impact in student learning and that through a reflective process, teachers together, we can make this change.” By having a collective focus, these teacher leaders commented that they could accomplish more for the students.

### **Networking.**

Elementary teacher leaders in this study reported that they felt supported and sustained when they networked with other educators outside of their school. Seventy-eight percent of the elementary teacher leaders stated they benefited from workshops, institutes, and/or conferences because they networked with like-minded educators. Forty-four percent expressed this being essential to their leadership. One of the elementary teacher leaders met educational experts at a national conference and felt encouraged to initiate the practices she learned. “I got to meet some pretty amazing people that are involved in math and science and was empowered through that training.” Another teacher leader noted, “The work we did with Teacher's College, just being there at Columbia

University and studying with them... they're very intelligent, but they're very passionate about what they do, so it's very inspiring to be there.” Being able to connect with like-minded educators motivated them to take back the practices shared.

Twenty-six percent of elementary teacher leaders noted how their principal connected them with other educators in the district and beyond, allowing them to expand their leadership, and eleven percent said this was central to their growth as a teacher leader. This is important to note because some principals supported their teachers in a way that impacted their development as a teacher leader. One of the teacher leaders communicated how her administrator introduced her to other educators as a means to help her grow as a teacher leader. This leader said, “She put me in contact with people... that gave me the ability to do professional development at the district. I've had the opportunity to meet and speak with some expert educators... in my school district... in other school districts.” Networking or connecting with other expert educators outside their school expanded these elementary teachers’ understanding of education and presented opportunities to lead.

### **Opportunities to lead.**

Having opportunities to pursue and lead as they choose with support and backing from other educators empowered teachers as leaders. Eighty-two percent of the elementary teachers interviewed reported administration that provided opportunities and choice in leadership supported and sustained them, and 37% of these teacher leaders stressed its importance. One teacher leader shared,

“[The principal] really got behind my efforts to be a lifelong learner and provided me opportunities and time which released me from class to go and then serve other teachers teaching math. If there were trainings that I wanted to attend, books

that I wanted to have access to, if she didn't have the money in her budget to do it, she tried to help me find it, whether it was through grant opportunities that we wrote together or things that she encouraged me to write on my own.”

The principal supported this teacher leader’s interest in learning, which ultimately led to her teaching other teachers. Another teacher leader stated,

“If I went to [the principal] with an idea, not only for my classroom, but for a school-wide idea... I was given the go ahead, the okay to do that, not only to organize it and implement it, but a budget to go along with it as well. Just having administrative support and collegial support really helped me to grow because as I thought of new ideas, I would bounce them off, I would get them with others and then it would come to fruition.”

In this situation, the teachers collectively created the ideas and then the principal would provide the necessary support and funds for the ideas to occur. These examples demonstrated how having opportunities to lead as the teachers choose with the support of other educators inspired them to lead.

### **Conclusion.**

These leadership stories conveyed by these 27 elementary teachers showcase how their individual paths have commonalities. Their relationships with other educators in the field impacted why and how they lead. The data showed how role models, a desire to impact education on a larger scale, professional development, a personal expertise or interest, collaboration, networking, and opportunities and choice in leading all influenced their journeys as teacher leaders. These experiences led them to take on more leadership to achieve more for education.

## **Leadership Stories**

### **Introduction.**

The four stories shared represent the diverse group of elementary teacher leaders interviewed. These stories showed the various avenues in which leadership emerged and developed further. The themes identified in the research were not isolated, but interacted in different ways along each of these teacher leaders' paths. These stories highlighted how the themes identified emerged and played out in relation to each other for the teacher leaders.

### **Angela.**

Angela said she began her journey as a teacher leader when she started to look for a way to support her students' academic performance. She commented that she chose to learn about balanced literacy because her students demonstrated they needed support in this curricular area. Angela decided to pursue a professional learning opportunity offered by an organization that other colleagues encouraged her to do. This experience allowed her to collaborate with colleagues, observe teachers and be observed, attend conferences, and have planning days to implement the ideas gained from the conferences. Angela reported that after attending the conferences provided by the organization, she felt inspired to adopt balanced literacy. She believed that collaborating with and observing teachers strengthened her ability to implement it well. Angela stated that they collectively decided to focus on literacy instruction. She discussed lessons and units with these teachers and they observed each other teaching and provided constructive feedback on their practice and student learning. Angela commented that these opportunities to plan together and reflect on their learning benefited her growth. She said her students reaped

the benefits of her new student-led, differentiated approach to literacy. “I started to learn about what was possible in terms of my professional learning... that really helped me sort of see the potential of what those kinds of opportunities can do to help a teacher grow in their leadership,” Angela stated. She recognized that she wanted to share this knowledge with other teachers and help students beyond her own classroom.

To do this, Angela and another teacher had discussions with the principal about the importance of balanced literacy and together they determined how they would share this pedagogical approach with the school. The principal helped create buy-in about balanced literacy among the teachers and Angela recruited a couple of colleagues who implemented balanced literacy. Angela said she intentionally recruited colleagues who “were people who would want to collaborate, who other teachers trusted, and they had good relationships with everybody” to help create buy-in from the faculty.

Angela and her three teacher colleagues then wrote a grant for the purpose of developing professional development in balanced literacy for their school. The first year, they did not receive the grant. Angela noted she continued her work with the three teacher colleagues anyway by giving professional development and planning the experiences necessary to start moving the staff forward. Angela shared that she, along with her three colleagues, worked to strengthen their grant application by developing a specific plan with goals and a vision. After their second attempt, they received the grant. Together, Angela and the other teachers involved, created professional development for the faculty to implement balanced literacy school wide.

Angela reported that she gained confidence from planning and facilitating professional development with her colleagues. She acknowledged, “I think it was just

building a comfort level and a confidence level of being able to be that person in front of the room.” She noted that she had success in leading and looked for ways to further her leadership by becoming a literacy coach for the district. As a literacy coach she reflected on how to enhance the teachers’ learning experience. She stated, “We have opportunities to come together and meet, but I feel like what would be helpful are more structured opportunities that are specifically geared towards developing our skills [as coaches].” So Angela decided to set up a meeting with the assistant superintendent to discuss additional ways to support the role of literacy coaches.

### **Summary.**

Angela’s interest and pursuit of professional development to help her students learn led to her implementing and developing an expertise in balanced literacy. For Angela, professional development inspired her to implement a new teaching approach. She felt collaboration allowed for reflective thinking and purposeful planning. She believed that working with other teachers led to growth in her ability to teach. This growth then led to her interest in sharing her expertise with her colleagues and administration to benefit the school. Angela found and worked closely with other like-minded colleagues who had a passion for balanced literacy and a desire to implement it at the school. Angela perceived her success in leading the school as inspiring her to then lead the district in its implementation as a literacy coach.

Angela’s story had aspects to it that were consistent with many other teacher leaders in that she engaged in professional development, worked with a collaborative team, and pursued leadership to share her expertise and help the school and district succeed. However, these were not isolated factors for Angela, they were connected. Her

desire to improve her students' learning, led her to take on professional development. The knowledge and skills learned from professional development then supported her to see she had something to offer her colleagues, which led her to talk to her principal and connected her to other teachers in a way to continue to learn and develop as a leader.

**Peyton.**

Peyton stated that she switched schools and grade levels each of her first five years teaching because of factors beyond her control, such as changes in enrollment. From working in multiple schools and grade levels, Peyton found each school and grade level she taught at had students struggling academically and that it was not an isolated situation for one class or school, but rather a larger issue that needed to be addressed. She decided she wanted to reach and help these struggling students. She said the one commonality among all five school sites and grade levels was the students really engaged with science. While Peyton noted that English education is her background, she found the students had many questions about science and a desire to investigate. Peyton started following the students' interest in science, which she said led her to wonder about her teaching approach. She reported, "I'm teaching language arts; I'm teaching math; I'm teaching social studies – all within the vehicle of science. They were engaged and they were learning, and I thought this is the way to go."

Peyton looked for ways to help her students by taking science courses for teachers offered at a local university. She stated that these courses became the catalyst for her learning, and led her to where she is today as a leader. She noted that she continued to take science workshops to develop her expertise in teaching science. "I started just by sharing all of this knowledge that I was finding out about or that I was learning. Teachers

would ask me, ‘How are you getting your students to engage?’... These were even veteran teachers,” Peyton acknowledged and stated that this is when she first started feeling like a teacher leader.

Every time she switched schools, Peyton shared what she learned about teaching science with her colleagues. She discussed how one of her principals noticed the impact she was having on her students and asked her to start leading professional development for the school. According to Peyton, this principal saw something in her and had confidence in her ability to lead. She said the principal’s encouragement and direction drove her to get involved with the district science team and lead professional development in science for the district. The principal then suggested Peyton apply to present at state and national conferences, which she did. After which, the district administration put her in contact with someone at a local university to lead professional development in science.

Peyton commented that all of these leadership opportunities allowed her to meet expert educators who deepened her knowledge about best teaching practices. Peyton commented that she uses the knowledge she has gained from these experiences to help teachers build their teams and become reflective thinkers. She reported that her principal’s encouragement to lead prompted her to think more about taking on a formal teacher leader role where she “could actually have more impact on teachers which would have impact back in the classroom.” She decided to obtain a formal leadership position as a science instructional coach.

In her new position, Peyton stated she collaborates with the other content instructional coaches as a way to share resources and ideas. Peyton said she constantly

receives validation for the work she is doing and constructive feedback from her director. Peyton noted that the support she received from her colleagues and director made her realize that delivering incredible professional development and receiving positive feedback from teachers does not necessarily lead to implementation. As Peyton said, “[The teachers] get back into their busy routines and life, which is totally understandable, and everything they were excited about in the professional development doesn't always get back to the classroom no matter how excited they are.” As a result, Peyton said she has started a project to figure out what are the best ways to support professional development beyond the workshops to make the largest impact in the classroom.

### **Summary.**

Peyton discovered from switching schools and grade levels that some of her students were struggling academically, but were engaged in science. This led Peyton to take professional development to help make a larger impact on her students. This positive learning experience led to her taking more professional development in science. She implemented the ideas she gained and other teachers took notice of how engaged her students were in learning. This led to her sharing her knowledge and expertise with other teachers. One of her principals acknowledged her ability to lead and encouraged her to share her expertise further. Peyton then led professional development for the district and presented at state and national conferences. With all these experiences and encouragement from the principal, Peyton desired to have a larger impact by becoming an instructional coach for the district. Now she continues to reflect with other leaders on how to best meet the needs of teachers in order to enhance student learning.

Peyton's story had similarities to other teachers in that she had a desire to impact education beyond the classroom, pursued professional development, collaborated with colleagues, and had opportunities to lead. While Peyton began her journey as a teacher leader independently seeking out professional development, her story demonstrated how the path to leadership was connected to others. Her colleagues wanted to learn from Peyton and her principal believed in her ability to lead. Her connection with other educators has prompted Peyton's continual growth as a leader.

### **Jaquelyn.**

Jacquelyn began her leadership by running an intervention program for the school. She stated she began looking for leadership opportunities because she felt she was teaching well and wanted to do something more for the school that would intellectually stimulate her. She then took a teaching position at another school. At this new school, Jacquelyn said she noticed there was barely any playground equipment and felt a new playground was needed. She reported that she researched how to obtain a new playground and got two companies to fund it. Jacquelyn wanted to do more for her school, so she became a mentor teacher.

Jaquelyn noted that her principal recognized her leadership abilities and recruited her to become the preschool director for the school. She continued to help the school by assisting with the writing of the California Distinguished School application and grants to fund the preschool. Jacquelyn shared how she once saved a failing program that was about to be taken over by the state. I put in "hundreds of hours and hundreds of weekend hours and evening hours and all kinds of hours to bring that program into compliance and beyond." The program became a recommended program after her hard work. She

reported being offended when her supervisor acknowledged her efforts by just saying she did a good job and handing her some candy. Jaquelyn said she would never forget this because it showed her how this could stunt someone's professional growth.

Jaquelyn said she then returned to teaching because she wanted to be more closely connected with students. She shared that her current principal does not require teachers to take on leadership roles, but provides professional development and planning days to explore ideas and develop curriculum in areas that interest the teachers. She stated that while this is helpful, she works in isolation if she cannot find a colleague who is also interested in the same topic. She reported that there are not a lot of leaders at her school and so she has to prioritize the most important items to attend to first. She expressed a concern with working alone because she feels her colleagues will be less likely to support and implement the ideas if they are not part of the decision-making process. Jaquelyn reported that instead of working alone, working with like-minded colleagues supports her as a leader. She said, "Being on a team is very beneficial. When you are a part of a larger team than just being one person trying to implement something." Jaquelyn felt working with others helps develop a shared understanding and brings strength to the school's leadership.

Jaquelyn noted that she leads more behind the scenes, like writing grants, analyzing student data, and being a mentor because it supports her creativity and fits her quiet personality. She continues to assist with writing grants and now also provides math professional development for the district, serves on a committee that provides feedback to the school on its implementation of Language Arts Common Core standards using student data, and works with other teachers to design and implement intervention

programs for the school. Jaquelyn shared that she continues to look for additional ways to expand her leadership roles as a teacher. Jaquelyn sought out leadership roles that fit her personality and interests.

### **Summary.**

Jaquelyn's journey was similar to other teacher leaders in that she had opportunities and choice in how she led and she found an expertise that she used to lead. Her principal allowed her opportunities and choice to pursue interests and develop ideas and activities around these interests. She used her writing expertise to help write the California Distinguished School application and grants for the school. Her story also demonstrated how relationships with leaders positively or negatively could impact a teacher's pursuit of leadership. Jaquelyn proved to be resilient and continued leading despite her supervisor's poor recognition of her efforts to successfully turn a failing program around.

Jaquelyn also led in a different way than many other teacher leaders because she led by writing grants and organizing a donation for a school playground, among other leadership roles. She eventually pursued a more formal leadership role as a preschool director, but ultimately decided she wanted to be in the classroom, working closely with students. Her story was similar to some other teacher leaders in that she chose to return to the classroom and take on more of an informal teacher leader role.

Jaquelyn, like other teacher leaders, sought out leadership opportunities because she wanted to have a larger impact by helping her students and the school. However, she did not always wait for others to offer these opportunities. While many of the teachers' path involved interest in sharing their expertise, Jaquelyn's path was unique in that she

sought out leadership herself. Only a few teachers reported they looked for opportunities to lead, instead many of them stated they wanted to support or share their ideas with other teachers. Jaquelyn's isolated leadership roles appeared to have an impact, though they were not acknowledged much compared to other teacher leaders' contributions.

**Gabriela.**

Gabriela stated she became a teacher leader because of high principal turnover at one school and an uninvolved principal who created a negative work environment at another school. As a result, she said she felt as teachers they had to be their own leaders to progress as professionals. Gabriela noted she felt she could lead in the area of science because she felt she understood and could teach it well. Gabriela stated that she then chose to collaborate with teachers on different grade levels who had a common interest in science and a goal to improve science instruction and activities. Gabriela reported that teacher leadership occurred from the teachers and her coming together with a common interest and purpose and then making and executing a plan collectively to benefit the school. She noted that she thinks shared leadership with teachers is powerful and valuable.

She acknowledged that a different principal then encouraged her to pursue professional development opportunities in science through an educational program. Gabriela began as a participant and after a while she said they recognized her for possessing leadership qualities and having an interest in leading. As a result, they asked if she wanted to become a facilitator. Gabriela stated, "To see those leadership qualities in me and certainly to express that and then to give me an opportunity which they didn't

have to, I think was inspirational for me.” Gabriela noted that she decided to become a facilitator because of the confidence these leaders had in her.

Gabriela reported that she was given the space to explore leadership as a facilitator. She stated that the facilitator she worked with showed her the importance of engaging teachers through the process rather than providing answers for them. Gabriela said she learned a lot about leadership from watching how she and others provided professional learning for teachers. As a teacher leader, Gabriela noted that she learned to respect what knowledge different educators brought to teaching by having them share their experiences and validating their thoughts and contributions. Gabriela commented that she thoroughly enjoys providing professional learning opportunities and working with teachers because she gets to meet other facilitators and teacher leaders and she likes educating other educators.

Soon after becoming a facilitator, Gabriela said she was invited by the organization to be a part of a grant with other teacher leaders. She, along with other teachers, developed and taught an institute incorporating English Language Development with science education. Gabriela reported that this experience inspired her interest to pursue a Teacher On Special Assignment position in supporting teachers with instruction, particularly since her children were older. She shared that she chose to take on this leadership role because she feels a responsibility to help and cares about the school community. Gabriela shared, “Having someone take an interest in you developing your leadership, I think is huge.” She commented that, just as other leaders did for her, she is cognizant of teachers who want to go beyond their regular duties and provides them with opportunities to lead.

## **Summary.**

Gabriela initiated her own learning as a teacher leader when she did not have the guidance from administration. This led her to work with other teachers around improving science instruction and activities to benefit the school. After leading science instruction and activities at the school, a principal suggested that Gabriela pursue professional development. Seventy-eight percent of the teacher leaders discussed going to educational programs offered by organizations or institutions. Gabriela pursued professional development, which led to her deepening her expertise in science. Within time this led to an opportunity to facilitate these sessions. From collaborating with other facilitators, she learned how important it was to value the participants' thinking and to engage them with questions rather than answers. This experience also led to networking with other excellent educators who inspired her growth as a leader. She valued the recognition and confidence other educators had in her and the opportunity she was given to develop her craft as a teacher leader. This led Gabriela to take on a new leadership position where she guides teachers with instruction and supports those who desire to lead.

Gabriela's interest in leading initially stemmed from a desire to lead and grow professionally, where she did not have the support she wanted from administration and so she sought it out with her teaching colleagues. Her story demonstrated how leadership might be ignited from negative circumstances. Nonetheless, her story mirrored other teacher leaders in that she pursued professional development, collaborated with colleagues, networked with other educators, and had opportunities to lead. Her story was mainly about the relationship and connections she made with teachers. To Gabriela,

opportunities to lead arose from educators believing in her and providing a space for her to develop leadership, and leadership came from working and learning with her peers.

### **Conclusion.**

Three of the teacher leaders represented how most of these teachers developed an expertise from an interest or passion that they then shared with colleagues in the form of professional development. Angela's journey began with an interest in improving student outcomes and her colleagues encouraging her to pursue a professional learning opportunity. She gained invaluable knowledge of balanced literacy from collaborating with colleagues and later pursued developing professional development for her school with the support of the principal and assistance of a few teachers. Peyton discovered that no matter where she taught, students were struggling academically. She noticed they enjoyed science and took some courses to develop her practice in science. Other teachers and the principal then took notice of her students' engagement and asked her to share her knowledge with them individually, the school, and later with the larger educational community and district. Gabriela decided she needed to initiate her growth as a leader when she did not have the guidance from a principal due to high principal turnover at her school. She worked collaboratively with a few teachers and began sharing her knowledge of science. Eventually, a principal took notice and suggested she take part in professional development of science, which led to an opportunity for her to lead professional development for other teachers and later support teachers in their practice. Each of these stories highlighted how they grew as leaders by forming a professional learning community within their school, university courses, or an organization. Angela and Peyton

began their journey because of interest to help improve student outcomes, while Gabriela began her journey because of a lack in principal leadership to guide her.

Jaquelyn, on the other hand, sought out leadership opportunities from running an intervention program to funding a playground to mentoring teachers. Her leadership path was different from the others and one often in isolation. She chose to lead because she wanted to make a difference and also because she wanted to be a leader.

### **Differing Findings**

In addition to patterns identified by the teacher leaders, there were some additional findings that represented a few teacher leaders' experiences that differed from the patterns of others. All but one of these findings were chosen because they were supported in literature on leadership, but were not found to be significant factors in supporting teacher leadership in this study. However, the theme of parents as role models influencing their development as leaders signified, while small, an unlikely finding that was not discussed in literature.

#### **Monetary rewards.**

Eleven percent of the teacher leaders, all of the men in the sample, stated that monetary rewards led and sustained them as a teacher leader. One of these teacher leaders reported, "Teachers do so much for free and we put in so much extra time, so I know for me, these opportunities, since I was being paid, I knew it was definitely incentive." These teacher leaders said the monetary recognition given for their additional time influenced them to lead. While this factor might have contributed to their decision to lead, ultimately other factors weighed more heavily. These teacher leaders also were part of the seventy-four percent that said their desire to make a larger impact beyond the classroom was one

of the most important factors that led them to take on leadership opportunities. They might have felt encouraged to pursue and sustain extra leadership roles because of financial recognition, but they especially expressed an intrinsic interest in having a greater effect beyond the classroom.

**Parents as role models.**

Some teacher leaders recognized how their parents served as role models that influenced their development as leaders. Twenty-two percent of elementary teachers stated one of their parents exhibited leadership, which influenced their desire to lead. “[My dad] always strove for the best and wanted it. He said, ‘If you want things to change, you need to take a step and be part of the change,’” reported one teacher leader. Another stated, “She was a Girl Scout leader, served on the Little League board, was involved with PTA... that was such a good, positive experience for everybody that she was involved with, that it's like okay, I can do that too.” Eighty-two percent of the teacher leaders noted veteran colleagues who were their role models and believed in their ability or expected them to lead drove them to take on leadership roles. However, other teacher leaders demonstrated how parents also served as role models and influenced them to take on leadership, and in many cases, from parents working outside of education.

**Leadership is innate.**

Seven percent of the teacher leaders said they have a personality that has led them to lead. One of the leaders said, “I obviously had some good mentor teachers who showed me how to do things like craft management and how to teach reading and math in different ways, but in terms of leadership outside the classroom, I think it's more innate.” These two elementary teachers felt they always identified themselves as leaders, but even

so, they also identified connections to others as a reason for what supported them as a leader. Relationships with students, parents, and/or educators supported and sustained them.

### **Time.**

Twenty-six percent of the teacher leaders mentioned that being provided with time supported their leadership. They did not indicate that insufficient time would prevent them from leading, just that they felt being given time showed they were respected as professionals. One teacher reported, “This principal will give you planning days. You are respected as a professional to take a paid day with a substitute and to spend it... exploring the ideas that you are interested in.” These leader felt supported because they were given time within their professional day to pursue interests and lead. These additional findings related to monetary rewards, parents as role models, leadership being innate, and time, while not represented by many teacher leaders, represented other factors that emerged among a few teachers.

### **Conclusion.**

The twenty-seven elementary teacher leaders in this study identified factors that influenced why they took on leadership and what supported and sustained them as leaders. Overall the basic findings were role models, a desire to impact education beyond the classroom, professional development, collaboration, networking, and opportunities to lead influenced the individual paths each of these elementary teachers took in leading. All these findings related to the teacher leaders’ connections with others. Their relationship with students, parents, and/or educators drove them to lead and continued to inspire them as leaders.

## **Chapter Five: Discussion**

### **Introduction**

The 27 teachers shared their stories, explaining why they pursued leadership and what supported and sustained their leadership. Common themes emerged as to what led them and what kept them going as leaders. Similar to this study, the literature found that professional development, collaboration, teacher dedication and involvement, and shared professional practices enhanced the development of teacher leadership (Muijs & Harris, 2007). This study more specifically found that these teacher leaders recognized how professional development expanded their expertise, collaboration led to shared vision and goals, role models guided their development, and networking allowed them to expand their leadership by connecting with educators outside their school. These teacher leaders also reported opportunities to lead and a desire to impact education beyond the classroom drove them to lead and supported and sustained them. Research also indicated supportive structures and culture, strong leadership, commitment to action, inquiry and data richness, and recognition and reward support the development of teacher leaders (Muijs & Harris, 2007). In this study, some of the teacher leaders mentioned these ideas, but they did not identify them as the defining reasons that led to their development as teacher leaders.

The study also revealed that these teachers' leadership journeys had unique nuances, but similarities in the patterns of their development. Findings from this study demonstrated that these common themes interacted in different ways for each of them as they grew and developed further as leaders. Nonetheless, the similarities among the type of leaders showcased the importance of identifying structural changes and ways to

acknowledge efforts to support them. These unique paths and collective themes highlighted some valuable ideas around teacher leadership. They challenged the ideas that leaders are born and that mentorship is significant to leadership.

First, I discuss how many of the teachers had a passion in education that drove them to lead and sustained them as a leader. Next, I focus on how relationships formed the foundation of why and how these teachers led. I then share how these leadership journeys took many forms, but had similar paths and show how the teachers valued both formal and informal leadership. For most of them, these journeys showed that mentorship was not central to their leadership paths and leadership was not something they sought out. Lastly, I report the limitations of identifying teacher leaders for this study, the implications from this exploratory study for future research, and the recommendations for administration in supporting and sustaining teacher leadership.

### **Passion**

The teacher leaders in this study each found and pursued a passion that they wanted to use to help or share with other educators, students, and/or parents. While the literature did not directly address teacher leaders looking to develop and share a passion, the research did report the different ways teachers might lead. According to York-Barr and Duke (2004), teacher leaders coached colleagues, implemented school reform, or took on other leadership roles. In this study, the teacher leaders chose to lead in these ways because they wanted to share what they were passionate about with others. A few teacher leaders showed passion for mentoring and led by providing instructional support for student teachers, novice teachers, and/or veteran teachers. Some teachers found a passion in advocating for the students and parents of the school by writing grants to

receive funding for resources and organizing and leading parent nights to keep parents informed. A couple of leaders were passionate about being part of the decision-making process and advocating for students and teachers by leading as the union representative or school site council. Many teacher leaders became passionate about a particular curricular area and took professional development in this area and then became an educational expert in their field. The literature reported that teacher leaders tend to provide professional development for colleagues (Day and Harris, 2003; Feiler, et al., 2000; York-Barr and Duke, 2004). While the findings here showed teacher leaders provided professional development for other educators, they also demonstrated that the teachers led as grant writers, decision-makers, mentoring, and more, and that how they led was driven by their passion.

The study revealed that these teachers found a niche that they were excited about and could excel in. They found a space to develop their passion, where they could participate and do something that would benefit their educational community. The study demonstrated that there were numerous areas in which teacher leaders discovered a passion and multiple ways they could lead. The findings showed that teacher leaders benefited from having a space and resources to explore their passion and an outlet to share their expertise or leadership. Research substantiated these findings in that providing a structure for teachers to develop and use their professional knowledge and discretion allowed teachers to become leaders (Harris, 2005).

### **Relationships**

The findings showed relationships with students, parents, administration, colleagues, and educational experts shaped and formed the basis as to why and how these

teachers led. Research supported these findings by indicating that relationships inspired others to develop as an educator and build capacity toward a mission (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000). The study demonstrated that these teachers associated their first steps into leadership with the relationships they formed. Initially their respect or care for the relationships they had with students, parents, and/or teachers inspired them to do more for them. Then the relationships they had with other educators throughout their journey as a leader influenced how they developed their passion and led. An example of this was how Peyton was inspired to do more for her students when she noticed they enjoyed science. She pursued professional development in science and implemented new teaching practices that led to relationships helping her colleagues and the principal asking her to share her expertise through professional development for the district. These findings validated the research that stated leadership practice occurred from the interactions between educators (Spillane, et al., 2004) and leadership might emerge from working together toward a common goal (Spillane, 2005; Spillane, et al., 2004). The findings also demonstrated that the relationships formed and connections made with educational experts provided a space for these teacher leaders to develop their craft and share their expertise and passion with like-minded educators.

The findings showed that the relationships the teacher leaders formed with students, colleagues, and/or administrators pushed them to take on leadership and sustained their leadership. For some, the relationships they had with students made them want to do more to help them succeed. For others, the recognition, guidance, and encouragement they received from a role model or administrator enabled them to lead. These findings upheld the research that teacher leaders desire respect, appreciation, and

peer acceptance and recognition from relationships (LeBlanc & Skelton, 1997), which helped them grow and develop as teacher leaders. Whether their relationships led them to advocate for students or parents, or whether their relationships led them to teach or assist other teachers, relationships supported their leadership in different forms from various people. The findings stipulated that these relationships impacted the paths these teacher leaders took. Gabriela's story showed how relationships impacted her journey as a leader. She shared how a suggestion from her principal led her to attend professional development. Then the relationships she formed with those at the organization led them to recognize her leadership potential and ask her to facilitate. This led to her relationships with other facilitators who supported her growth as a facilitator of other teachers. These experiences and opportunities from the relationships she formed guided her to how she leads today. The study made evident that relationships motivated the teacher leaders to initiate leadership and then relationships impacted the experiences they had and how they grew as a leader.

### **Path of Leadership**

The four teacher leader stories illustrated that the path of leadership had varied nuances for each teacher, but had similarities in how their leadership developed. They chose paths based on their individual passions and relationships formed. Many of the teachers stated how their journeys initially focused on improving their teaching practice or helping their students, which led them to opportunities to learn and experiences with others, and this ultimately drove them to become leaders. This was significant because literature suggested that leaders had particular traits and some were meant to lead. These

findings challenged this idea and showed how many teachers became leaders with support and guidance.

The findings exhibited how a teacher leader's journey could go back and forth from informal and formal leadership roles. They valued all forms of leadership, moving from one role to the next based on their interests and how they felt they could best lead and help teachers and students in their school and district. The teacher leaders took on different informal roles, formal roles, and formal positions. Instead of being concerned with the type of leadership role they held, the four stories highlighted that these leaders led in a way that gave them purpose and direction. Research suggested that principals that provided a clear purpose and roles for teacher leaders validated them (Barth, 2001; Murphy, 2005). While the findings stated that some teachers appreciated guidance from administration, some also identified the importance of having choice in what and how they led. Choice in how they pursued leadership affirmed the research that stated teacher leaders and principals should challenge the traditional top-down hierarchy (Biegen & Kennedy, 2000; Crowther, et al., 2002; Stoelinga, 2008). The findings demonstrated that they valued both informal and formal roles by pursuing their own path of leadership in a direction that supported their passions.

Even though some of the teacher leaders had served as mentors for other teachers, most of them did not discuss this as central to their leadership paths. This might be because of the population interviewed or the way in which questions were asked. Nonetheless, mentorship was significant in the literature as a way teachers could support and lead, but the findings showed this to be important because teachers did not frame their work as leaders in this way.

## **Limitations**

Obtaining teacher leader nominations proved to be challenging. The original ten nominations from the two organizations were easy to obtain, but then the initial nominated leaders felt it was hard to make their own nominations. Some teacher leaders felt they could not recommend teachers who lead differently than they do because they lead with or know teachers who lead in the same way. Other teacher leaders struggled to nominate teachers working at different school sites because they had only worked at one or two schools. Those interviewed had difficulty nominating others because of their limited scope of teacher leaders known. As a result, one of the individuals from the organization provided additional contacts with other individuals who could then make teacher leader nominations.

Another limitation included that the teacher leaders interviewed were mid-career or veteran teachers. Even though I only asked for teacher who led in a different way and did not specify years of experience, the teacher leaders nominated others with nine or more years experience. The study did not include more novice teachers who may have just begun their journey as leaders. Ideally, having teachers with a few years teaching experience would have provided more diversity in the study.

Finally, this study included only teacher leaders located in southern California. This may have provided a limited view of teacher leadership because teachers from the same state may have similar experiences. This study would be strengthened if additional organizations nationwide provided teacher leader nominations. Including teacher leaders in various areas nationwide would provide more data and possibly new findings on what supports and sustains teacher leaders.

## **Implications**

Considering this was an exploratory study, more research should be conducted on what leads teachers to take on leadership and what supports and sustains them. Based on the findings of this study, more research is needed around how teachers develop a passion or interest to pursue, how relationships influence teacher leadership, what opportunities teachers need to take on leadership, what drives teachers to want to have a larger impact beyond the classroom, and how to support teacher leaders in their journey to redefine their leadership. Furthermore, organizations that support teachers across the nation should be included to provide nominations of teacher leaders nationwide and novice teacher leaders also should be studied to provide a more in-depth understanding of teacher leadership.

## **Recommendations**

Teachers mentioned the importance of administration supporting them as leaders. Many studies also suggested the importance of principals providing support of teacher leadership to help them be more effective in school reform (Crowther, et al., 2002; Harris, 2005; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001; Murphy, 2005) and improve teacher leaders' effectiveness (Barth, 2001; Murphy, 2005). This study suggests that teachers' passions need to be nurtured in areas that will benefit the school by providing them with resources and a space to grow professionally. The research also implies that teachers should have opportunities to come together, connect, and share ideas with colleagues, administrators, other teachers and educational experts in order to guide them to grow and develop as teacher leaders. Structural changes in school, such as time and a space to collaborate in a

professional learning community and professional development of their choice within the school and/or district, may support teacher leadership.

The teacher leaders demonstrated that they take on informal and formal roles that benefit the school and district. Making opportunities available to lead in informal roles, formal roles such as providing professional development for other educators, and formal positions such as an instructional coach or curriculum specialist, provides teachers with choice on how they will lead in their journey as a leader. Another way to support teacher leaders is allowing them to lead in informal and formal capacities simultaneously, where they teach students and also support teachers outside the classroom by mentoring or providing professional development. A structural change, where teachers job share, may provide a way to do this. The study demonstrated that acknowledgment is important to the teachers who lead. Their colleagues may support teacher leaders by acknowledging the ideas shared and support given. The principal may best acknowledge teachers individually, so as not to single out a teacher in front of others, and provide support in the way of time to lead, choice in how to best support the school, and professional development opportunities to continue growth as a leader. Therefore, administration should offer support for teachers to develop as leaders by providing time and resources for them to grow professionally and lead, acknowledgment of their efforts, and opportunities to work with all kinds of educators. By supporting and sustaining teacher leadership, administrators and teachers alike will be able to collectively lead and build school and district capacity.

## Appendices

### *Appendix A*

#### **Letter Asking for Initial Nominations of Teacher Leaders**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

I am a graduate student in the Educational Leadership Program at UCLA and a teacher at xxxxxxxxxx. Entering my last year of graduate school, I will be conducting research on teacher leadership. Megan Franke suggested I contact you for assistance. My dissertation addresses the reasons teachers take on leadership roles and the experiences and opportunities they perceive supporting and sustaining their roles as teacher leaders. For the purpose of this study, teacher leadership may include both formal and informal roles and efforts by teachers. Leadership then may take the form of participating in collaborative design and decision making, involvement in shared decision making, taking on professional learning, taking on a school based issue, leading professional development or a school/district based committee and so on. Some examples of what this may look like include involvement in refinement and improvement of teaching practices, chairing a school based committee, taking on a school based issue to support change, or mentorship or support in other teachers' development.

I was hoping that you could provide about five nominations of diverse formal and informal elementary teacher leaders from varying school sites that I could contact for potential participation in my study as an interviewee. If you would like to speak or meet with me regarding my study, you may contact me at (xxx) xxx-xxxx or xxxxxx@xxxxxxx.xxx. Thank you for your time and assistance.

Best regards,

Kristin Artim

*Appendix B*

**Email to Teacher Leaders About Project**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

I am a doctoral student in the Educational Leadership Program at UCLA and a teacher at xxxxxxxxxx. For my dissertation, I am conducting research on the reasons teachers take on leadership roles and the experiences and opportunities they perceive supporting and sustaining their roles. \_\_\_\_\_ suggested I contact you as a teacher who might be willing to contribute to my study and engage in an hour long interview. I would appreciate the opportunity to speak or meet with you regarding this topic, and am available to answer any questions you may have regarding this study at (xxx) xxx-xxxx or xxxxxx@xxxxxxx.xxx. Please let me know if I may contact you regarding this study and, if so, what is the best way to reach you. Thank you for your time and assistance.

Best regards,

Kristin Artim

*Appendix C*

**Questions for Teacher Leaders Prior to the Interview**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

Thank you for participating in my study on the different reasons teachers take on leadership roles and the experiences and opportunities they perceive supporting and sustaining their roles. Before our interview, I would appreciate you answering and emailing me back your answers to the following questions:

1. Please check all credentials and degrees you hold:
  - Teaching credential(s) from California
  - Teaching credential(s) from another state
  - National Board Certification
  - Masters degree(s) in Education
  - Masters degree(s) in another discipline
  - Doctorate degree in Education
  - Doctorate degree in another discipline
  - Other (Please specify: \_\_\_\_\_)
2. How many years have you been teaching?
3. List the school(s) and the city and state of the school(s) you have taught at.
4. How many years have you been teaching at your current school?
5. What grade level(s) and/or subject matter do you and have you taught?
6. What is the title of your current position?

Thank you for your time and assistance.

Best regards,

Kristin Artim

## *Appendix D*

### **Interview Protocol and Questions**

I am conducting research on teacher leadership. Leadership for me includes both formal and informal roles and efforts by teachers. Leadership then may take the form of participating in collaborative design and decision making, involvement in shared decision making, taking on professional learning, taking on a school based issue, leading professional development or a school/district based committee and so on. I appreciate you lending your expertise. All responses will be kept confidential and no names will be used in the study. I will ask a series of questions regarding the different reasons you take on leadership roles and what you perceive as supporting and sustaining your role as a teacher leader. I also may ask additional information regarding the experiences and roles you share. Please start by stating your name, how long you have taught, and your experiences in teaching.

1. Tell me your story of how you became a teacher leader.
2. Can you talk to me about two of the most significant people and/or resources that influenced you as you became a teacher leader.
  - a. Please share how each of them influenced you as you became a teacher leader.
  - b. How have you grown as a teacher leader?
  - c. What are some ways you changed?
3. In considering the schools you have taught at, which was the most supportive to becoming a teacher leader? (If only taught at one school: How did and does your administration influence your role as a teacher leader?)
  - a. What was it about that school that made it supportive?
  - b. What was different about this school from other schools you have worked at?
4. How does your current school influence your role as a teacher leader?
  - a. What role do different people or resources play in your leadership support?
  - b. Does your current school support and sustain you as a teacher leader? If so, how? If not, how?
5. What leadership roles do you take on? Why?
6. Is there anything else you want to share around what has supported you in your journey as a teacher leader?

Please recommend three teacher leaders who you feel exhibit leadership in a different way than you.

Thank you for your time. I appreciate your thoughts on teacher leadership. To accurately represent the thoughts you shared today, I will email you a summary of the main ideas from this interview and will ask you to verify and provide feedback. I may also ask you some additional questions. Thank you again.

*Appendix E*

**Questions for Teacher Leaders After Interview**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

Thank you for meeting with me to discuss your journey as a teacher leader. I would appreciate you answering and emailing me back your answers to the following questions:

1. Please check off any activities below you have engaged in:
  - Collaborated with teachers on grade level
  - Collaborated with teachers on different grade levels
  - Collaborated with specialists
  - Collaborated with administration
  - Served on a school committee
  - Read professional books
  - Implemented new teaching practices
  - Developed new curriculum
  - Advocated for students' needs
  - Advocated for schools' needs
  - Assisted students outside of instructional time
  - Attended a conference
  - Presented at a conference
  - Organized professional development for the school
  - Led professional development for the school
  - Participated in an action research project in education
  - Participated in a professional learning community (PLC)
  - Mentored a student-teacher
  - Mentored a novice teacher
  - Served as an academic coach (subject area(s): \_\_\_\_\_)
  - Attended a school board meeting
2. Are there any other formal or informal positions you have held not on the list? If so, what were they?

Thank you for your time and assistance.

Best regards,

Kristin Artim

## Appendix F

### **University of California Los Angeles Study Information Sheet for Pilot**

Teacher Leadership: Exploring what supports and sustains elementary teachers as leaders

*Kristin Artim, M.Ed.*, from the Graduate School of Education and Information Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) is conducting a research study.

You were selected to pilot the study and as a possible participant in this study because someone recommended you as a leader in teaching. Your participation in this research study is voluntary.

#### **Why is this study being done?**

This study is for my dissertation. I am conducting research on the reasons teachers take on leadership roles and the experiences and opportunities they perceive supporting and sustaining their roles.

#### **What will happen if I take part in this research study?**

If you volunteer to participate in this study, the researcher will ask you to do the following:

- *Answer some questions regarding your professional history as an educator.*
- *Participate in an hour long interview on your experiences and opportunities as a leader in teaching.*
- *Read the summary of the main ideas from your interview and verify and provide feedback.*
- *Answer some questions regarding the roles you have taken on as a leader in teaching.*
- *Provide feedback on the interview for possible refinement for the study.*

#### **How long will I be in the research study?**

Participation will take a total of about 1 – 2 hours and will be completed within two months.

#### **Are there any potential risks or discomforts that I can expect from this study?**

There is minimal risk because multiple measures will be taken to safeguard your personal information and interview.

#### **Are there any potential benefits if I participate?**

You will not directly benefit from your participation in the research.

The results of the research may provide insight for administrators on how to support and sustain teacher leadership.

**Will information about me and my participation be kept confidential?**

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can identify you will remain confidential. It will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of safeguarding data. Your individual information will be saved separately from your interview transcript on different hard drives. Your individual information will be saved with a code and all identifiers from your interview transcripts will be changed to pseudonyms. Kristin Artim will be the only one who will have access to it.

**What are my rights if I take part in this study?**

- You can choose whether or not you want to be in this study, and you may withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time.
- Whatever decision you make, there will be no penalty to you, and no loss of benefits to which you were otherwise entitled.
- You may refuse to answer any questions that you do not want to answer and still remain in the study.

**Who can I contact if I have questions about this study?**

- **The research team:**  
If you have any questions, comments or concerns about the research, you can talk to the researcher. Please contact:  
Kristin Artim at (xxx) xxx-xxxx or xxxxxx@xxxxxxxx.xxx.
- **UCLA Office of the Human Research Protection Program (OHRPP):**  
If you have questions about your rights while taking part in this study, or you have concerns or suggestions and you want to talk to someone other than the researcher about the study, please call the OHRPP at (310) 825-7122 or write to:  
UCLA Office of the Human Research Protection Program  
11000 Kinross Avenue, Suite 211, Box 951694  
Los Angeles, CA 90095-1694

## Appendix G

### **University of California Los Angeles Study Information Sheet for Study**

Teacher Leadership: Exploring what supports and sustains elementary teachers as leaders

*Kristin Artim, M.Ed*, from the Graduate School of Education and Informational Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) is conducting a research study.

You were selected as a possible participant in this study because someone recommended you as a leader in teaching. Your participation in this research study is voluntary.

#### **Why is this study being done?**

This study is for my dissertation. I am conducting research on the reasons teachers take on leadership roles and the experiences and opportunities they perceive supporting and sustaining their roles.

#### **What will happen if I take part in this research study?**

If you volunteer to participate in this study, the researcher will ask you to do the following:

- *Answer some questions regarding your professional history as an educator.*
- *Participate in an hour long interview on your experiences and opportunities as a leader in teaching.*
- *Read the summary of the main ideas from your interview and verify and provide feedback.*
- *Answer some questions regarding the roles you have taken on as a leader in teaching.*

#### **How long will I be in the research study?**

Participation will take a total of about 1 – 2 hours and will be completed within two months.

#### **Are there any potential risks or discomforts that I can expect from this study?**

There is minimal risk because multiple measures will be taken to safeguard your personal information and interview.

#### **Are there any potential benefits if I participate?**

You will not directly benefit from your participation in the research.

The results of the research may provide insight for administrators on how to support and sustain teacher leadership.

**Will information about me and my participation be kept confidential?**

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can identify you will remain confidential. It will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of safeguarding data. Your individual information will be saved separately from your interview transcript on different hard drives. Your individual information will be saved with a code and all identifiers from your interview transcripts will be changed to pseudonyms. Kristin Artim will be the only one who will have access to it.

**What are my rights if I take part in this study?**

- You can choose whether or not you want to be in this study, and you may withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time.
- Whatever decision you make, there will be no penalty to you, and no loss of benefits to which you were otherwise entitled.
- You may refuse to answer any questions that you do not want to answer and still remain in the study.

**Who can I contact if I have questions about this study?**

• **The research team:**

If you have any questions, comments or concerns about the research, you can talk to the researcher. Please contact:

Kristin Artim at (xxx) xxx-xxxx or xxxxxx@xxxxxxxx.xxx.

• **UCLA Office of the Human Research Protection Program (OHRPP):**

If you have questions about your rights while taking part in this study, or you have concerns or suggestions and you want to talk to someone other than the researcher about the study, please call the OHRPP at (310) 825-7122 or write to:

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Los Angeles, CA 90095-1694

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