

A MULTIPLE-CASE STUDY ON THE PERCEPTIONS OF TEACHER AUTONOMY IN A
TRADITIONALLY STRUCTURED AND A TEACHER POWERED SCHOOL

by

Jerry Lee Wright

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

Liberty University

2018

A MULTIPLE-CASE STUDY ON THE PERCEPTIONS OF TEACHER AUTONOMY IN A
TRADITIONALLY STRUCTURED AND A TEACHER POWERED SCHOOL

by Jerry Lee Wright

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA

2018

APPROVED BY:

Judy P. Shoemaker, EdD, Committee Chair

David Gorman, EdD, Committee Member

Terry Fasel, EdD, Committee Member

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to examine teachers' perceived autonomy in two different school settings. The theory that guided this study was Bandura's social-cognitive theory, specifically focusing on the three aspects of human agency. The research question was used to investigate the similarities and differences of teachers' perceptions of autonomy in two schools one traditionally structured and the other teacher-powered. Thirteen participants from two separate settings, one teacher-powered school and one traditionally structured school were selected for this study. Participants were selected using criterion-sampling methods to ensure that all participants were teachers within their setting. Teacher-powered schools was defined as schools with a leadership structure driven by teacher leaders while traditionally structured schools were defined as schools with a principal-driven organizational structure. Data collection was triangulated using participant interviews, site observations, and document analysis. Data for this study were organized based on site and participants' responses. Categorical aggregation was utilized to help identify common themes across multiple sources. Based on the data collected, it was determined that teachers in teacher-powered schools reported having a higher level of autonomy over curriculum decisions and instructional strategies than those in traditionally structured schools

Keywords: case study, teacher autonomy, teacher leadership, teacher-powered schools, traditionally structured schools

DEDICATION

Colossian 3:23 states, “Work willingly at whatever you do, as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people.” I’ve said from the beginning of this doctoral journey that this degree was God’s first. Therefore, it is only fitting to dedicate this dissertation to my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. It is through Him that I’ve had the wisdom and courage to pursue my dream of earning this degree. Throughout this journey He has walked ahead of me making a way for this research, He has walked beside me encouraging me with the wisdom of what to write, and sometimes behind me pushing me to not give up and to persevere in His name. This is His doctorate and for that I give Him all glory, honor, and praise.

Secondly, I dedicate this piece of research to TEACHERS. First I wrote this dissertation in honor of MY teachers, the ones who believed in me and encouraged me to achieve my absolute best. It is these teachers who inspired me to follow in their footsteps so that I could be for students what so many of my teachers were for me. To the teachers I now have the privilege of working alongside, I wrote this for you. You inspire me daily. You have the passion and dedication to change the world and you are doing it every single day. I sit in awe of the talent that lies within every single soul I teach with and am confident that we have the power to change our education system for the better. Lastly, I wrote this for the teachers yet to come. I don’t want to leave our education system the way we received it, full of bureaucracy and top-down mandates. It is because of my hope for what TEACHING should be and could become that I pursued this degree. This research is only the beginning and it is my prayer that teachers find their inner voice and start raising it loud and clear. Teachers DO have the expertise and knowledge to be the change that our students need. Therefore, I dedicate this work to ALL teachers...the ones we need to start trusting instead of criticizing. The people whose voice we

should hear the loudest because they are the closest voice to the things that matter most, our precious children.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I want to acknowledge my parents, Randy and Trisha Wright. If only every child had the cheering section that I've had in my parents...our world would be a much better place. Thank you for always believing in me and my passion for education since I was a very young child. Whether late night trips to a store for a school project to putting your needs aside to help me pay for graduate school, please know I'm forever grateful for the sacrifices you've made so I could receive this degree. You are the quintessential example of unconditional love and that has made me the person I am today. I always said I'd be a doctor when I grew up and now I've made that dream come true (maybe the plan was a little altered, but a doctor is a doctor). My prayer is that I make you proud because I know that I am so proud and honored to be your son. The Lord found great favor on me when he gave me you two as parents.

Secondly, to my amazing wife, Mary Craig Wright...THANK YOU. I said that this degree was God's first, and OURS second and I could not mean that more. Even though I did the writing, you did the encouraging and sacrificing so that I could pursue my passion for teaching and education. You never complained when focusing on this degree meant taking time away from you. You have cheered me on and showed me what it means to have a supportive wife. You always put my needs and desires before your own and that is what makes you selfless. I am so blessed by your love and it's more than I deserve. Even more, I'm so thankful that you understand my love for this field and that you encourage me to push for something better for our students and community. I love getting to walk life's journey with you and can't wait to see what adventure God has in store for us next.

Thirdly, I have to thank my best friend and brother in education, Jon Spencer. Your enthusiasm and love for teaching is what inspired me from the very beginning of my career to

question the norm and dare to be different. I have learned so much from you and now I have the utmost honor and privilege of working alongside you every single day. That has been one of God's greatest blessings to me. Getting to live out our dream of running a school together has been an amazing adventure. I must say that I look forward coming to work every single day. I know God did not cross our paths by coincidence nor did he put us in charge of a school by mere chance. I believe that it has been part of His big plan and through this research I am excited to see what outside of the box methods we dream of to help elevate teachers to make the lives of our students better. There is not anybody else in this world I could imagine making this vision come to life with besides you. Thank you for pushing me to be better because our kids deserve it.

Lastly, I have to acknowledge my wonderful committee who helped me bring this research to reality. Your immediate feedback and encouragement helped me cross the finish line. To my chair, Dr. Judy Shoemaker...I owe you the world. You believed in me since I very first met you at Warner University and you've never let me forget my pact of becoming a doctor of education. Very few people writing their acknowledgements can say that they've known their chair since undergraduate, but I can and do so proudly. Thank you for never losing touch with me and for always being my cheerleader. Thank you for always pushing me to improve my writing and to be better than I was the course or degree before. I honestly can say that I would not be here without your guidance and wisdom. It is not only my pleasure to call you professor, but most importantly my friend.

Table of Contents

ABSTRACT.....	3
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	13
Overview.....	13
Background.....	13
Historical Contexts.....	15
Social Contexts	18
Theoretical Contexts.....	19
Situation to Self	22
Problem Statement.....	24
Purpose Statement.....	25
Significance of the Study.....	26
Research Questions.....	28
Definitions.....	30
Summary.....	31
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW	32
Overview.....	32
Theoretical Framework.....	32
Related Literature.....	35
Teacher Autonomy.....	36
Teacher Morale	41
Accountability.....	45
Teacher Leadership.....	48

Distributed Leadership.....	54
Innovative School Design.....	56
Summary.....	59
CHAPTER THREE: METHODS.....	61
Overview.....	61
Design.....	61
Research Questions.....	63
Setting.....	63
Participants.....	64
Procedures.....	66
The Researcher’s Role.....	68
Data Collection.....	69
Interviews.....	70
Focus Groups.....	76
Site Observations.....	80
Document Analysis.....	81
Data Analysis.....	82
Trustworthiness.....	84
Credibility.....	84
Dependability and Confirmability.....	85
Transferability.....	86
Ethical Considerations.....	87
Summary.....	89

	10
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS.....	90
Overview.....	90
Participants.....	90
Results.....	97
Theme Development.....	97
Summer School Themes	98
Common Themes	98
Winter School Themes.....	98
Research Question Responses.....	110
RQ1	110
RQ2.....	113
RQ3	114
RQ4.....	116
Summary.....	118
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION	120
Overview.....	120
Summary of Findings.....	120
Research Questions.....	120
RQ1	120
RQ2.....	121
RQ3	123
RQ4.....	125
Discussion.....	127

Empirical Literature	128
Theoretical Literature.....	134
Implications.....	141
Empirical.....	141
Theoretical	145
Practical.....	148
Delimitations and Limitations.....	150
Delimitations.....	150
Limitations	151
Recommendations for Future Research	152
Summary	153
REFERENCES	154
Appendix A: Recruitment Form	161
Appendix B: IRB Approved Consent Form.....	163
Appendix C: Participant Interview Questionnaire	164
Appendix D: Teacher Autonomy Observation Instrument.....	167
Appendix E: Findings Coding Matricies	168

List of Tables

Table 1: Theme Comparisons	98
----------------------------------	----

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

The public education system has placed great emphasis on blaming teachers for the outcomes of student achievement and school success instead of trusting them for their expertise to bring about positive change (Farris-Berg & Dirkswager, 2013). To help improve the current realities of public schools, government officials have increased the standardization of both instruction and teachers alike. This failed attempt to improve student achievement could possibly indicate the need to take a different approach for school success such as empowering teachers with autonomy to impact their schools and instruction (Farris-Berg & Dirkswager, 2013). This movement, known as teacher-powered schools (TPS), could be the key to improving school and student success by using the most valuable educational commodity – teachers (Farris-Berg & Dirkswager, 2013).

Chapter One provides an overview and introduction to the proposed multiple case study focused on teachers' perception of autonomy to make decisions. According to Creswell (2013), the case study approach to research enables the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon within a particular case or cases, which in this study will be the perceived autonomy within two school sites. A multiple case study design will provide a comparative view of the phenomenon to identify if structures of schools impact the autonomy (Yin, 2014). Chapter One explains the background of the topic of teacher autonomy including the historical, social, and theoretical contexts of the issue. In addition, the problem, purpose, and research questions are presented for the proposed study.

Background

Today's American education system is filled with disengaged professionals whose

morale is at an all time low (Berry, 2014; Dierking & Fox, 2013). Possible causes of this dissatisfaction include educational policy, lack of autonomy on behalf of teachers to make decisions about curriculum, and leadership styles of administrators that do not promote collaboration and teacher empowerment (Dierking & Fox, 2013; Sterrett & Irizarry, 2015).

When the autonomy entrusted to teachers to make decisions for both their students and school is limited it diminishes teachers' belief that they can positively impact the success of their students. It also limits the desire of teachers to be engaged in the profession (Berry, 2014). Humans have an innate desire for autonomy in their lives (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014).

This structure of public schools with insurmountable mandates and limited autonomy does not have to be the only option for school operation and organizational leadership. In their book, Farris-Berg and Dirkswager (2013) discussed eight practices in which autonomous teachers engage. The eight practices include: (a) obtaining a shared purpose, (b) participating in shared leadership for the good of the entire school, (c) encouraging students and colleagues to be engaged in school, (d) developing curriculum that individualize learning for students, (e) addressing student discipline and social problems as a part of the learning process, (f) broadening the definition of student achievement and success, (g) encouraging instructional improvement amongst each other through peer-evaluation and coaching, and (h) balancing the budget through trade-offs to meet the needs of the diverse students they serve. Farris-Berg and Dirkswager also indicated that these eight practices are interwoven within the culture of schools with schools that have a reputation for high-performance and student success. Therefore, a fully autonomous structured school can in turn increase teacher morale and job satisfaction and student achievement simultaneously.

Another model of increased autonomy for teachers presented in the literature is

distributive and cooperative leadership. Teachers' self-efficacy, motivation, and commitment to the organization is increased when they perceive the leadership within the school to be a cooperative effort and their resistance to change is diminished (Abdolhamid & Mehdinezhad, 2016; Bush & Glover, 2012). In addition, when teachers are empowered to make decisions for their students and school their self-efficacy increases (Abdolhamid & Mehdinezhad, 2016; Angelle & Teague, 2014; Fairman & Mackenzie, 2015). However, when teachers have lower levels of self-efficacy, they tend to limit students and themselves in regards to the potential they can reach (Angelle & Teagues, 2014). For the models of distributed leadership to be successful, teacher leadership teams must be empowered to lead change without tight reigns and oversight from administrators (Bush & Glover, 2012).

While distributed leadership models encompass some facets of teacher autonomy, they do not completely support the notion that teachers are capable of initiating the change and carrying out that change to best meet the needs of students and teachers. Fairman and Mackenzie (2015) referred to these teachers as igniters and catalysts, meaning that such teachers are able to lead a movement of change and improvement with their students and colleagues. This in turn develops a culture of improved teaching and learning. In addition, Berry and Hess (2013) promoted the redesigning of teachers' roles so that strong teacher leaders do not have to focus on climbing a ladder of leadership. Instead through these redesigned roles, teacher leaders are able to thrive in a lattice method of leadership where their impact can remain in the classroom while spreading to the other classrooms and throughout the school. This model is what is referred to as a teacher-powered school (Berry & Hess, 2013)

Historical Contexts

Historically, there has been an extreme shift with teacher autonomy from the hands of

teachers into the hands of external decision makers (Moloney, 2006; Smaller, 2015). In both Europe and America, a researcher described the gradual process of de-professionalizing and de-skilling teachers through the removal of teacher autonomy (Smaller, 2016). Moloney (2006) explained that current trends in teacher accountability have supported creating teacher-proof curriculums that move away from teacher decision making to scripted curriculums created with the intent for any person to understand. Even early childhood arenas have felt the current change towards higher accountability at a cost of less autonomy (Grant, Danby, Thorpe, & Theobald, 2016). With policymakers trying to improve systems through focus on teacher efficacy, pre-kindergarten and primary classrooms are no longer places of creativity and exploratory learning. Instead these teachers are also being forced to embrace policy driven regimes that are limiting their abilities to build educative relationships with children in an attempt to ensure highly quality education programs (Grant et al., 2016). According to Moloney (2006), “The well-documented shift of autonomy and agency away from classrooms and local schools leaves teachers feeling frustrated, ineffectual, and silenced” (p. 24).

Teacher autonomy became even more undermined with the legislation under the No Child Left Behind Act from 2002 in which an increased focus was placed on the performance of students and schools on standardized assessments (Chomsky & Robichaud, 2014). Although, standardized assessments have been dated back to the 1920s, the amount of pressure placed on teachers to ensure students perform has thus increased over the years. Now autonomy is heavily impacted because lawmakers believe schools and teachers should be accountable for how students perform (Chomsky & Robichaud, 2014). Grant et al. (2016) reported findings where teachers describe the burden of policies requiring them to spend most of their time providing proof of quality programs versus focusing on their ideas or desires for their curriculum and

instruction. Chomsky and Robichaud (2014) also explained that current legislation in Race to the Top has adopted policies “designed to enforce obedience, discipline and discharge of individual initiatives” (p. 3). Therefore, teacher autonomy is being minimalized due to fear of discipline for students not performing according to policy expectations.

In contrast, Smaller (2015) contended that in the past century, teachers have never been truly considered professionals. There have always been barriers and restrictions placed on their roles of teacher and leaders. Smaller (2015) stated however that the historical change that has most recently been observed has been the standardization of teaching and learning. Smaller referenced work from the 1950’s on the culture of the American school that reported society’s call to improve the education of children. This in turn led to an emphasis on teachers to improve their teaching skills, very synonymous to today’s educational setting

It has also been common for teachers to have the autonomy to make decisions for their schools and to be involved in participative leadership. Dating back to the late 1900s, shared leadership and other styles of teacher leadership that encourage teachers to help in managerial type decisions within a school has been documented (Kipkoech & Cheshire, 2011). Kipkoech and Cheshire (2011) discussed common leadership roles such as department chair or lead teacher as historical examples of how administrators have empowered teachers to have some autonomy to make decisions for their students and school within a traditionally structured model.

The history of schools supervised by autonomous teachers dates back to the 1970s during which the country had two teacher autonomy structured schools open on opposite coasts. Following in the next decade was the publication of a report titled “A Nation at Risk” in which the idea of restructuring seemed plausible (Farris-Berg & Dirkswager, 2013). From the mid 90s all the way into the 2000s, more full autonomy schools began throughout the country. In the year

2010, Farris-Berg and Dirkswager (2013) explained that teachers from TPS met with the Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, to discuss the possibility of enhancing teacher autonomy through TPS, which would in turn increase teacher morale and student achievement outcomes. Finally, the most recent event in the teacher leadership and full teacher autonomy movement is the National Education Association appointed a commission in 2010 to redesign the teaching profession by creating a vision where autonomous teachers would be leading the charge for increasing teacher efficacy and student achievement (Farris-Berg & Dirkswager, 2013).

Social Contexts

According to the Center for American Progress, Teacher morale and autonomy in America's public school systems is at an all time low (Berry, 2014). Teacher morale can be greatly impacted by teacher autonomy, which is the teachers' ability to have academic control of what is taught in their classrooms. When teachers are given the autonomy to make instructional decisions for their students, their satisfaction with the teaching profession will improve (Farris-Berg & Dirkswager, 2013). Research in the field of teacher autonomy can support empowerment of teachers, which will increase teacher engagement as well as positive student outcomes.

In addition to teacher morale, teacher retention is a social context that plagues the success of classrooms. Teacher retention is directly related to teacher morale. According to Greene (2016), in some high poverty schools, teacher turnover rates are as high as 100 percent each year, which can greatly impact the student outcomes in those classrooms. Latiflogu (2016) explained that attracting teachers into the profession is a struggle and that the strongest who are currently serving are prone to burnout, which means this is a pertinent social concern for the classrooms across the globe. Greene further explained that a significant indicator of this social problem across most public schools is that teachers are "isolated, overwhelmed, and unsupported" (p. 45).

This often leads to them quitting and not returning to the teaching profession. Greene (2016) also shared that teacher leadership opportunities through increased autonomy can provide these teachers with the empowerment needed to encourage them to stay as well as create positive change for other teachers around them. In a report of high-poverty schools' approaches to encouraging teacher leadership, Greene (2016) shared how autonomous teachers were creating initiatives to help support and retain new teachers in the high-need teaching environments.

One of the indicators for teacher retention that Latifoglu (2016) shared was the extent those teachers' ideas were supported and encouraged. This indicator supports that teachers have the desire to lead and bring solutions for educational problems, but want to be trusted and empowered to attempt those ideas. The result shared was that these educators become autonomous teacher leaders who are reflective practitioners. Therefore, the social context of teacher morale and teacher retention will be approached through hearing from teachers in different structured schools to determine if their level of autonomy is what impacts their morale and retention. Latifoglu (2016) expressed that there are successful models of schools that are tackling the social issue of teacher morale and retention and that those models should be emulated in struggling school contexts.

Theoretical Contexts

The theoretical framework for this study will be Bandura's Social-Cognitive Theory. The Social-Cognitive Theory has adopted "an agentic perspective in which individuals are producers of experiences and shapers of events" (Bandura, 2000, p. 75). Bandura's (2000, 2002) theory proposed that out of all mechanisms of human agency, the one that is most supreme to individuals is that of self-efficacy. Self-efficacy, as defined by Bandura (2000, 2002), is one's belief that he or she has control over his or her actions, which in turn results in desired outcomes

by the individual. Self-efficacy directly relates to teacher efficacy. Teacher efficacy is “the teacher’s assessment of his or her capability to organize and execute teaching and learning processes” (Zakeri, Rahmany, & Labone, 2016, p. 158). According to Zakeri, Rahmany, and Labone (2016), teachers with increased levels of self-efficacy are reported to have a desire to take more risks, explore new methods to help improve student achievement, be more passionate about teaching, and stay in the teaching profession. Therefore, teacher efficacy is greatly impacted by teachers’ ability to have autonomy to make decisions for their schools and students.

Teacher efficacy research initially proposed that teaching was an independent act that was conducted in isolation based on individual teachers’ beliefs and actions (Zakeri, Rahmany, & Labone, 2016). Bandura (2000, 2002) explained that there is a level of organizational structure that requires efficacy as an individual no matter the amount of collective work that occurs. Teaching would be included under Bandura’s description. Teachers desire and require individual autonomy to make the decisions necessary for their individual classrooms. However, most of teaching is reported to involve collective work in which the autonomy is provided to a collective group. Tschannen, Moran, Woolfolk, Hoy, and Hoy (1998) describe teaching as being a process that most often occurs collectively within a group. Therefore, teacher efficacy and autonomy is more apt to be considered under the collective efficacy construct of the social-cognitive theory.

Bandura (1997) explained that teacher self efficacy and collective efficacy are separate constructs of the social-cognitive theory. However, self-efficacy of individuals does impact the collective efficacy. In fact, Bandura (2000, 2002) explained in order for successful functioning, human agency must consist of a combination of self, proxy, and collective constructs of efficacy. Bandura (2000) defined collective efficacy as the act of combining individual autonomy to seek desired results for an individual and group. “A group’s attainments are the product not only of

shared knowledge and skills of its different members, but also of the interactive, coordinative, and synergistic dynamics of their transactions” (Bandura, 2000, pp. 75-76). In other terms, individuals with high levels of self-efficacy working collectively does not necessarily ensure collective efficacy (Bandura, 2000, 2002).

Collective efficacy combined with self-efficacy are impacted by the amount of autonomy provided to individuals and those within a collective group. From these Social-Cognitive Theory constructs, TPS are providing collective groups of teachers the autonomy to utilize their collective efficacy capacity to empower their decision making for students and their schools. As Klassen, Tze, Betts, and Gordon (2011) explained: “When teachers experience challenges and failures that may lower their individual motivation, these setbacks may be ameliorated by beliefs in their colleagues’ collective capacity to effect change. Teachers’ collective efficacy beliefs, then, are related to teachers’ self-efficacy beliefs” (p.23). Therefore, teachers’ self-efficacy and collective efficacy have an impact on teachers’ ability to influence their teaching practice and student outcomes. Teachers’ levels of self and collective efficacy are empowered through the autonomy provided to them to make decisions for their students and schools (Klassen et al., 2011).

Teacher powered schools embrace the notion that teacher autonomy is the approach that is going to help improve learning for all students. Some TPS empower teachers with full autonomy to make decisions while other schools provide full autonomy in only certain aspects of the school’s operation (Farris-Berg & Dirkswager, 2013). One underlying theme in all currently established TPS is that teachers are trusted for their expertise to make decisions that will impact students and the school (Farris-Berg & Dirkswager, 2013). Some of the areas of autonomy that are incorporated in TPS include: (a) selecting and evaluating personnel, (b) determining and

planning curriculum and instruction, (c) setting school schedule, and (d) creating school-wide policy (Farris-Berg & Dirkswager, 2013). This school structure appears to be an idealistic educational society and one that most teachers would choose to be a part of. Therefore, this study seeks to increase the body of knowledge regarding schools structured on the premise of teacher autonomy by identifying the similarities and differences in perceived teacher autonomy within TPS and traditionally structured schools.

Situation to Self

For the past seven years, I have served as an elementary school teacher teaching grades third through fifth. Currently, I am serving as the assistant principal of my school site through a hybrid role. Because of the passion I have gained through my research and time spent in the literature for this study, I have committed to the work of teacher leadership and autonomy for teachers, which is why I will be also teaching daily in a fifth grade classroom. By assuming a teaching role as part of my responsibilities, I have been able to empower other teachers to also assume leadership responsibilities. I am aware of the importance of maintaining strong instructional leaders in the classroom. However, these instructional leaders have great expertise that could contribute to improved school success beyond their classrooms. Therefore, as I reflect on my current situation and the needs of my students and school, I am intrigued by the possibility of a school structure where teachers can serve as both leaders and instructional personnel. I am interested in determining if this organizational structure impacts teachers' autonomy to make decisions in a positive way through my pilot of this new leadership role.

As a teacher-leader and now assistant principal in my school setting: I have had and continue to have opportunities to engage in and lead professional development for teachers, mentor and coach new or struggling teachers, and serve on curriculum committees to make

decisions that impact the curriculum and instruction for a large group of teachers and students. All of these leadership opportunities tend to fall in the hands of school administrators, yet have direct impact on the daily routines of the classroom. As a classroom teacher, I have observed that my input and expertise in such roles tends to be respected by my colleagues due to my immediate experience in the classroom on a daily basis. Therefore, this reality has brought me to the conclusion that more transformative change could occur in school settings if people leading the change are instructional leaders currently serving in the trenches.

Recently I had the opportunity to attend a TPS conference in which I had the privilege to tour and interact with personnel at a school that is led solely by teachers who teach in that setting. During my visit at this teacher powered school I observed teachers who were invested in the mission of the school, engaged students who believe they mattered and were dedicated to their education, and a school culture that promoted creativity, individuality, and success for all learners no matter their backgrounds, differences, or academic ability. Furthermore, I also attended workshops presented by teacher leaders who lead and serve in similar settings across the country. From these experts, I continued hearing a similar theme. This theme was that when teachers were trusted to make decisions to impact students and the school, both involved parties benefited greatly. This inspired me to find out more about the impact that these schools have on teacher autonomy.

As the researcher, I assumed different philosophical assumptions throughout my study, particularly ontological and epistemological assumptions. Creswell (2013) defined ontological assumptions as those based on the nature of realities and the philosophy that different perspectives may view the reality in a different manner. Since this research was a multiple-case study, I was aware that there might be two perceptions of the reality of teacher autonomy based

on the structure within which the teachers being interviewed teach. Also, teachers' perception of autonomy may differ within one particular setting based on years of experience and opportunities afforded to teachers. I also took on an epistemological assumption throughout the research.

Creswell (2013) explained epistemological assumptions as the attempt of the researcher to gather subjective evidence through collaboration with the participants. In other words, through my work within the two cases that I'm using in my research, I attempted to become an insider. Creswell (2013) describes being an insider as being someone who spends time in collaboration with the teachers to better understand their individual perceptions of the autonomy they are afforded within their particular school setting. The paradigm that I used to guide my research was social-constructivism because I desired to better understand the world around me, and more specifically the classrooms and educational system in which I teach. Rather than approach my study with a strict view of cause and effect relationships, I developed a subjective meaning of the term autonomy directly gathered by the interviews and interactions I conducted with my participants. Through the development of this subjective meaning of the term autonomy I desired to gain more insight on how more autonomy can be provided to teachers in the future.

Problem Statement

The problem is that teachers lack the autonomy to make decisions that impact their students and schools (Berry, 2014; Berry & Hess, 2013; Farris-Berg & Dirkswager, 2013). Current literature indicates that teachers feel disengaged in the profession and yearn for opportunities to have the autonomy to lead beyond the walls of their classrooms to impact their students and school (Blomke & Klein, 2013; Farris-Berg & Dirkswager, 2013). The current literature on teacher autonomy and leadership describes the impact of the adoption of models of leadership such as distributed leadership within a traditional structured school to help support

teacher autonomy (Bush & Glover, 2012; Hall, Gunter, & Bragg, 2013; Wang, Waldman, & Zhang, 2014). Tian, Risku, and Collin (2016) conducted a meta-analysis of the literature finding that distributive leadership originated with the purpose of educational leaders being able to share the workload. However, the conclusion of the researchers found that there has been no literature regarding distributive leadership with the individual being considered an agency of change. This gap in the literature supports the need for research finding how teacher autonomy is empowered through this approach of distributive leadership (Tian et al., 2016).

In addition, there is support in the literature for teachers to be empowered through teacher leadership projects (Angelle & Teague, 2014; Fairman & Mackenzie, 2012, 2015; Jao & McDougall, 2015; Minckler, 2014; Reeves & Lowenhaupt, 2016; Stoisch, 2016) and teacher-led changes in schools (Cameron, Mercier, & Doolittle, 2016; Priestley, 2011). For example, Minckler (2014) proposes that educational leaders who use transformative leadership to build teacher social capital will empower teachers to have a positive impact on student outcomes. Administrators that adopt a collaborative leadership style through increased levels of teacher autonomy have a higher impact on the self-efficacy of the teachers who teach within their school (Arbabi & Mehdinezhad, 2016). However, few studies provide an in-depth understanding of the context of the differences between perceived levels of teacher autonomy within traditionally structured schools versus ones that develop a complete level of teacher autonomy to make decisions.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this multiple-case study was to examine the perceived teacher autonomy to make decisions for their students and school within a traditionally structured and teacher powered school. Autonomy is what provides teachers “the opportunity to collectively use their

discretion to choose or invent ways of operating that are associated with high performance” (Farris-Berg & Dirkswager, 2013, p. 31). Because current literature does not detail teachers’ perceptions of autonomy in school settings that are completely teacher led, this study seeks to increase the current body of knowledge by providing an in-depth study of two cases with two different organizational structures. The independent variable in the study was the structure of the two schools, one being traditionally structured, and one being teacher-powered, and the dependent variable was the teachers’ perceptions within these two sites regarding their level of autonomy to make decisions for their students and schools. For this study, traditionally structured schools were defined as school settings that follow a traditional administrator hierarchy structure and TPS were defined as schools run by the discretion of teacher leaders (Farris-Berg & Dirkswager, 2011). The population of the study will include six to seven classroom teachers from each of the two school sites.

Significance of the Study

Bandura’s social cognitive theory (1989, 1997, 2000, 2002) contends that individuals’ behaviors are influenced by the collective group in which they are engaged. Therefore, teachers who are surrounded by strong teacher leaders will in turn be positively influenced to also engage in transformative action for both their students and schools. With this application of Social-Cognitive Theory, TPS could impact the public education system and the ways schools organize their hierarchal structure to empower teachers with the autonomy to improve student outcomes.

Models of distributed leadership, which encourage the distribution of leadership tasks and decisions among a group of individuals within an organization, are supported by current literature. For instance, a school’s curriculum leadership team might be an example of how distributed leadership is adopted in public education (Bush & Glover, 2012; Hall, Gunter, &

Bragg, 2013; Wang, Waldman, & Zhang, 2014). Additionally, the number of research studies conducted that focus on how autonomous teacher leadership endeavors positively impact student achievement and school success have increased (Angelle & Teague, 2014; Fairman & Mackenzie, 2012, 2015; Jao & McDougall, 2015; Minckler, 2014; Reeves & Lowenhaupt, 2016; & Stoisch, 2016). However, there are current gaps in the literature in regard to the impact of a school structure that embraces a 100% model of autonomous teacher leadership to make decisions that impact their students and school. This proposed research study is significant as it will compare the perceived autonomy of teachers to make decisions for their students and schools in a traditionally modeled elementary school and a teacher-powered school.

The findings of this study may benefit current superintendents and district level administrators who are continually seeking for solutions to the increase teacher morale and student achievement simultaneously. Both are concerns for educational leaders and could possibly be answered in a model where autonomous teachers make decisions. Farris-Berg and Dirkswager (2013) describe the roles within TPS like this,

If we trusted teachers to call the shots, the responsibility of education managers who are working outside of the schools- school boards, chartered school authorizers, superintendents, state commissioners, and state governors- would be to negotiate mutually agreed-upon objectives with teachers; then measure results and, when warranted, enforce consequences. Teachers who want autonomy would be granted authority to collectively determine how to achieve the objectives insider their schools.

(p.161)

Therefore, the findings of this study could support the belief that restructuring schools could be the model needed to empower teachers with the autonomy necessary to bring about the change

desired through educational policy. In addition, the findings of this study help teacher leaders who are looking for ways to lead beyond their classroom walls, but still want to maintain a level of instructional leadership within the classroom while serving in leadership capacities. Finally, this study is significant to both charter school and traditional school board members who are looking for innovative structures for schools in order to provide quality schools that meet the desires and needs of both students and teachers alike.

Research Questions

The following research questions were used to guide this study:

RQ1. What are the similarities and differences of teachers' perceptions of autonomy in a traditionally structured and a teacher-powered school?

The first research question of this study is based on the current problem in the educational setting, which is the lack of perceived autonomy by public education teachers. Current literature continues to present the fact that teachers are reporting a lack of engagement in the profession due to limited autonomy to make decisions to drive instruction and impact their schools (Farris-Berg & Dirkswager, 2013; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014). Farris-Berg and Dirkswager (2013) questioned if teachers were trusted with the autonomy to help improve schools instead of being the ones blamed for why schools are failing, school success might be more likely. In an attempt to see if increased teacher autonomy is the answer, some schools have adopted a model of organizational structure where teachers are leading the charge. These schools are known as teacher-powered schools. Therefore, the first question of this study is to see if the perceptions of the teachers within these schools differ when compared to teachers in traditionally structured schools in regard to the amount of autonomy they perceive to make changes and decisions that impact not only students, but also schools. If there is a significant difference in the

between the two schools, it can be inferred that possibly restructuring school designs to empower teachers more might be the answer to improving teacher engagement in the profession and student achievement simultaneously (Berry, 2014; Farris-Berg & Dirkswager, 2013).

RQ2. How does teacher self-efficacy impact perception of autonomy within a traditionally structured and a teacher-powered school?

The second research question connected the problem and purpose of this study to the theoretical framework of the study, which is Bandura's social cognitive theory. Bandura's (1989, 1997, 2000, 2002) theory proposes that self, proxy, and collective aspects of human agency impact social cognition or one's belief of their efficacy to impact the desired outcomes for their life. The second research question focused on self-efficacy and teachers' beliefs about their own ability to impact students and an entire school. Bandura (1989, 1997, 2000, 2002) defines self-efficacy as the belief that an individual possesses the skill set to achieve desired results in life. It is inferred based on Bandura's theory that if teachers have high levels of self-efficacy, their perceptions of teacher autonomy will be significant. If teaching in a setting that is conducive to teacher autonomy, teachers with high levels of self efficacy will have higher perceptions of autonomy. If teaching in a restrictive environment, these similar teachers would have lower perceptions of autonomy as they have the belief that they can make decisions to impact students and the school.

RQ3. How does teacher proxy-efficacy impact perception of autonomy within a traditionally structured and a teacher-powered school?

The third research question focused on the proxy-efficacy component of human agency. Proxy-efficacy is described as an individual's ability to influence situations or people who have control over the decisions made within their current setting (Bandura, 1989, 1997, 2000, 2002).

This question helps to identify if teachers perceive, in their current school setting, a level of influence on those making decisions. This influence could be over administration, curriculum and assessments, or any other factors that impact outcomes in their school site. Based on responses to this question, I will gain insight on the influence teacher voice has on those making major decisions within the school. A high level of proxy-efficacy could correlate to high levels of teacher autonomy even though teachers might not be making the final decision.

RQ4. How does teachers' collective efficacy impact perception of autonomy within a traditionally structured and a teacher-powered school?

The final research question focused on the collective efficacy component of Bandura's theory. Bandura (1989, 1997, 2000, 2002) explains collective efficacy as the belief of a group of individuals on a combined level of efficacy to achieve the desired outcomes. Teaching is the quintessential example of collective efficacy. However, based on teachers' beliefs about the collective efficacy within their school setting, teacher perceptions of autonomy could be impacted.

Definitions

1. *Autonomy*- The opportunity for teachers to use their discretion to choose or invent ways of operating that are associated with high performance (Farris-Berg & Dirkswager, 2013).

2. *Collective Efficacy*- A group of individuals' ability, through shared beliefs, to achieve desired outcomes through collective action (Bandura, 2000).

3. *Self-Efficacy*- One's belief that his or her actions and motivations can result in desired outcomes (Bandura, 2000).

4. *Teacher-powered School*- A school structure where teachers are, "collectively granted final decision making authority-not simply input-in areas influencing whole school success"

(Farris-Berg & Dirkswager, 2013, p. 19).

5. *Teacherpreneur*- An individual who serves a portion of their professional time in a classroom teaching students while using the other portion of their day in leadership roles (Berry, 2014).

Summary

Chapter One of this research plan provided an overview of the research study. In this overview, there was a synthesis of the current literature on topics such as distributed leadership and teacher leadership initiatives. In addition, the gap in the literature has been identified which is the impact of a full teacher-led model of school structures on teacher autonomy to make decisions for students and their schools. The next chapter will provide a synthesis of current literature pertaining to the idea of teacher autonomy, which will include literature regarding related topics such as distributive leadership, teacher leadership, teacher morale, and innovative school designs. Chapter Two will be followed by Chapter Three which will provide a detailed description of the multiple-case study being conducted to help answer the questions regarding teacher autonomy.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

This second chapter of the research study provides a theoretical framework for the study as well as an extensive synthesis of the current literature regarding topics surrounding the idea of teacher autonomy and current approaches to help increase the autonomy of teachers. The theoretical framework for the study is Bandura's (1989) social-cognitive theory. Case study designs are based on a theoretical foundation that helps explain why people think a certain way or certain events happen (Yin, 2014). Social-cognitive theory proposes that individuals have the ability to control their own beliefs, thoughts, and actions, which is defined as self-efficacy (Bandura, 1989). In addition, this theory supports the idea of collective efficacy, meaning that a group of individuals can behave in a way that represents the belief of the group (Bandura, 2000). Current literature in this area discusses distributed leadership within the traditional school structure with opportunities for teacher-led initiatives and other teacher leadership activities. There is a gap in the literature regarding what happens when full autonomy for teachers is the organizational structure for an entire school and how teachers perceive that autonomy to make decisions for their students and their school.

Theoretical Framework

Bandura's social cognitive theory is the theoretical framework of this study. Bandura's (1987, 2000, 2002) theory is based on the perspective of human agency. Bandura (2002) stated that to be an agent, "is to influence intentionally one's function and life circumstances" (p. 270). There are three human agencies that work together to influence an individual's decisions in life. The three agencies include: direct, proxy, and collective. Direct personal agency involves an individual directly influencing his or her personal decisions while proxy agency involves groups

of people depending on the abilities and resources of another to influence their well-being (Bandura, 2002). Most people do not have control over the conditions of their society or institution. This requires individuals to exercise proxy agency by depending on those with such power, resources, and influence to directly impact their outcomes (Bandura, 2002). This level of social agency, proxy agency, is what impacts most teachers, as individually, they do not have the power or autonomy to directly influence the institutional practices that greatly impacts their classrooms, students, and daily life.

The third agency is the collective agency aspect of social-cognitive theory. Collective efficacy or agency is defined as the combination of a group of individuals' resources, knowledge, and skills to work together in order to effect the collective group in a manner that is desired by most (Bandura, 2000: 2002). This agency of social-cognitive theory recognizes that individuals do not live autonomously, but rather in harmony with a group. This type of human agency is most apparent in the TPS model of school as teachers do not lead in isolation, but collectively influence the decision making for the school (Farris-Berg & Dirkswager, 2013).

Although human self-efficacy might be perceived as an individual's belief in his or her ability to achieve desired outcomes, self-efficacy also encompasses collective efficacy as well (Bandura, 1987, 2000, 2002). The influence of collective efficacy is not the sum of the individuals' levels of self efficacy. Rather collective efficacy is the effect of a collective group of individuals pulling together their knowledge and resources to create a stronger desired impact than if each individual contributed individually (Bandura, 2002). In order for collective efficacy to achieve a desired outcome, Bandura explained, "It is people acting in concert on a shared belief not a disembodied group mind that is doing the cognising, aspiring, motivating, and regulating" (2002, p. 271). A group's collective efficacy also impacts the level of commitment

individuals have towards the common aspiration as well as the effect failure and setbacks have on the individuals within a group when adversity arises: in the pursuit of conquering social problems (Bandura, 2000).

Collective efficacy impacts one's perception of his or her self-efficacy. When working in a collective group, such as teachers at a TPS, one's view of his or her self-efficacy is either impeded or positively influenced by the efficacy of those individuals with whom they work (Bandura, 2000; 2002). For instance, a teacher leader responsible for curriculum might determine his or her self-efficacy based on how successful the discipline teacher leader's initiatives have been working to improve behavior. In addition, an individual's perception of the collective efficacy of a group impacts the motivation of the collective group to invest in the mission and vision of the organization (Bandura, 2000). Therefore, if educators do not feel collectively, or individually for that matter, that they are empowered through autonomy, they are less likely to be in agreement with the endeavors of their school or organization (Bandura, 2000; 2002).

Beyond motivational processes, Bandura's social-cognitive theory impacts cognitive processes of individuals. Bandura (1989) theorized that one's belief of his or her self-efficacy influences his or her thoughts about his or her ability. Self-efficacy impacts whether one develops a self-hindering mindset or develops a belief that he or she is able to achieve their desired outcomes. In addition, self-efficacy, which encompasses collective efficacy, cognitively determines the level of goals an individual or group sets based on their cognitive belief that he or she can achieve such level of success (Bandura, 1989).

Selection processes are also encompassed within self and collective efficacy, which is where the social cognitive theory directly correlates to the idea of teacher autonomy. Based on the level of efficacy, either individual or group, people select their environments with an

understanding of their ability to handle the challenges they may face within those settings (Bandura, 1989). If there is a perception that they cannot cope with issues that arise, individuals are more apt to not select that particular environment. This notion of not being able to handle or change the top-down initiatives is why teachers are leaving the profession and the retention rates are at an all time low nationally because individuals do not believe they have the autonomy or collective efficacy to cope with the continual pressures placed on teachers (Berry, 2013). This lack of autonomy, mostly found in traditionally structured schools, limits one's belief of self-efficacy, making them believe that their professional judgments and abilities are less superior than they actually are. Bandura (1989) shared that the limited belief of one's self-efficacy can actually inhibit his or her career options and belief of their ability to lead or make decisions even though they might have the ability to do so. Therefore, by increasing the autonomy given to teachers, their belief of self and collective efficacy will improve. This increase in efficacy beliefs will in turn empower teachers to believe in their professional judgment and skillset to make decisions that positively impact their students, colleagues, and schools.

Related Literature

The related literature section of Chapter Two synthesizes current literature on topics surrounding teacher autonomy. The topics synthesized include teacher autonomy, teacher morale, teacher leadership, distributed leadership, and innovative school design. Topics were included in this section of Chapter Two due to their connection to the concept of teacher autonomy. For example, teacher autonomy is often expressed in opportunities for teacher leadership as well as distributed leadership type styles. In addition, teacher autonomy is connected to teacher morale (Berry, 2014) thus supporting the need to better understand teacher perceptions' of autonomy in order to improve morale of teachers. Finally, innovative school

design support current concepts of innovation in organizational styles of schools such as TPS and how that allows for more autonomy for teachers.

Teacher Autonomy

Research supports that there is a strong correlation between increased teacher autonomy and increased job satisfaction and teacher engagement (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014). Schools that promote a high level of teacher autonomy are found to have the lowest percentages of teacher turnover, especially in the areas of science and math (Berry, 2014). Dierking and Fox (2013) shared that “today's teachers have incurred more restrictions, rules, and guidelines than in any previous era. Their boundaries grow ever smaller with each new mandate from administrators, legislators, and departments of education” (p. 130). Autonomy is a universal need and something desired by teachers (Paradis, Lutovac, & Kaasila, 2015; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014; Strong & Yoshida, 2014; Wiebe & Macdonald, 2014). When polled, teachers requested things like higher salaries, smaller class sizes, and better curriculum resources. However, the one recurring request by all polled educators was the desire for an increased autonomy in their classrooms and across the school (Strong & Yoshida, 2014).

Some contend that teacher autonomy is no longer relevant in the educational arena due to the increased levels of accountability and standardization of curriculum and instruction (Strong & Yoshida, 2014). Since the passing of the No Child Left Behind Act, states have been charged with the task of measuring student progress. This has led to increased tracking and rating of schools, which has created a trickle down effect of stricter guidelines and expectations for administrators, teachers, and students (Strong & Yoshida, 2014). This competitive nature created by government accountability allows for parents, community members, and district level administration to make comparisons between schools and their data, thus placing extreme levels

of pressure on administrators to ensure their schools are performing. Repercussions from this include, but are not limited to, lessened autonomy for teachers and mandated curriculums and instructional blocks that place core academic subjects as the priority with nonnegotiable expectations for what instruction and curriculum looks like in those areas (Strong & Yoshida, 2014).

In one particular teacher autonomy survey, 41% of the teachers felt enough pressure to strictly teach to a test to ensure students performed at appropriate levels (Strong & Yoshida, 2014). This extreme pressure not only hinders teachers' autonomy, but also impacts teachers' self-confidence and their belief that they are capable of being an education professional. In fact, according to one teacher case study, the teacher reported doubting her capacity to be an effective educator due to the continual micro-managing of administrators and the mandate to teach in a certain way at a certain pace (Paradis et al., 2015). However, it is critical for teachers to be cautious of their own perceptions and habits that may be limiting their own autonomy, without any assistance from outside factors such as educational policy and standardized testing. Parker (2015) explained that some teachers cave to the pressure of the standardizing of education, which leads to practices that are status quo even though the policy or standards allow for interpretation that include teachers' autonomy to use innovation and creativity.

According to Ingersoll, Merrill, and May (2016), teachers indicated that one factor that helps retain them in low-performing schools is the level of autonomy they are provided to drive the instruction for their students. For instance, low performing schools that placed heavy sanctions on teacher decision-making over things such as student discipline, content to be taught, and the methods used to teach resulted in higher teacher turnover. The opposite of this was similar low-performing schools that did not limit teacher autonomy, which resulted in high

retention rates. These statistics indicated that teacher autonomy heavily influences a teacher's decision on whether to stay or leave a school (Ingersoll, Merrill, & May, 2016).

If structured in a way where teacher autonomy was a priority, schools have the opportunity to empower teachers with the autonomy to determine where to draw the line in regards to what is important or necessary for their students (Wiebe & Macdonald, 2014). It is imperative to look into different school structures because teachers are going to continue seeking for closed-door autonomy, which derives from the notion that teachers are going to close their doors and do what they feel is best. This reality is what concerns many policy makers when discussing teacher autonomy. This isolated autonomy does not empower teachers to grow professionally or collaborate, rather it promotes a culture of fear and disappointment as teachers always worry about not doing what is asked of them (Paradis et al., 2015). Parker (2015) encourages engaged autonomy, which refutes the idea of isolation and teachers doing what they wish on their own. Instead, this level of autonomy empowers teachers to not only grow professionally, but also participate in an environment of collaboration where teachers value shared expertise (Parker, 2015).

Increasing the amount of teacher autonomy afforded to teachers has differing effects based on the expectation level of teachers. For example, high expectation teachers look to autonomy as the opportunity to be innovative in instructional decisions to better meet the needs of students, which leads to professional growth; conversely low expectation teachers look to autonomy as an opportunity to hide weaknesses in their practice as well as avoid tasks they desire not to complete (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014). In a collective case study conducted by Benson (2010) with secondary teachers in Hong Kong, he interviewed teachers, asking if they were given the autonomy to implement units created in their teacher preparation programs and

the resounding conclusion was that they were not. Benson's (2010) research added to this study by explaining the importance of teachers giving students the autonomy in their learning in order to empower them to take ownership over their personal success. However, he noted that teachers are not given the same treatment thus limiting their engagement with their career. Benson explained that although teachers have been adequately trained with the skill set to design curriculum this is rarely the reality even in Hong Kong. Rather, higher authoritative decision making bodies are handing down mandates to the classroom teachers thus dictating what and how they present material to their students. Similar findings are found with the China education systems due to the teacher-centered orientation of teaching (Wang & Zhang, 2014). Wang and Zhang reported from a teacher autonomy study that teachers are enthusiastic about the instructional movement, but have recently become disheartened because of the top-down mandate mentality of how the new program rollout is occurring. Teachers are being discredited and not being trusted for the true impact they can make on both curriculum and instructional decisions.

Teachers have the inner desire to have a greater influence beyond their classroom and on the educational policy that impacts their classroom. Strong and Yoshida (2014) indicated that there is an apparent high level of autonomy for teachers within their individual classrooms. However, teachers are still requesting more autonomy for decisions beyond their classrooms, such as curriculum selection. Dierking and Fox (2013) explained their literature to say, teachers need to feel supported, encouraged to believe that they have the power to make decisions in their own classroom, and be empowered to make the positive difference they can make in the lives of their students. Teachers must not allow constraints placed on them to disempower them, but rather they must empower themselves by finding the outlets to speak up and share their area of

expertise (Benson, 2010).

In Wang and Zhang's (2014) research, they explored the benefit of equipping teacher candidates with the understanding of action research to meet the needs of their students in the classrooms. They found that the student teachers felt empowered by the autonomy provided to them through action research. Teachers explained that they diagnosed concerns within the classroom and then utilized their expertise and knowledge to prescribe a plan of action to promote growth (Wang & Zhang, 2014). However, with the standardization of instruction, some teachers have reported that teaching has become homogenized. Rather than having the autonomy to do what is best for their students, teachers feel that they are expected to teach identically to another teacher across the hall with a different group of students (Wiebe & Macdonald, 2014).

Teacher autonomy is strong when teachers are empowered with the ability to make decisions. One specific study was conducted over 18 months in which teachers worked on designing literacy based assessments that met the rigor of the new state standards while also be reliable and valid measures of what students know (Quartz, Kawasaki, Sotelo, & Merino, 2014). The teacher researchers in the study concluded by stating, "We believe that small autonomous schools intent on meeting their heightened accountability requirements with authentic, teacher-developed assessment systems have the potential to use data to innovate and challenge the pernicious status quo of standardized test-driven schooling" (p. 149). This study supported that teachers have the knowledge and understanding of the changes that need to be made to best impact student achievement yet need to be given the autonomy to break the status quo in order to make educational change for their classrooms and schools.

Having the freedom to create curriculum is not the only form of teacher autonomy possible in school settings. Teachers with proven records of success and expertise should have

other decision making power as well. For instance, such educators should be able to select their evaluators or who they seek feedback from to improve their practice (Elwood, 2014). This would not be logical in a traditionally structured format where there are only two primary evaluators, but in a system developed around teacher autonomy and empowerment, peer evaluation could be a model to increase the autonomy. Teachers feel the standardization of the entire profession even in evaluations and they long for a chance for autonomy to be reinstated so that something like evaluations can bring meaning back to the profession (Elwood, 2014). Elwood (2014) stated,

Oh to be truly trusted; to be treated like a professional, whose views matter; to be asked questions based upon heartfelt interest more than rote accountability; to have an evaluation mean more than dodging the demoralizing gotcha—these are the elements that allow teachers to thrive, to move confidently into the sometimes messy and often frustrating but truly rewarding experiences of teaching. (p. 10)

The first step in securing teacher autonomy, according to Strong and Yoshida (2014), is for administrators to acknowledge the current pressures trying to diminish the autonomy of teachers. Once this is accomplished, administrators and educational leaders should strive to continue supporting autonomy in the areas it is currently present and attempt to find ways to increase autonomy in those areas lacking it (Strong & Yoshida, 2014). However, securing teacher autonomy cannot strictly be placed in the hands of current administrators. Rather, teachers are where the change in autonomy must really begin. Teachers must break the silence, acknowledge the issues they are having, and begin voicing their concerns regarding autonomy so that change can occur (Paradis et al, 2015).

Teacher Morale

Teacher morale and engagement in the profession are strong indicators of a successful

school and effective leaders. Most teacher retention rates can be attributed to a leadership deficit found in today's schools (Pucella, 2014). Current research indicated that teaching has a higher turnover rate than nurses, lawyers, architects, and other well respected roles. Even more concerning is that the studies have proven that the teaching profession has become unstable in the past few years (Ingersoll et al., 2016; Nazareno, 2013). Nazareno (2013) explained that the teaching profession is at its lowest level of job satisfaction with only 39% of teachers polled stating they were very satisfied with their career. Studies have linked teacher retention with the level of decision-making those teachers are afforded (Nazareno, 2013; Pucella, 2014). Klassen et al. (2012) explained that engaged teachers are more likely to be effective educators and willing to lead beyond their classrooms to contribute to a greater need within a school setting. Major factors that contribute to teacher motivation and engagement within the profession include: job control, support from administration, and a healthy school climate (Klassen et al., 2012; Pucella, 2014).

One issue impacting the morale of American teachers is the demoralization of the profession. The demoralization of teaching can be defined as the process in which the morals and reasons most educators joined the profession are being stripped away leaving teachers not believing in the work that they do (Parker, 2015; Santoro, 2011). According to a survey conducted for a General Teaching Council, over 80% of the teachers polled indicated that the most satisfying part of the profession was seeing the progress students make both academically and socially (Parker, 2015). However, when autonomy is being reduced, teachers feel as if they make a lesser impact on their students, which is why they joined the profession in the first place. With increased levels of pressure to ensure students perform, teachers are being forced to decide whether to result to strictly successful teaching versus good teaching in order to get results.

When successful teaching is not directly connected to effective pedagogical practices, the learning is not of benefit to students (Nazareno, 2013; Santoro, 2011). Furthermore, teachers not only are being forced to make compromising decisions, but are also being held accountable for decisions that they have very limited control over (Nazareno, 2013).

Santoro (2011) shared a teacher's reason for leaving the profession in his case study. The reason was the demoralization of her career from an autonomous educator who had the freedom to create and design instruction based on the needs of her students to an educator forced to follow suit to state mandates stemming from a lack of performance by students over a period of a couple of years (Santoro, 2011). This is supported in Pucella's (2014) research study which found teachers with minimal impact on decisions that directly affect their students such as curriculum and discipline burn out at a more rapid pace. However, the same research found that if even in earlier years, teachers are provided with leadership opportunities that involve them in the decision making for their classroom, their desire to remain in the profession improves (Purcella, 2014).

Teaching, although a highly stressful profession, can be one of the most satisfying careers for people. Hoigaard, Giske, and Sundsli (2012) reported that 60% of teachers who participated in their qualitative study reported that teaching is a highly rewarding profession amongst all the chaos. Rooney (2015) reported that most teachers elect the profession because of the intrinsic rewards resulting from seeing students succeed associated with the profession. On the contrary, teachers feel disconnected to the intrinsic rewards associated with teaching due to the omission of teacher autonomy and increased pressure to maintain the level of instruction called for by standardized curriculums. Teachers are more passionate about their practice when they are able to respond to student interests and individual needs versus following a scripted curriculum that

does not allow for freedom and creativity on behalf of both teachers and students (Olivant, 2015). Blomeke and Klein (2013) explained that increased levels of teacher morale lead to organizational support by teachers and increased student achievement. Conversely, limited morale in turn lead to teacher burnout and weakened student achievement. Teacher morale is not some unattainable attribute in today's schools, but rather is a result of teachers being trusted to complete the work they were hired to do and respected as professionals with the right intentions to help children (Elwood, 2014). As Klassen et al. (2012, p. 333) stated, "Engagement is boosted when teachers' basic psychological needs for autonomy, relatedness, and competence are fostered through opportunities for decision-making, meaningful relationships at work, and feelings of professional competence derived through professional growth."

According to Cobb (2012), mandates placed on teachers in the classroom are deafening the morale of teachers across the world. The four teachers interviewed shared that the mandates are stifling and create limited autonomy and freedom in regards to curriculum and instructional practice. They furthered their argument by stating that creativity and innovation have both left the classroom due to the intense focus on preparing students for success on standardized assessments, which does not engage or motivate students or teachers (Cobb, 2012; Olivant, 2015). Olivant's (2015) reported from interviews that teachers felt a lack of trust in their ability to do what they were credentialed to do. Teachers' intrinsic motivation to teach and impact future generations is being diminished by narrowed curriculums, limited professional trust, and lack of freedom to meet needs of students in ways fitting to their style (Rooney, 2015). In Ingersoll, Merrill, and May's (2016) research, less than half of the teachers interviewed indicated that they felt like the district or state's standards had a positive impact on their satisfaction with their careers. Cobb (2012) found when analyzing the interviews of the four teachers that the ones

who seemed to have the highest engagement in the profession were those who refused to conform to mandates and focus on practices that were best for students. This increased level of morale is supported by Lopez's (2010) statement, that "teachers' confidence in their professional practice and improved working conditions could facilitate the process of change" (p. 76).

If teachers aren't empowered to have the freedom to stray from mandated curriculums, they report that their profession is not pleasurable (Rooney, 2015). Both teaching quality and teacher satisfaction are influenced by the level of autonomy teachers perceive as well as the frequent appraisal by supportive leadership (Blomeke & Klein, 2013; Hoigaard, Giske, & Sudsli, 2012; Strong & Yoshida, 2014). As Rooney (2015) explained, intrinsic motivation is what has continued to allow the teacher pool to flourish. However, teacher shortages are becoming more prevalent as high-stakes accountability and limited autonomy is taking away the intrinsic motivation associated with teaching. As explained by Ingersoll, Merrill, and May, "It stands to reason that if teachers are to successfully meet standards, schools must be organized in ways that give teachers the tools, capabilities, and resources they need to do so" (p. 49).

Accountability

For the past 150 years, traditionally structured schools have not necessarily invited teachers to be involved in the decision making for schools, but equally as much have not held them accountable for the failures or inadequacies of those decisions (Education Evolving, 2014). However, within the past two decades, the shift in accountability has resulted in teachers being held accountable for multiple areas of students' academic and social growth while their opportunity to be involved in the decision-making has stayed status quo (Education Evolving, 2014; Rooney, 2015). Since "*A Nation at Risk*," there has been an increased focus placed on closing the achievement gap and ensuring equity in education. However, after this pursuit has

been a plethora of state standards and increased amounts of testing.

Because of data's indication that students are not progressing according to legislative standards, teacher effectiveness has been scrutinized (Education Evolving, 2014). Research indicates that the single most influential factor for student success is the classroom teacher (Education Evolving, 2014; Olivant, 2015). This realization has maximized the amount of time teachers are being observed. It also has resulted in the linking of achievement data to teacher performance ratings. Test-based evaluations are trying to put a quantity on the effectiveness of a teacher (Bolyard, 2015). The National Council for Teaching Quality reported that 35 states require student performance on standardized assessments be linked to teacher evaluations (Education Evolving, 2014). One major issue with this level of accountability is that it is insinuating that teachers are responsible for the performance of students on high-stakes assessments. This also insinuates that teachers have control over the factors that impact a student's performance on the assessment, which is not the case (Bolyard, 2015). Instead of focusing on the evaluating of teachers in the classroom, teacher retention is where most energy should be placed since teachers are the most influential factor on student achievement (Ingersoll, Merrill, & May, 2016).

Even the evaluations for the practicum experiences pre-service teacher are standardized and do not account for the complexities of the classroom or the diversity possible in pedagogy (Krise, 2016). Krise (2016) stated, "It seems clear the goal is for tracking, standardization, and competition: not creating an assessment tool that considers the intricacies of teaching" (p. 26). If this lack of autonomy and creativity is being instilled in pre-service teachers, the future of autonomy in the actual realm of teaching and learning will become obsolete (Krise, 2016). This is evident as approximately 30% of new teachers leave the profession within the first five years

of their career with the increased standardization from government entities being one of the major factors for that attrition (Parker, 2015).

Another ramification of initiatives like No Child Left Behind has been the connection of school disciplinary actions, rewards, and funding and the performance of schools on high-stakes assessments (Bolyard, 2015; Rooney, 2015). Teachers indicated that the incentives received by teaching at a successful student achievement school did not impact their retention. However, the punitive measures taken against low-performing schools overwhelmingly impacted the retention of highly effective teachers in the neediest schools (Ingersoll et al., 2016). Bolyard (2015) explains explained that this type of accountability is managerial as it focuses on competition as well as efficiency. Such accountability results in adoption of curriculums that are scientifically tested and prescriptive, limiting the autonomy of teachers to make instructional decisions they feel are most impactful for students (Krise, 2016; Olivant, 2015; Rooney, 2015). So much time is spent on administering assessments that authentic learning nor creativity is being fostered in classrooms.

The priority given to ensuring assessments are administered results in cramming so much knowledge into the instructional block that students are really involved in a short term memory process versus true learning (Olivant, 2015). In reality the locus of control over content and curriculum has shifted out of the hands of the teacher, the professional, and into the hands of legislature and lawmakers who have little to no experience of the realities of classrooms (Olivant, 2015). In addition, this intense focus on standardization of teaching has resulted in deletion of at least one subject area in most classrooms, a minimization of the arts, and a stifling effect on the creative autonomy of most educators (Olivant, 2015). Krise (2016) reported that corporations have now found business opportunities in developing programs, test study

materials, and other curriculums that are strictly aligned to assessed competencies in order to use this new era of accountability to make profit. This is not only happening in the pre-k through twelfth grade arena, but is even happening in teacher education programs.

Growing accountability has resulted in teacher autonomy remaining stagnant. According to Education Evolving (2014), “Teachers are at the bottom of a hierarchical leadership pyramid, and each level of leadership imposes a new layer of accountability upon them, without providing teachers with commensurate autonomy” (p. 4). Teachers are spending an ordinate amount of time focusing on nonnegotiable mandates that may or may not align with their pedagogy all in the effort of ensuring students score satisfactory on high-stakes assessments (Rooney, 2015). Teachers feel as if their role could now be completed by a robot because their judgment about what is best for kids is irrelevant to the actual needs of what lawmakers feel like students need in order to be successful (Olivant, 2015). As one teacher indicated, the best assessment that could be administered in the classroom is the teacher. He or she is the best judgment of what students know and need (Olivant, 2015). Even more alarming is the fact that teachers are the last ones to be included on education reform conversations, which is narrowing their influence as well as stifling their creativity. This lack of autonomy directly correlates to a diminishing impact of teachers on the creativity and problem-solving abilities of students (Olivant, 2015).

Teacher Leadership

“Teacher leadership is characterized as a conglomeration of roles within and beyond the classroom that range from formal to informal, instructional to administrative, and team based to organizational” (Lee Bae et al, 2016, p. 907). In other words, teacher leadership is a movement involving teachers, who serve in the classroom, helping make decisions on a school and district level to bring about positive change. The thought of teacher leadership evolved around the 1980s

due to an increased pressure for educational systems to create ways for teachers to utilize their teacher expertise (Sawyer, Neel, & Coulter, 2016; Weiner, 2011). Teacher leadership roles came as a solution to help find ways to reduce high teacher turnover rates and stop exodus of teachers to administrative roles in order to utilize their skillset and knowledge (Weiner, 2011). Weiner (2011) stated, “effective teacher leadership is associated with decreased teacher attrition, improved instructional decision making and efficiency, and increased student achievement” (p. 10). Sawyer, Neel, and Coulter (2016) identified three major areas for teacher leadership: managerial, expertise-based, and recultural, which involves teachers initiating change in the culture of schools. Lee Bae et al (2016) added to this list of areas for teacher leadership to include professional learning facilitators as well as researchers. However, these areas of teacher leadership do not take into consideration if such roles can be responsible for initiating innovative designs for what the structures of schools look like.

Adversity for teacher leadership stems from the lack of clear definition of roles for both administrators and teacher leaders. In fact, Lee Bae et al (2016) reported that the data supporting the impact of teacher leadership is mixed. This is most likely attributed to the lack of conceptualization of what teacher leadership truly looks like. Administrators often fail to redefine their roles in order to support and encourage teacher leadership roles within their school (Weiner, 2011). Administrators who are insecure in their roles might prohibit teacher leadership roles within a school as it may compete with their level of power and control within the school. Sterrett and Irizarry’s (2015) working condition survey indicated that site based administrators have control over the teacher leadership opportunities on their campus.

More adversity for teacher leadership arises from its contrasting approach to the egalitarian view of teaching. Egalitarian views of teaching includes the notion that all teachers

are equal and only separated by years of experience or level of education, which does not always mirror those who take teacher leadership roles (Weiner, 2011). However, administrators have the power and control to help mitigate any resistance towards teacher leadership through the way they align such roles with the mission and vision of the school (Weiner, 2011). In order to overcome the adversity for teacher leadership roles, the partnership between teacher leaders and administrators must be in harmony (Ringler, O'Neal, Rawls, & Cumiskey, 2013; Sterrett & Irizarry, 2015; Weiner, 2011).

Traditional school structures need to be rethought in order for teacher leadership roles to be embraced and aligned, which explains why some schools are restructuring completely into an organizational structure that is completely built on a foundation of teacher leadership and teacher leadership roles (Weiner, 2011). For example, teacher leadership roles can be tailored to meet the needs of a school. Lee Bae et al's (2016) explained that some teacher leadership roles involve teachers still leading within the classroom while also have outside of the room impact while other roles require full time leadership schedules. Such roles might include teacher mentors, department or curriculum team heads, instructional coaches, and student support resource positions (Lee Bae et al, 2016). In order for teacher leaders to be successful, teachers must still understand and maintain some level of function of the classroom teacher while also participating in decision making that has a wider impact (Pucella, 2014).

In order to overcome adversity for teacher leadership, certain protocol can occur to ensure teachers are empowered with the autonomy to lead. Such protocol might include: encouraging risk taking type problem solving by teachers, providing ample amounts of collaboration time for teacher leaders, and inviting teachers to the table to help with important decision making for which they have valuable insight (Ringler, O'Neal, Rawls, & Cumiskey,

2013; Sterrett & Irizarry, 2015). One particular study examined how teachers became model classrooms for an ELL program that led to them developing the skills and expertise to become peer coaches and teacher mentors based on the empowerment provided to them to try a new program to help student achievement (Ringler et al., 2013).

Similar findings were reported in a qualitative study designed by Dierking and Fox (2013). The study findings included four major themes from the coding of interview and survey data which include: “Knowledge can affect teacher power and confidence, teachers’ voices can indicate some degree of confidence and empowerment, support and encouragement can strengthen teachers’ sense of power, and some forces can disempower teachers’ actions” (p. 135). In the findings, teachers shared how learning and increasing their knowledge through professional development increased their confidence and empowerment in what they do (Dierking & Fox, 2013). This translated to an increased desire for teacher leadership and being able to share what they’ve learned with others. Pearce’s (2015) research’s findings indicate that healthy school cultures promote a mindset that every teacher is a leader and with the right support and professional development, every teacher can lead within the classroom, school, district, and on global levels. By participating in his teacher leadership development program, Pearce (2015) reported that student achievement and his ability to lead in and out of his classroom improved simultaneously. These studies all support the power of teacher leadership through teacher autonomy in traditionally structured schools with the levels of allotted leadership impacted by administration. However, this research seeks to find if more autonomy is provided for teacher leadership, when there is an authoritative figure controlling the level of teacher autonomy each teacher obtains.

Restructuring schools and improving student achievement requires the reliance on expert

teachers who serve daily in the trenches of instruction (Lopez, 2010). Lopez's conclusion from her study was that teachers desire to take on new roles such as researcher in order to find new approaches to better meet the needs of students. If administrators provide clear expectations for what they desire and the needs that need to be met and then support teacher leaders in their pursuit to achieve those expectations, teacher leadership in the form of teacher researchers can create great change for students (Lopez, 2010). Pucella (2014) also contended that it is important to not discount novice teachers in the teacher leadership arena. She explained that newer teachers tend to have a higher level of enthusiasm and desire to bring change to education, which could be capitalized on by providing opportunities for these teachers to assume leadership roles (Pucella, 2014).

Pearce (2015) researched one example of this type of teacher leadership opportunity, the Teacher Learning and Leadership Program (TLLP), an Ontario project. The TLLP fund teacher leaders who desire to have an impact on curriculum and instruction within a school or district through a job-embedded project. Such projects might include teachers leading lesson studies on campus or working collaboratively with teachers to develop a more standards aligned curriculum in which the TLLP funds will support and finance the initiative (Pearce, 2015). One teacher leader who took advantage of the TLLP project utilized funds to purchase iPads to create a paperless mathematics curriculum. This innovative design of instruction led to educator visits within his classroom observing his best practices, the creation of a well-received blog, and then eventually invitations to present at educational conferences (Pearce, 2015).

Pucella (2014) conducted research that focused on beginning teacher leadership ideas with pre-service teachers. Although strong teacher leaders need to develop a level of effectiveness in the classroom in order to lead outside of the classroom, Pucella (2014) noted that

pre-service teachers can begin working on ideas of leadership so that they are even better followers. Pucella concluded that effective followers in turn help teacher leaders achieve the mission and vision of the school. In addition, it was noted that when people learn to follow effectively they are more likely to lead effectively later in their careers. Therefore, by teaching educational leadership principles in teacher preparation programs will help to foster stronger teacher leaders once they get in classrooms of their own.

Teacher leadership can also be diminished by some work cultures. Teachers become disenfranchised in their pursuit of teacher leadership due to curriculum mandates and other restrictive factors that impede their freedom to lead and make decisions based on their gained knowledge (Dierking & Fox, 2013). Sterrett and Irizarry (2015) also found ways that school leadership has discouraged the teacher leadership movement. Some of the results of the study reported that micromanaging, withholding valuable information from teachers, and creating systems that leave teachers working in isolation are all found methods that have been invoked by administrators that have created a culture with limited teacher leadership.

However, to the contrary, teacher leadership can have an opposite effect on teachers and schools when embraced by all involved parties, administration and teachers. Teachers who have served in teacher leadership roles report that they have felt success throughout their service in their role. Some examples of that success include having an impact on the school-wide curriculum, influencing the pedagogical practices of their colleagues, and having a voice on the organizational and managerial components of the school (Lee Bae et al., 2016). In other words, these successful teacher leadership environments provided teachers with the autonomy to feel like their voice and expertise mattered within the school.

Distributed Leadership

With the increasing levels of accountability in schools, more principals are relying on a distributed leadership model to help meet the demands required (Pucella, 2014). Pucella (2014) reported that if principals desire for their schools to achieve a high level of academic achievement, leadership opportunities must move beyond the office and into the classrooms of teachers. Distributed leadership is defined as a model of leadership where leadership tasks are broadened to people beyond those who hold formal leadership titles such as principal or supervisor (Bush & Glover, 2012). This model of leadership is more effective as it does not constrain the ideas and opinions of the individual within an organization unlike a more hierarchal structured form of leadership (Bush & Glover, 2012; Pucella, 2014; Tian, Risku, & Collin, 2016). The concept of distributive leadership strives to empower teacher leaders and other subordinates to develop their self and collective efficacy to be able to handle situations effectively. In order for distributive leadership to be effective, teams must be disciplined to set aside time for meeting and collaboration so that no problem or issue goes unnoticed or unhandled (Bush & Glover, 2014).

In connection with the articles regarding teacher morale, distributive leadership might be a desired approach for administrators and school design teams as it helps engage teachers within the mission and vision of the school (Abdolhamid & Mehdinezhad, 2016; Bush & Glover, 2014; DeMatthews, 2015; Wilson, 2016). When leadership is cooperative and teachers feel empowered to contribute to the decisions of their school, teachers will be more motivated to be effective teachers and leaders within that site. Teachers who were involved in distributive types of leadership were less likely to resist the change that was inevitable within the school setting. By sharing and empowering teachers with the autonomy to be involved in leadership decisions

within a school, administrators are increasing the self and collective efficacy of the individuals within their school (Aboldhamid & Mehdinezhad, 2016). Social capital is imperative in the development of leadership, both administrative and teacher based, so that the relationship between administrators and teachers allows for shared decision making between both involved parties (Wilson, 2016). When self-efficacy and collective efficacy is strengthened, productivity of those groups of teachers and individuals is also improved. This supports the need for school designs and structures that promote collaborative forms of leadership and positive belief that all can achieve, which according to Angelle and Teague (2014), will increase the collective efficacy of the school as a whole.

When studying distributive leadership, Tian et al. (2016) conducted a meta-analysis of almost a decade of studies regarding distributive leadership. The conclusion of the meta-analysis and suggestions for further research involved redesigning school structures so that more formal and informal roles for leadership can be supported and then sustained through the structure of the school setting. Distributive leadership or leadership structures beyond that do not look to flatten or dissolve hierarchal levels of leadership. Instead, these innovative school designs look to recognize the notion that both hierarchal and fluid types of leadership can co-exist to provide teachers with the autonomy to make decisions for their students and schools (Tian et al., 2016). An example of this restructuring using a distributed leadership model was found in DeMatthews's (2015) study consisting of high impact schools where principals distributed leadership to teacher leaders. These teacher leaders were engaged in activities such as creating and leading professional development, working on improving school culture, and redesigning school structure to better meet the needs of diverse learners (DeMatthews, 2015). This model of leadership is successful because the ones making some of the biggest leadership decisions are the

ones who know the direct needs of the students for which the decisions are being made (DeMatthews, 2015).

Innovative School Design

Some schools are attempting to be innovative in their design in order to empower teachers to be the leaders of change. A common school design infamous for its autonomy afforded to teachers is the charter school movement (Torres, 2014). A charter school allows for school leaders or practitioners to engage in innovative school design with limited constraints or requirements. In fact, Torres (2014) indicated that in early charter school studies, teachers who had the opportunity to participate in start-up charter schools reported finding enjoyment with the increased responsibility of founding a school centered around ideas that they believed were important for students. In multiple research studies cited by Torres (2014), common freedoms that innovative charter schools' teachers enjoyed having the autonomy over curriculum decisions, instructional strategies, professional developments, and the selection of personnel. Also, charter schools were more likely to attract teachers who desired autonomy over educational policy and school-wide decisions as well as those who desired more innovation in their classrooms and within their schools (Torres, 2014). Therefore, the innovation afforded to the charter movement of schools empowers and attracts teachers who desire the autonomy to empower students in ways they feel are best.

One design that has been utilized in schools is the expanded learning time (ELT). ELT is a structure that extends the school day for students and teachers alike to provide teachers with the freedom to be creative and innovative with instruction as well as leadership (Berry & Hess, 2013). The National Center on Time and Learning estimated that approximately 1,000 schools around the country have adopted the ELT structure. The expanded learning time movement "can

allow teachers to cover more content, individualize instruction, and offer deeper thinking,” (Berry & Hess, 2013, p. 58). Unfortunately, schools believe that in order to be more successful more must be done. This often results in an unrealistic expectation for teachers to work more evenings and hours and the passion is beginning to dwindle while the results are dismal. This fact supports the notion that something transformative must occur for true change to come for students and teachers alike. Berry and Hess (2014) shared that in order for models such as the expanded learning time to be most successful, there needs to be a strong level of teacher leadership who are competent in pedagogy while able to effectively communicate the need for policy change. Berry and Hess (2014) define this role as a “teacherpreneur” which refers to a teacher who remains a constant front in the classroom while also being given the time to lead outside of the classroom, school-wide.

Beyond the traditional school, there are magnet and charter school systems that have empowered teachers to be creative and autonomous to best provide students with better experiences and preparation for life beyond standards and assessments. Weier’s (2012) case study reported on one of these autonomous magnet schools. At this autonomous magnet school, students explore different magnets in primary grades and then get to self-select their magnet for the duration of a three-year tenure for fourth through sixth grades. This school’s philosophy is based on the idea of innovation and teachers concluded in the study that they refused to compromise the philosophy of their innovative school design to adhere to district mandates or directives. In the case study, teachers detailed freedom to be innovative in curricular design so that deeper understanding can be attained by students through thematic learning (Weier, 2012).

Another example of school innovation is the Collaborative Inquiry Teacher project, an innovative professional development opportunity for ninth grade applied mathematics teachers.

Through the professional development format, teachers across the district teaching a similar subject or set of standards are collaborating via online systems to share resources, instructional ideas, and understandings of the content and standards. Many of the teachers interviewed reported that this level of professional development was more beneficial than any other as it provided time for teachers to collaborate across the district and strengthen each others' pedagogical approaches (Jao & McDougall, 2015). However, scheduling and time constraints associated with such a collaborative approach to growing professionally is the scheduling difficulties and the amount of time it takes for teachers to coordinate to meet thus supporting the need for innovative school designs that structure a schedule that embraces and allows for such examples of collaboration (Jao & McDougall, 2015).

Although online collaboration is more conducive for cross district collaboration of teachers, collaboration amongst teachers within one school site is viably even more critical as it directly impacts teacher morale and culture. Blomeke and Klein (2013) explained that teacher trust and morale will increase when they are provided with the time and workspace to collaborate with one another as well as time to evaluate each others' teaching. One innovative way schools are ensuring collaboration amongst teachers is professional learning communities. However, in order for professional learning communities to be successful and for teachers to execute their autonomy to problem solve for student success, Wilson (2016) reported that schools must undergo a "reculturing". Not only does innovation have to occur with systems and scheduling, but teachers must be supportive of the why behind such collaborative work in order for autonomy to be afforded to them and then utilized effectively (Wilson, 2016).

Teacher-led or teacher-powered schools are probably the most innovative in school designs as they are designed and ran by teachers, such as the Mathematics and Science

Leadership Academy in Denver, Colorado. This particular teacher powered school was designed not on the premise that principal led schools were ineffective but on the idea that a school that was designed solely around students would be best to meet the needs of impoverished learners (Nazareno, 2013). As one of the founders of the school shared, “To attract the most highly skilled teachers to serve high-needs students, we had to make it clear that teachers would have the authority and autonomy to make authentic decisions on behalf of students” (Nazareno, 2013, p. 51). Some of the empowering roles teachers serve at this innovative academy include participating in a teacher team that has decision-making authority over areas such as professional development or climate and culture. In addition, each teacher leader is also a member on a peer evaluation team of three that helps teachers evaluate their progress towards personal, professional, and school goals (Nazareno, 2013). Nazareno (2013) shared that one of the greatest attributes of a teacher led school is that power to innovate without having to go through a chain of hierarchical commands.

Summary

The above chapter included a critical synthesis of the current literature regarding topics of teacher autonomy and teacher leadership initiatives. The current literature provides extensive study on the impact of teacher autonomy on student achievement and teacher morale. In addition, studies have focused intently on teacher-led initiatives and the use of teacher autonomy through distributed leadership models of organizational structure. There is even current literature on some innovative restructuring of current school structures and teacher roles within the current realm of public education. However, the lacking factor in it all, is research conducted on the differences of teacher autonomy in traditional structured schools in comparison to a school where full teacher autonomy is the complete leadership structure such as the teacher-powered

school. Therefore, this study could provide the research necessary to help fill a gap in the scholarly literature regarding teacher autonomy and school structures that fully embrace the autonomous teacher.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this multiple-case study was to examine the similarities and differences in teacher autonomy among teachers in a traditionally structured and teacher-powered school. The purpose of Chapter Three is to present an in-depth description of the methods and design selected for this study. Additionally, included in this chapter is the site and participants for the study, role of the researcher, data collection and analysis techniques, trustworthiness efforts, and ethical considerations.

Design

This research study is qualitative in nature. Research design refers to the entire qualitative process, beginning with conceptualizing a problem all the way to the conclusion with data collection and analysis techniques in between (Creswell, 2013). Yin (2014) stated, “A research design is the logic that link the data to be collected to the initial questions of the study” (p. 26). Therefore, the design is more than just a research plan, but rather is a blueprint for how the beginning of the study connects to the conclusions that might possibly be drawn (Yin, 2014). As part of this blueprint, Yin (2014) suggested focusing on four specific problems: “what questions to study, what data are relevant, what data to collect, and how to analyze the results” (p. 29).

To further narrow the design of this qualitative study, I utilized a case study approach. Although, case study designs are sometimes questioned as rigorous methods of research due to the lack of generalizability in the results and the extensive time requirements for completion, I believe that the case study is most effective in understanding the true perceptions of teacher autonomy (Yin, 2014). According to Creswell (2013), “case study research involves the study of a case within a real-life, contemporary context or setting” (p. 97).

This case study took place within the real-life setting of two cases or schools. Both schools are current public schools within the United States public education system. Creswell (2013) described case studies as being bounded by time and place. This case study was bounded by the location as it involves two schools during the 2017-2018 school year. Due to the bounding of this case, only participants who teach within the two case locations within the 2017-2018 school year time frame were considered as part of the phenomenon in this study. Yin (2014) explained the importance of bounding in case studies as it helps to focus the collection of data to be only inclusive of the phenomenon of the study. Bounding helps the data to not be influenced by the context of the study. The most effective case studies provide an in-depth description of a unique case (Creswell, 2013). As Yin (2014) described, “the desired case should be some real-life phenomenon that has some concrete manifestation” (p. 34). Therefore, the teacher-powered case is extremely unique and a real-life phenomenon with only sixty of them in existence throughout the country. This case study had the opportunity to give an in-depth coverage of what the life of teachers is like within such unique settings, especially regarding the autonomy to make decisions.

This case study was a multiple case study. Sometimes a study might involve more than one case, which constitutes the need for a multiple-case study design. For example, Yin (2014) described looking at multiple single-case schools that use some sort of innovation to then compile together into a multiple-case study. One major advantage of using the multiple-case study design is that the results and conclusions from the study are strengthened which aids in the overall effect factor of the study as a whole (Yin, 2014). When selecting cases for multiple-case study designs researchers should seek cases that are likely to produce similar findings or cases that will have contrasting results based on the phenomenon being studied (Yin, 2014). In my

proposed research, my two cases involved two different structured public elementary schools. It was my desire to examine these two cases to see if the findings regarding the teacher perceptions of autonomy within those two different school sites differs.

Research Questions

1. What are teacher perceptions of autonomy in a traditionally structured and a teacher-powered school?
2. How does teacher self-efficacy impact perception of autonomy within a traditionally structured and a teacher-powered school?
3. How does teacher proxy-efficacy impact perception of autonomy within a traditionally structured and a teacher-powered school?
4. How does teachers' collective efficacy impact perception of autonomy within a traditionally structured and a teacher-powered school?

Setting

Two school sites were selected for this multiple-case study. Both sites are public elementary schools within the United States public school system that serve kindergarten through fifth grade students. The primary defining factor for selection was that one of the elementary schools must be a public elementary school that followed a teacher-powered school model while the other school was a traditionally structured elementary school. The TPS site, referred to as Winter Elementary (a pseudonym), is located in Minnesota and was selected from the currently operating list of teacher-powered schools for this study because it is an average size public elementary school with an approximate population of 429 students. Of those 429 students, 21% (89 students) are considered economically disadvantaged. Winter Elementary was also selected as a case in this study because it has recently converted to a teacher powered model meaning it

was historically known as a traditionally structured school until recently. In addition, this particular site was selected because its organizational structure does have an acting administrator similar to the traditionally structured school, but is driven by the autonomy of the teacher leaders who serve in the classroom on the campus. The leadership structure of the school consists of three vertical based teams (communities) in which every grade level has one teacher representative in addition to an ESE support teacher. Through an integral force of collaboration, these vertical teams teach different strands in both English-Language Arts and Math in order to personalize learning and meet the needs of all learners.

The other site for this study, referred to as Summer Elementary (a pseudonym), is a traditional elementary school in central Florida. This particular school site was selected as a part of this study because of its traditional organizational structure. There are 812 students at Summer Elementary School. The free and reduced population is 85% of the total population of the school. This school site is located within the same district in which I currently am employed, but is not my home school. The organizational structure of this school consists of a principal and assistant principal as well as a curriculum leadership team and several resource personnel such as a literacy coach and STEM coach. The decision making flow of this school involves input from teachers, but is authorized and finalized by the administrators on site.

Participants

In this multiple-case study purposeful sampling was used to identify participants. Purposeful sampling means, “the inquirer selects individuals and sites for study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and the phenomenon” (Creswell, 2013, p. 156). Due to purposeful sampling the participants will only include teachers, as the intention of this study is to explore their perceptions of their autonomy within their school

settings.

Criterion sampling refers to the process of selecting participants who fit a certain criteria that pertains to the research study (Creswell, 2013). In this research study, teachers who I interviewed had to be teachers, not coaches or guidance roles, at either of the two case sites. The reason why I set the criteria for classroom teachers was that even in a teacher-powered school, teachers who lead part of the day versus teaching full time would have had different perceptions of the autonomy afforded in their school. For example, if a teacher in a teacher-powered school only teaches half day and serves as a dean the other half of the day, his or her perception of their autonomy to make decisions for their school could have been vastly different than a teacher in that same school who teaches all day. It was my desire as the researcher to gain a true perception of what full time teachers perceive their autonomy to be in different structured environments. With this criterion set, once the sites provided permission for participation, teachers who meet the certain criterion were emailed to request their participation in the study.

The sample size of this study was between 12 and 15 teachers with the intention of interviewing an equal number of teachers from each setting. Although the sample size may appear small, qualitative studies do not focus more on the quantity of participants, but focus more on the extensive detail about each of those participants (Creswell, 2013). The demographics of these teachers represented Caucasian females as they were the ones who fit the criteria and were willing to participate in the study. Also, the years of experience in the classroom varied from first year, non-educationally trained teachers to veteran educators with over twenty years of teaching. Seeing that participants voluntarily participated in the research study, I could not guarantee the percentages of each demographic category represented in the actual study.

Procedures

The first procedure in my research was gaining the appropriate approvals for this proposed research study. I first secured approval through Liberty University's International Review Board as well as the IRB processes through both school districts of the two sites in the case study. After full approval for the proposed case study was secured, I emailed and contacted the administrators within the two site schools to explain the purpose of the research and requested their permission to contact their teachers and come onto their campus to conduct interviews, focus groups, and site observations. Through this process of administrator contact, I asked for important documents that pertained to the autonomy of teachers so that I could conduct document analysis to identify common patterns and themes. Documents that I was interested in securing included faculty meeting and leadership team meeting agendas. These two documents provide insight to the data collection of this study because of their indication on how much leadership and power is given to actual teachers in these two forums. For example, in a faculty meeting are teacher leaders providing professional development or are professional learning communities sharing out their updates from their leadership team?

Following administrator approval, I emailed teachers who met the criteria necessary for participation in this study, which was classroom teacher within one of the two sites, and explained the purpose of the study and requested their participation in the study using a recruitment email (Appendix A). Those who responded in agreement to participate were given a consent form (Appendix B), which they completed and submitted to the researcher. Once permission forms were secured, participating teachers were provided with a demographic form via electronic means such as email. On this form, teachers were asked to complete demographic

information such as years of experience as well as their level of educational training. In addition, this form asked teacher participants' willingness to participate in interviews, focus groups, and classroom observations of their instruction. My goal was to secure six to seven teachers per site for the study. I was able to secure six from Winter Elementary School and seven from Summer Elementary. Once all demographic forms were received, I organized participants based on their willingness and availability to participate in the different facets of the data collection. This list helped me identify, which participants I needed to contact for each component of the study.

Next, I worked to schedule times for one-on-one interviews with participating teachers. The preference was to conduct face-to-face interviews, but due to location and teacher availability, I accommodated willing teachers through phone conferences or written responses using a questionnaire template with my research questions (Appendix C). After analyzing the data collected from the interviews, I looked for common themes shared by participants. According to Yin (2014), focus groups can be utilized to help corroborate the findings of an interview. If I noticed any common themes that I needed further clarification on or would like to collect more data about, I had planned to schedule focus groups on site with the teachers. However, based on the responses in interviews, no further clarification was needed as teachers so focus groups were not scheduled.

If it was determined that focus groups were necessary to help inform the study more, I would have found a common date and time to host a focus group at each of the two sites. Again, data collection would have occurred through similar means as the interviews. Since focus groups could have involved multiple individuals, writing thorough transcriptions of the conversation will be difficult so tape recording would have been a necessity.

I also scheduled times with site administrators or lead teachers to immerse myself within

their school sites to observe team collaboration sessions that may have impacted teachers' autonomy to make decisions. It was important to me that I conducted site observations after most interviews were completed because I wanted to have a deeper understanding and background of what I was going to be observing in the different settings. While conducting site observations, I utilized an observation tool (Appendix D) to help transcribe in detail what was happening within the collaboration sessions. For example, for a meeting observation, the observation tool allowed me to record who led the meeting, how many opportunities participants had to speak their opinion as well as vote towards the overall decision.

Finally, after I completed my site observations and conducted interviews, I contacted both sites' administrators and gained access to important documents that pertained to my study. These documents included minutes and/or agendas for professional learning communities, professional developments, leadership team meetings, and faculty meetings. By completing an analysis of these documents, I was able to identify the amount of autonomy and teacher leadership opportunities provided to teachers within the school site. For example, if a leadership team agenda allows different roles to facilitate their part of their meaning, this would indicate that there is a level of autonomy given to teacher leaders at that particular site.

The Researcher's Role

My primary role in this research study was to be the human instrument. Because my data collection techniques included interviews and field observations, I was the primary tool by which the data was collected. I collected data through transcription and detailed field notes of observations so that I was able to identify any patterns or common themes that arose in either or both sites. In addition, my other role in this research study was interpreter. It was one of my primary responsibilities to analyze and interpret the transcriptions and field notes to find

similarities and differences among teacher autonomy to make decisions that affect both students and the school in the two different settings. Being that I am a passionate teacher-leader who advocates for restructuring current traditional roles of teachers, I was aware of the bias that I might have brought to this study. Seeing that I believe strongly in the idea that teachers have the expertise and knowledge to be responsible with complete autonomy to make decisions for their students and school, I had to strive to not allow this passion to interfere with the interpreting and reporting of the findings. It was my responsibility to the field of scholarly research to be transparent with my findings and unbiased in my data analysis and reporting techniques.

In addition, Summer Elementary School in this study is located within the school district that I lead and teach in and the participants who I interacted with were colleagues whom I've collaborated and worked with on a district level. Therefore, my role as a researcher required my prior experiences and relationships with these participants to not impede with my truthful reporting in things such as on-site observations or face-to-face interviews.

Because I brought certain values to this research study, I assumed an axiological philosophical assumption throughout the research. Creswell (2013, p. 20) explains that "inquirers admit the value-laden nature of the study and actively report their values and biases as well as the value-laden nature of information gathered from the field". Therefore, there was a representation and integration of the participants' voice in my findings. As Creswell (2013) described a researcher who is taking on an axiological philosophical assumption, I positioned myself within the study and sites of the school.

Data Collection

To ensure triangulation of data, data collection for this study happened through three different methods. Triangulation is a process when "researchers make use of multiple and

different sources, methods, investigators, and theories to provide corroborating evidence” (Creswell, 2013, p.251). The research plan included these four methods of data collection: interviews, focus groups, site observations, and document analysis. However, focus groups were not deemed necessary based on the responses received during interviews.

Interviews

Participant interviews were the first form of data collection for this case study. Case-study research typically involves data collection techniques that primarily focus on interviews and site observations (Creswell, 2013). Yin (2014) suggested that interviews are the most important component of data collection for the case study design. Suggestions for conducting interviews include identifying the participants, setting the place, being conscious of time, and ensuring that there is extensive transcription and recording of the interviews to help with data analysis. Therefore, in my research study I conducted interviews with teachers at both school sites. I interviewed six teachers from Winter Elementary School and seven teachers from Summer Elementary School. Teachers were given the opportunity to select the time and setting for their interviews as well as the option of having a phone interview if it was most conducive for their schedule. If participants were unable to participate via phone or face to face, they were provided with a copy of the interview questions to provide written responses to for analysis.

During the interview process I was audio-recording the interview, if the participant provided permission (Yin, 2014), as well as memoing things such as facial expressions, voice intonation, and pauses by the participants to help with later transcription and analysis (Creswell, 2013). Reasons I might not have recorded my interviews were if the participant denied my request to record and if the participant appeared to be uncomfortable with the presence of the recording device, which might have impeded the effectiveness of the interview (Yin, 2014). It

was my intention for the audio-recording of interviews to help provide a more accurate description of what the participant portrayed, but I did not utilize it as an excuse to be less engaged throughout the actual face to face interview (Yin, 2014).

When writing interview questions that were included in my study, there were some considerations I made. In particular when writing my interview questions, I was intentional to ensure that I maintained a certain line of inquiry to help answer my research questions of the study but was also mindful that the interview process was fluid and less rigid. My interviews were more unstructured and intensive rather than a rigid conversation guided by a pre-set list of questions (Yin, 2014). Included below are the interview questions I asked the teachers in both school sites.

Open-ended interview questions. The following questions were used during the teacher interviews:

1. Please introduce yourself to me by including your name, educational background, years of teaching experience, and current years of teaching at this current site.
(Biographical)
2. Please describe the organizational structure and leadership design of your school site.
(RQ1)
3. How would you describe the teacher morale within your school? (RQ1)
 - a. What are the factors that have created this level of morale?
4. How would you describe the level of autonomy you have to make decisions about your students and school-wide initiatives in your current setting? (RQ1)
5. What are some of the factors that you feel are inhibiting your autonomy to make decisions for students and your school? (RQ1)

6. What are some of the decisions in your school and classroom that you currently have the autonomy to make and what are some of the decisions you have no autonomy to impact? (RQ1)
7. How would you describe your self-efficacy in regards to teaching and making educational decisions for your students and school? (RQ2)
8. How do you feel your level of self-efficacy could impact your ability to embrace the autonomy to make decisions for your students and school? (RQ2)
9. Some people might say that a lack of teacher (self) efficacy is what has limited autonomy for teachers. How do you feel others' perceptions of your efficacy impact the amount of autonomy you have? (RQ2)
10. Proxy-efficacy is defined as one's ability to influence those who have control over their institution or society. How would you describe your level of proxy-efficacy in your school setting? (RQ 3)
11. Describe the ways teachers in your school setting are able to influence or persuade those who make decisions impacting your students and school. (RQ 3)
12. If you could improve your proxy-efficacy, what are some of things you'd like to have more autonomy or influence over? (RQ3)
 - a. Why are those topics or issues most important to you?
13. Collective-efficacy is defined as a group of individuals combining knowledge and resources to benefit the majority of the group. How would you describe the collective efficacy of your school setting? (RQ4)
14. What is some evidence to support either a weak or strong collective efficacy on your campus? (RQ4)

15. If your school's teachers could strengthen your collective efficacy, what are areas of concern or issues that you believe your teachers would use their collective efficacy to seek the autonomy to improve? (RQ4)
16. Thank you for taking your time to share with me about your school site and the autonomy you possess here on your site. My last question for you is if you believe that the morale of teachers here on your campus would increase if there were increased levels of autonomy for teachers?

The first two questions of the interview were intended to help develop some familiarity between the participant and myself. It was my intention through these two questions to gain basic information about the participants, which helped data analysis so that I could look for common themes regarding teachers' perceptions of their autonomy dependent upon their years of experience or educational background and preparation. In addition, the second question in particular helped to gain a deeper understanding of the teachers' perceptions as well as descriptions of the organizational structure of their school and leadership style. Just because a school is labeled as a teacher-powered School does not necessarily mean those teachers saw the organizational structure as that type.

The third question in the interview allowed teachers to disclose about the morale of teachers within the school site of the participants. Berry (2014) described that current levels of teacher morale in the public education setting is low and some attributing factors involve limited autonomy and freedom to meet the needs of learners in ways they feel are best. Therefore, I was seeking to corroborate this study to identify if morale and autonomy are linked together. This question helped me to see if teachers who perceived low levels of autonomy also perceived the teacher morale at their school site to be poor or in need of improving.

Questions four through six looked directly at teacher perceptions of autonomy. As indicated in chapter 2, autonomy is a universal need for all humans including teachers and the lack of autonomy is impacting teacher retention, morale, and effectiveness (Paradis, Lutovac, & Kaasila, 2015; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014; Strong & Yoshida, 2014; Wiebe & Macdonald, 2014). These interview questions directly addressed the first research question of this study. Based on these three questions, I was able to transcribe thorough descriptions of teachers' perceptions of their autonomy in regard to what they have control and say over within their school site as well as identification of barriers that are currently instituted in their site that are inhibiting their autonomy to make decisions for their students and schools. With each passing year, more standardization is happening in public education, which in turn is creating more and more barriers for teachers and their autonomy to make decisions (Dierking & Fox, 2013). These questions sought to see the reality of these studies and if the organizational structure created a difference on the perceptions of teachers.

Questions seven through 10 directly related to the theoretical framework of the study and addressed research questions two through four of the study. Each of those three research questions were addressed with three interview questions. The theoretical framework of this study is based off of Bandura's (1989, 1997, 2000, 2002) social-cognitive theory, which proposed there are three components of human agency that impact the desired outcome of individuals. The three areas of human agency include self-efficacy, proxy efficacy, and collective efficacy. Questions seven through fifteen looked to identify teachers' perceptions of their own level of self-efficacy and how that directly related to how autonomy is afforded to them in their current school site. This helped to identify if teachers who have higher levels of self-efficacy also perceive higher levels of autonomy or if there is no connection at all. Self-efficacy is defined by

Bandura (1989, 1997, 2000, 2002) as one's belief of his or her ability to impact the desired outcomes in their own lives.

Questions 10 through 12 incorporated proxy-efficacy within the two school sites. These questions sought to identify the participants' perceptions of their proxy-efficacy to help influence the decisions of those who determine the conditions of their school site, such as an administrator or lead teacher. Bandura (1989, 2000) described proxy-efficacy as a necessity of human agency to have the belief and ability to influence those who control or make decisions for their current situation or institute. Therefore, responses to these interview questions helped me gain insight on how well the participants felt like their voice or influence had on the decisions that are made to impact the classroom and their school. This level of proxy-efficacy closely aligns to teacher autonomy to make decisions because even if the decision was not directly made by the teacher, if their influence on those who make the decision led to a desired outcome there is a level of teacher autonomy present in that school site.

Questions 13 through 15 looked directly at the collective efficacy component of human agency in Bandura's social-cognitive theory. Bandura (2002) looked at collective efficacy as a combination of resources, skills, and knowledge of a collective group of individuals that leads to a desired outcome by the majority. Collective efficacy is pertinent to teacher perceptions of autonomy as most teachers work on grade level teams when looking at cases such as elementary schools. These grade level teams or professional learning communities are where most of the decision-making efforts take place. Therefore, these questions attempted to identify the level of collective efficacy within the two cases as well as the impact this collective efficacy has on the autonomy within these schools. Most importantly, I sought to elicit from participants what they believed as most important to teams of teachers within their school if collective efficacy was

strong and led to increased autonomy of those teams to make decisions for the students and schools.

The final question of the interview attempted to make the final connection between the perceptions of teacher autonomy and its impact on teacher morale. In Santoro's (2011) case study, a teacher who left the profession described her reason for leaving the profession as not an effect of burnout, but rather an effect of the profession being demoralized and teachers lacking the trust to do what is best for students. If teacher morale, which leads to low retention rates, is caused not by the demands of the career, but from the lack of autonomy given to teachers, that can be corrected (Berry, 2014). I especially looked to see if participants' responses to this question differ between the two sites because if the responses are more favorable towards the teacher-powered model then that could lead to future research on why a teacher-powered model of school design might be the answer to keeping the best teachers in the classroom to benefit children.

Focus Groups

A focus group is defined as a convening of a small group of participants to discuss some aspect of the case study (Yin, 2014). Therefore, if based on data gathered from the interviews deems a focus group necessary to further develop my understanding and depiction of the perceptions of teacher autonomy within the two sites; I would have hosted two focus groups, one at each site respectively. All teacher interview participants would have been invited to attend the focus group, but as the researcher I will be aware that it might not be feasible for all participants. Once I would have found all willing participants, I would have scheduled a time and location for the focus group. I was also aware that my focus group may have taken place through technological means to best meet the needs of my participants. It was my intention for each focus

group to consist of a minimum of four participants each. However, after analyzing the transcription of the interviews, I did not identify any topics or themes that need further clarification or deeper perspectives. Most interviews corroborated one another and were similar across the board to other teachers who participated in the same site.

The two focus groups will be audio recorded thus requiring any willing participant granting permission to do so. The audio recording of the focus groups is mandatory because seeing that all individuals may contribute during multiple times in the discussion, it will be almost impossible for me to engage with the participants in conversation and keep accurate written transcriptions of what was said. Also, to help track who makes what comment, I will also ask participants to state their name before they begin their comment or discussion in the focus group. Once the focus groups are complete, I will conduct thorough transcriptions of the focus groups to help identify common themes and patterns of ideas shared among the participants.

I chose to conduct my focus groups after the one on one participant interviews. My reasoning for this placement of the focus groups is because I want to already know who my participants are and their stances on teacher autonomy in their site before I meet with a group of them collectively. The need for focus groups may be obsolete if interviewees provided thorough enough responses during the initial interviews. The intention of the focus group was to have corroboration of themes or ideas present in the interviews (Yin, 2014). The focus groups occur will help ensure the reliability of the results because sometimes over corroboration of statements in individual interviews could indicate that there might have been some conspiracy or previous discussion of the topics among the participants to ensure that my findings report in a certain way (Yin, 2014). Assembling the group of individuals together in one setting helped to lessen this type of conspiracy as people were more honest when in a group where others know whether what

they are saying is correct or incorrect based on the realities of their school site. Here is a list of questions that will be covered in the two focus groups.

Open-ended focus group questions. The following questions are prospective questions that may guide the focus group discussions:

1. Thank you all for taking this time to participate in this focus group. Even though you most likely know everyone in the group, to help me, please go around the circle and share your name, current role at your school, years of teaching experience, and years of teaching at this current school.
2. How would you describe the opportunities at your current school that empower you to be fully autonomous in the decision-making and outcome for your students and school? (RQ1)
3. What are some areas or issues that you would like to see more autonomy in controlling or making decisions about? (RQ1)
 - a. How would your use of autonomy in making these decisions change the current situation for you and your students?
4. How is the morale of teachers at your school site? (RQ1)
 - a. What are the reasons for the morale being this way?
 - b. If your autonomy to make decisions were increased even greater than the extent is now, how would that impact the morale of your teachers?
5. In your one-on-one interviews, I discussed the concepts of self, proxy, and collective efficacy. How would you describe the collective efficacy of the teachers within your school? (RQ4)
 - a. How would this level of collective efficacy inhibit or assist in using full teacher

autonomy at your school?

The first question in the focus group is just a general question helping to create an environment of trust and rapport amongst the focus group participants and myself. The question helps me to know the names of who I am talking to as well as helps me get a vibe for the amount of experience of those who are sitting in the room.

Questions two and three focus solely on the perceptions of teacher autonomy at the school site. Seeing that the central question of the study encompasses teachers' perception of autonomy, these two open ended questions will help to identify if these teachers feel empowered within their school to make decisions as well what decisions would be made if they were empowered with greater autonomy they currently have. This also helps to encompass teacher leadership and give me insight on the amount of teacher leadership opportunities provided within the two school sites as well as the desired teacher leader opportunities these teachers have. By encouraging teachers to take risks with problem solving as well as provide them with time to collaborate and strengthen one another will help to ensure that teachers feel empowered to lead (Ringler, O'Neal, Rawls, & Cumiskey, 2013; Sterrett & Irizarry, 2015). Therefore, by engaging teachers in discussion about a Utopian society where they did have the autonomy I will be able to understand exactly the areas they desire to bring about positive change if given the power to do so.

Question four addresses teacher morale directly. Again, I am hypothesizing based on literature read that if teachers felt like they were respected as professionals trusted to accomplish what they've been trained to do then their morale and commitment to the profession would also increase (Berry, 2014; Elwood, 2014; Klassen, et al., 2012; Santoro, 2011). This question helps me to prove this hypothesis false or true based on how teachers make connections in their

discussion between the amount of autonomy they perceive and their satisfaction in their current role at their current school.

Finally, question five helps to bring in the theoretical framework from my study into the focus group conversation. I particularly want to highlight the beliefs of the group of participants in regards to their collective efficacy and their ability to work together to solve problems if they were given the autonomy to do so. In addition, this question will help to see if structure of school supports the beliefs of teachers in regard to their perceptions of their collective efficacy.

Site Observations

Site observations were the second method of data collection for this study. As mentioned previously, Creswell (2013) supports that interviews and observations are two of the most foundational forms of data collection in the case study design. Since a case-study design takes place in a real-world setting, Yin (2014) suggests the use of direct observations within the setting to help support already collected evidence. Site observations helped me to gain a deep understanding of the two cases necessary to make comparisons of their approaches to teacher autonomy. I worked with site administrators to schedule times in which I could immerse myself in the culture of their school through my attendance at team collaboration sessions. As encouraged by Yin (2014), I developed an observation tool to help with the structure of my observations (Appendix A). I decided to ensure that I observed a similar activity or meeting at both sites to better compare the autonomies provided to teachers. At Summer Elementary School I observed a grade level curriculum-planning meeting. At Winter Elementary School, I observed a genius hour, which was their equivalent to a vertical curriculum planning meeting in their teacher-powered school. In both observations I took extensive field notes in which I tried to fully encompass all that I saw and heard to help with further coding and data analysis (Creswell,

2013).

Document Analysis

Document analysis was the final method of data collection for my research study. After I secured permission from the site gatekeeper such as the principal or lead teacher to conduct research within a site, I emailed that individual to discuss the different documents I wanted access to in order to conduct thorough document analysis. Documents such as meeting agendas, minutes from leadership team meetings, and any other document that might have given me insight to the level of teacher autonomy within the school sites was collected. The principals had some discretion in what documents they felt would best inform the study.

Once documents were collected, I coded documents to find common themes and then looked for comparisons across sites as well as differences. Yin (2014) explained that documents help “corroborate and augment evidence collected from other sources” (p. 106). For instance, if participants indicate through focus groups and interviews that they have opportunities to lead professional development or collaborate with their teams over curriculum development, analyzing meeting agendas and minutes from professional learning communities can provide the support needed to corroborate the reports from the participants. I opted to conduct document analysis in the last phase of triangulation because this form of data collection cannot stand alone. This means that even if faculty meeting agendas list collaborative planning time or teacher leader presentation, explained that this cannot be taken as fact (Yin, 2014). Therefore, mitigation of such claims must be made through conversation with actual participants in these sites. Furthermore, if the evidence supported through document analysis does not support evidence collected in interviews and observations, it will then support further exploration into the problem or topic (Yin, 2014).

Data Analysis

My data analysis technique closely aligned to Creswell's (2013) steps to data analysis in qualitative studies. My first step in data analysis was to organize my data in files based on the type of data collection method utilized to get the data as well as the site in which the data was collected. Next, I began to complete a first read of the data transcriptions, documents, and field notes and began to memo and make notes throughout my readings. Memoing helped me to record or make notes of my initial thoughts or interpretations of the data through my first look that later helped me to better organize the data or place it where it best fit (Yin, 2014). Some of my initial organization of data also included suggestions made by Yin (2014) such as tabulating the frequency of occurrences of different events within the two school sites. Examples of this would be the frequency that teachers were sought out for input and suggestions or possibly allowed to vote on the final outcome or decision.

In addition, I worked to create a matrix in which I created categories pertaining to teacher autonomy such teacher input, teacher leadership roles, teacher led components of meetings, etc. in which I was able to correctly code and place my observations or findings for both sites to help later identify themes or patterns. This matrix helped me to conduct a cross-case synthesis in which I created matrices for both case studies to help me make cross-case comparisons later in my data analysis stages (Yin, 2014).

Once all data was reviewed, I began to identify arising themes in the data, which lead to me reorganizing my data now based on the themes those pieces of data supported. I planned on doing this by cutting apart statements and notes, which should be color-coded to identify location and person, in order to best align them to the theme they support. However, instead of cutting

apart, I selected different colored highlighters to represent themes and coded the data through that route. Once data was organized by themes, I interpreted the data through comparisons among the sites, which is synonymous to what Yin (2014) refers to as cross-case syntheses. This pattern-matching step helped me to identify if the data I collected matched the hypothesized outcomes for which I was looking. As Yin (2014) explained, pattern matching involved looking to see if a data supported pattern was found and looking at in comparison to what the predicted pattern was before data was actually collected. My predicted pattern for this study was that a structured school that empowers teachers to lead and gives full teacher autonomy will have teachers who perceived higher levels of autonomy as well as higher levels of efficacy and morale when compared to a traditionally structured school. From there, my final step of data analysis was determining how I would choose to represent the data to best show my findings from the research.

Other data analysis techniques that I incorporated throughout the steps outlined above included categorical aggregation and comparisons and patterns. The categorical aggregation occurred when trying to identify the common themes that arose from multiple sources of data as well as multiple participants. The comparisons and patterns method of analysis was critical to this study since this study was comparative in nature. Creswell (2013) described that comparisons and patterns techniques involves looking for patterns among two or more categories. Seeing that I attempted to identify comparison between two different structures of schools, this method of analysis helped me to see if there were patterns among the two sites about teacher autonomy to make decisions for students and the school.

In the end, it was my desire to ensure that I reviewed all evidence to ensure that my study had gone through a high quality analysis process. I wanted to also ensure through careful

comparisons and pattern matching, that I was thoroughly answering all of my research questions even if this included participants contradicting each other (Yin, 2014). Most importantly though, I wanted to make sure that through my analysis procedures that I was able to tie all pieces of collected evidence into addressing the most important topic of this study which is the perceptions of teachers about the autonomy they are afforded to make decisions for their school and students. Yin (2014) discusses that it is easy to sometimes make detours during the analysis stage which carries risk for criticism that the research diverted focus away from the main issue because of contrary findings. Although, topics such as teacher leadership roles, teacher morale, and even efficacy theories were addressed and supported or disproved by the evidence, I wanted to ensure that my analysis used the evidence to shed light on the topic of teacher autonomy so that it can be carried forth to improve school design and structures. By doing this I have contributed to the literature regarding school structures so that they are designed to better meet the desires of teachers so that students are more positively impacted, even if that design is not the structure that I originally hypothesized as the better fit for teacher autonomy.

Trustworthiness

By being a precautionous and transparent researcher, I strived to conduct a research study that upheld high-levels of trustworthiness. Creswell refers to trustworthiness or validation as a strength of qualitative research because “the account made through extensive time spent in the field, the detailed thick description, and the closeness of the researcher to participants in the study all add to the value or accuracy of the study” (p. 250).

Credibility

When working in the field of education research and talking about something that is felt and pertains to every teacher in the world such as teacher autonomy, credibility of the study is

imperative. To strengthen the credibility of my study, I immersed myself within the field that I studied to ensure that I was understanding exactly what my evidence portrayed (Creswell, 2013). One of my case study sites was thousands of miles away, but thanks to modern technology, I was able to conduct a Google hang out to ensure that I could be face to face virtually with teachers at the TPS. In addition, I ensured triangulation of my data to increase the credibility of the findings. Yin (2014) defines triangulation as “the convergence of data collected from different sources, to determine the consistency of a finding” (p. 241). The triangulation of data occurred as I gathered data from both sites through a multiple of sources such as interviews of participants, , site observations, and document analysis.

In addition, as I conducted interviews with participants I engaged in member-checking in which I shared with them the transcriptions of their interviews and findings of my study to ensure that I am portraying their thoughts and ideas in an interpretation that is fitting to their true feelings and beliefs about the topic of teacher autonomy within their school site. I also incorporated validation techniques suggested by Creswell (2013) throughout the study. I also engaged in debriefing with an outside individual to receive constructive feedback and an outside perspective about the approach and procedures I have followed to ensure that my findings are accurate and that my process has been valid (Creswell, 2013).

Dependability and Confirmability

In order to conduct a study that is dependable and easily replicated, Yin (2014) suggests that researchers conduct research in such an operational way that anyone could pick up the study and conduct the same case study. The best way to ensure this dependability of the study is to be very descriptive in the development of my study, particularly my settings. Seeing that this is a multiple case study and the two sites are very specific in regard to their selection, I was

extremely descriptive about the cases so that any other researcher would also find synonymous sites for replication. To do this, I explicitly defined the organizational and leadership structure adopted in the teacher-powered school within this particular study as such sites are not easily located within the United States. For instance, if I just described the school site as one that embraces teacher autonomy, other researchers might not understand the depth of autonomy within the school site and could easily report different findings within their case study.

Dependability also occurred by me being descriptive in the data collection and data analysis techniques. Researchers should collect and conduct data as if a supervisor was overshadowing the process (Yin, 2014). This meaning that it is important to be detailed in every description of the steps taken throughout the case study process. Throughout my Chapter Three there are examples and detailed explanations of how I not only collected the data, but also how I later organized and analyzed the data as well. Therefore, the dependability of my study was strengthened and should be replicable by other researchers.

Also, having an audit-trail of the entire research process has been critical to ensuring that my findings of the case study were dependable, accurate, and transferable to current literature. Therefore, to create the audit-trail I ensured that my entire research process from beginning to end is completely documented via paper and digital records. From consent forms, to notes in the field, to emails with participants and principals, I have saved and stored all documents to ensure that my entire study is transparent and valid and not influenced by personal bias.

Transferability

Transferability refers to my study's ability to be transferred to other context or generalized to similar situations as those involved in the case study. One of the limitations of the case study model of research is that because the participant size is small, the results are not easily

generalized on a larger scale (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2014). However, in order to ensure external validity or transferability, the written research should be written correctly (Yin, 2014). In order for case study findings to be generalizable, it is imperative for the study to be guided by either “how” or “why” questions so that the findings can be more transferable to other settings that are similar. Therefore, this study has four research questions that are written with the word “how” to help ensure that this study is a little more generalizable than it would be if they were not written in this form.

Ethical Considerations

Creswell (2013) described the importance of keeping ethical considerations at the forefront of the entire research process and I strived to do so from beginning to end of this study. I was in the field with real participants who have emotional ties to their positions, roles, and careers and I must be conscious to remember that whatever data I collected was real life and most likely emotionally sensitive to most people who provided the data. I constantly remembered the purpose of my study when working with these individuals as we are striving to find avenues and routes that increase teacher autonomy to help impact their engagement in the profession and learning for students.

One of the first ethical considerations in my research study was the notion that I was asking busy professionals who were overwhelmed with responsibilities both professionally and personally to engage in a research project that requested even more of their time. Therefore, I wanted to be respectful of their time and be mindful of the requests that I asked of them. I strived to conduct interviews during times that were selected by the participants and conducive to their schedules. In addition, when engaging in interviews I was mindful of the time it took to complete the interview and then showed my appreciation to participants. Also, my time in the field was

intended to be non-intrusive and not disruptive to learning for students. My intention during observations was to be an invisible person who is there to engage in the processes of the school in a silent manner. Therefore, I was mindful to not interject during meetings or instruction, but rather just took field notes and then followed-up with clarification questions via emails or phone calls at a less disruptive time.

Also, the educational environment is full of bureaucracy and many of my participants might have been fearful of retaliation by their administration or direct supervisor if they were truly transparent in their answers about the autonomy they were afforded. Therefore, in order to ensure confidentiality throughout the entire process, all participants names were turned into pseudonyms and any information collected or gathered from participants was locked in secure locations not easily accessible by anybody but myself. In addition, I needed to be aware that focus groups can sometimes increase the opportunity for confidentiality breaches (Creswell, 2013) because although I can discuss that confidentiality is a norm for our focus group, I cannot control what other individuals do or repeat when they are outside of our focus group meeting. Therefore, it was my intention to be very serious with my focus group from the beginning of the session and ask them to sign confidentiality notices just to help make them aware of the importance of not disclosing information that was discussed within that meeting.

Finally, an important ethical consideration for my study was my current role as an administrator in my local school district. Although, I was not a direct supervisor over the individuals who were participating from my school district, I still took into consideration that the perception of my role may have an impact on the participants. In addition, I needed to be cognizant of the need for separation between my role and my research as I wanted to get the most authentic results from the participants that are not influenced by their concern of my

position.

Summary

Chapter Three of this research provided an in-depth overview of the methods I utilized to conduct my multiple case study on teacher autonomy to make decisions for students and the school. Within this chapter, I included the design of the study, selection of site and participants, procedures I utilized in the study, and my role as the researcher. Also, this chapter included the research question and sub-questions as well as the insurance of triangulation in data collection with a description of all four techniques I utilized to collect data. In addition, I provided the steps I took to analyze the data and the steps I took to ensure trustworthiness and ethical considerations of my sites and participants.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

This multiple-case study was designed to examine the perceptions of teacher autonomy among teachers within both a traditionally structured and teacher-powered school. Chapter Four of this study focuses on the findings collected through interviews, site observations, and document analysis. Within this chapter is a detailed description of the participants through the use of pseudonyms and their roles within their current sites. In addition, the research questions of this study will be addressed using themes derived from the data collection.

Participants

Chapter Three indicated that the sample size of my study would be between 12 and 15 participants. The actual sample for the study was 13 teachers, with seven being from Summer Elementary School and six being from Winter Elementary School. Based on the criterion set for the sample, all teachers included as participants in the study fit the criteria of being full time elementary teachers within a general education setting. A detailed description of each of the 13 participants interviewed is presented below.

Louise is a Caucasian first grade teacher at Summer Elementary School who has been teaching for 12 years, three of those years being currently at Summer Elementary School. Louise has a Bachelor of Science degree in child development as well as a master's degree in elementary education. Louise was a parent of students who attended this school, but had a passion for the work the school was doing, which led her to coming back to work full time in the capacity of teacher at Summer Elementary School. Louise was an active participant in the school PTO and other parent related activities, which afforded her different autonomies before she

taught. Now, her role has shifted, which has impacted her autonomy. Louise has a positive perception of her school leadership and culture, but feels very restrained by the curriculum and other district level mandates that are limiting her teaching autonomy.

Samantha is a passionate Caucasian fourth grade teacher at Summer Elementary School and has been teaching a total of four years at that current grade level. Her entire career has been spent at this current traditionally structured school site. Samantha's experiences have included teaching self-contained fourth grade, which entails teaching all subjects to her homeroom of students. In addition, she has departmentalized where she focused on the subjects of math and science for two classes. Currently, Samantha is a self-contained teacher in a general education classroom, where students with special learning needs are included with the support of an ESE resource teacher. Samantha enjoys the art of collaboration and speaks positively about the collective efficacy of her team and their ability to make changes impacting the students at her grade level. Based on her interviews, Samantha can be described as a rule follower and a teacher who desires to do what is expected of her, which sometimes diminishes her autonomy to do what she feels may be right for her students.

Whitney is another Caucasian fourth grade teacher at Summer Elementary School with 18 years of teaching experience in a variety of settings. She has been teaching at Summer Elementary School for two years. Some of Whitney's experiences include teaching middle school, special education in a self-contained setting, private school, and general education. Whitney is certified in both ESE and Elementary Education (K-6). Whitney's bachelor's degree is in varying exceptionalities education, which allows her to bring a special education perspective to the general education setting where she is currently now serving. She is currently discouraged by the lack of autonomy she is afforded in her current teaching position. She speaks

positively about grade-level team she works with but feels the team has few opportunities to make decisions relating to curriculum. She is especially frustrated by the new language arts curriculum adopted by the district because she feels the curriculum does not provide opportunities to address specific student learning needs, especially in writing.

Debra is a Caucasian second grade teacher at Summer Elementary School, who has 20 years of experience at this school site. Prior to her tenure at Summer Elementary School, Debra taught private pre-kindergarten. Debra's bachelor's degree is in history, with an elementary education add-on certificate. Debra has taught both 2nd and 3rd grades, with experiences in general education and advanced academic settings. Debra is a veteran at this traditionally structured school, which gives her a perspective of the way organizational structure has evolved over time within this school site. Based on my interview and interactions with Debra, I can tell that she is discouraged and somewhat defeated in her current teaching situation. She has seen the pendulum swing in education with her years of experience and the current system in which she teaches is not ideal in her image. She feels very confined to curriculum and scheduling, with limited autonomy to make decisions she feels best for her students. She is disappointed in a current structure that puts mandates over years of experience and data over the needs of developing a whole child.

Marilyn is a Caucasian kindergarten teacher at Summer Elementary School. Marilyn has only taught at Summer Elementary School during her six-year tenure in the profession. Marilyn's experiences are all in primary areas, kindergarten and first grade general education classrooms. Marilyn has a bachelor's degree in elementary education from the University of South Florida. Marilyn is pleased with Summer Elementary School and also feels appreciated and valued based on the feedback she receives from administration. However, Marilyn is equally frustrated, like

the rest of the teachers at Summer Elementary School, with the strict requirements of a curriculum that is not engaging for all learners. Her passion is for teaching in engaging ways, but she feels that her ability to do that is impacted by curriculum. She believes school morale has been impacted by this, but believes the morale of her school is district influenced and not as low as other schools within the district.

Wanda teaches 2nd grade at Summer Elementary School. She is a Caucasian teacher who has seven years of experience, with six years at this school setting. Wanda has taught both kindergarten and second grade at her school site and currently teaches in a departmentalized classroom where she focuses on the content areas of math and science. Wanda has an overall positive perception of her current teaching assignment and administration. She is pleased with her teaching team and feels like the collective efficacy at her school and on her grade level is good and helps do what is best for students. Wanda also feels discouraged by the lack of autonomy given to teachers at her school site, whether that be school, district, or state induced. She feels as if teachers' educational backgrounds are not sufficient enough to be trusted to make decisions and instead are being continually told what to do and how to do it.

Juliette is a first year, Caucasian teacher at Summer Elementary School where she currently teaches fifth grade. Juliette recently graduated with a degree in elementary education and is also endorsed in reading and English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). In addition, Juliette teaches in an inclusive setting, where she has students with learning disabilities included within her general education setting. Juliette loves her school family and team. She is extremely grateful for the opportunities she has been provided within her school site to be a contributor and to receive support in her classroom. Juliette feels as if her lack of expertise is a cause for the lack of autonomy she feels, but also feels as if her classroom make-up of students has been difficult to

manage, with the high percentage of students with IEPs being included. Juliette does feel like she must battle between doing what she is mandated to do and what she feels is best for her students. The more the year progressed, the more Juliette felt like she was closing her door and doing right by students.

Rebecca is a Caucasian teacher within one of the communities at Winter Elementary School. Rebecca's assigned grade level is fifth grade; however, she focuses on varying grade levels for her math and literacy blocks based on the instructional organizational structure at Winter Elementary School. Rebecca has been teaching three years at Winter Elementary School and is currently pursuing her Master of Education degree with a specialization in the area of science. Rebecca feels strongly about the need for teacher-powered within their school site. She wants teachers to have a voice and power to make decisions they feel are important for the students of their school. Although grateful for the level of autonomy they are afforded at Winter Elementary School, Rebecca would like to see an increase in autonomy in different areas. These areas include budgeting, staffing, and more control over professional development. She believes the autonomy they have regarding students is powerful, but she would like to see more decision-making authority regarding those things that impact her as a professional in her school.

Maura is also a Caucasian teacher within one of the learning communities at Winter Elementary school. Maura is assigned to the third grade content area, but also teaches varying grade level standards for the focus areas of literacy and mathematics. Maura is a veteran teacher who was also part of the design team for the teacher-powered organizational structure at Winter Elementary School. Maura has taught for 24 years in the public-school system and has a master's degree in education. Maura has been an advocate for the teacher-powered movement since being on the design team and has even presented at teacher-powered conferences regarding the work

they are doing at Winter Elementary School. Maura is pleased with the autonomy they've secured as a team of teachers, but is not completely satisfied with where they are since moving to a complete school model. She feels the next step in the teacher-powered work is defining roles so that all teachers have an in-depth knowledge of what it means to be teacher-powered.

Julie is also a Caucasian educator at Winter Elementary School, where she has taught for a total of 8 years. Julie is also a veteran educator with diverse experiences mostly in early childhood such as kindergarten, but also has experience in third and fifth grades. Currently, based on the leadership organizational structure at Winter Elementary School, Julie is a support specialist, which is a teacher position within a specific community, which is unique to the organizational model of Winter Elementary. Julie was also a member of the development team for Winter Elementary School, but feels like since moving from a single community within a school to an entire teacher-powered school that there have been barriers. One of those barriers that Julie feels is impacting them most is an administrator who is supportive, but still not completely sure of her role in a teacher-powered school. Julie believes there is still more work to be done in order to secure teachers the autonomy the design team sought after at the start of the movement.

Susie is another Caucasian educator at Winter Elementary School, where she has taught for a total of four years. Susie's entire teaching career has occurred at Winter Elementary School. Susie is in the first grade position of her community, however, this means that she does focus on other grade level standards for her math and literacy instruction blocks based on the assessment scores that students score on their screeners. Susie is also pursuing her graduate degree in the content area of literacy. Susie has a positive perception of the autonomy provided to teachers at Winter Elementary School. She is passionate about the work, especially the curriculum design

that teachers have been afforded the opportunity to impact. Susie also believes the morale of Winter Elementary is great and that there is a common bond that brings the teachers within communities together. Like other participants from Winter Elementary, Susie believes that more defined roles for teachers will increase autonomy and boost morale to even a greater level.

Dolly is a Caucasian educator from Winter Elementary School where she teaches first grade. Dolly was a part of the original development team and serves on the school and district literacy teams. Dolly has 21 years of teaching experience, five at this current location. She has experience mostly in primary grade levels, with a focus on literacy. Dolly has a Masters in Teaching and Learning with an additional 60 plus credits with a literacy concentration. Dolly is a highly experienced teacher who has presented professional development both in and outside of the district. Her level of expertise has benefited greatly from teaching in a model like Winter Elementary School since she has the freedom to use her knowledge to best impact students. Dolly is proud of the model they've created and feels as if her school works hard and that all people are invested in doing best by their students. Dolly believes that the requirement for all teachers to be involved in order for the school to exist has in turn boosted performance and self-efficacy. Dolly believes that teachers feel needed and get to see the fruits of their hard labor, which is why the morale at Winter Elementary School is so high.

Reba is a Caucasian educator from Winter Elementary School where she teaches 2nd grade. Leah has taught 24 years and started out of college teaching at a small school. Reba has a Masters of Science degree in Curriculum and Instruction. A vast majority of Reba's experience is in 3rd grade. The reason Reba switched to 2nd grade is because of her kindergarten endorsement and based on the pathway modules they do at Winter Elementary School, it enables students to progress at a faster rate. Reba believes that teacher-powered is hard and does not

come easy. However, Reba believes it is some of the most important work she's been a part of. She believes that she must continue to work towards finding solutions for her school and is extremely committed to seeing the full evolution of her school to a true teacher-powered movement. Reba has a positive perception of her school and also her administrator. She feels as if everyone is finding their place in the model, but believes strongly in the need for autonomy and what it does to empower both students and teachers.

Results

Theme Development

I conducted interviews through means that were easiest for teachers. This included phone and survey type formats. I conducted a site observation at both sites during curriculum and team based collaboration sessions. I finally requested and received documents from both site administrators that pertained to the organizational structures of each school site. Once data collection occurred, I began the data analysis process as outlined in Chapter Three of this study.

The first phase of data analysis served as what could be considered a first look of the data. This process included things such as memoing as I conducted or read through the interviews during a first read. This looked differently based on the data I was first reviewing. For instance, once all interviews were transcribed, whether through participants typing out responses or me transcribing verbal interviews, I began highlighting statements that I felt were pertinent to my research questions and resonated as profound statements about their perceptions of teacher autonomy. During site observations, using the observation tool as provided in the appendix, I made sure to memo notes about key happenings that provided insight into the organizational structure within the school and how that could in turn impact the perceptions those teachers have regarding their autonomy to make decisions.

I began by creating a matrix and coding information based on themes that I thought the data best aligned to (Appendix E). For example, if the participant's response discusses the organizational and leadership structure for decision making on their school site, I coded it to go in the table under structure of school. If teachers discussed ways they were able to have input or give their expertise to impact a decision, I coded it under decision-making. This process continued, and new components of the matrix were added as new themes emerged in the data analysis process. The four major themes that emerged from my findings were: leadership structure, teacher morale, decision-making, and roadblocks to success.

The next step in my data analysis was to conduct a deeper analysis to begin looking for not only commonalities among participants within a specific site, but also similarities or differences in perceptions among teachers at the two sites. The highlighting technique I utilized to find common themes or ideas from the participant interviews is presented in Appendix E. The comparisons and patterns approach to data analysis was used to identify themes and patterns (Yin, 2014). This was done to determine if some of the perceptions were just views felt by one participant within a site or if it was a generalization for that school structure due to the repeated number of times the response or feeling were identified in the participant interviews. These themes are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Theme Comparisons

Summer School Themes (Traditional Structure)	Common Themes In Both Structures	Winter School Themes (Teacher-Powered Structure)
Traditional structure with principle / assistant principal making decisions with some	Barriers to success and autonomy mostly coming from federal and district	Shared leadership team with 11 members; principal is part of this team

teacher input	policy	
Strict requirements to follow a district mandated curriculum with fidelity	Some weak collective efficacy perceived by teachers (Summer=lack of cross school collaboration; Winter= Need for more defined roles)	Consensus model to help make decisions and incorporate all teachers' voice
Low morale (some contributed to administration, some contributed to the district mandates)	Desire for more autonomy to make decisions for students and school (Summer=Curriculum; Winter= Budget, Professional Development, Staffing)	Strong morale between teachers (even district level personnel came in to do an audit and shared about cohesiveness of team)
Low perceptions of autonomy regarding ability to make any decisions	Feeling as if administrators have an impact on the perception of autonomy and morale	Strong perception of autonomy to impact students, plan curriculum and assessments, create schedule, designing learning spaces, etc.
Some perceived autonomy to make a few decisions for students, but mostly feel as if they are told what to do	Both site observations showed a curriculum meeting where a team of teachers collaborated around curriculum	K-5 communities encourage strong levels of vertical and horizontal collaboration, helps with collective efficacy
Positive interaction with administration, but not always felt as if input is heard or honored		Feel completely in control of what they are teaching, how they teach it, and the approaches they use to meet students' needs (Pathways and Modules)
Some collective efficacy within individual teams, but minimal cross school collaboration		Documents/agenda items are voted on for order of importance before a meeting is held
Strong feeling as if there is a lack of value/respect for teachers as experts in their fields to make decisions for students		Documents are collaborative meaning members on shared leadership team contribute to the ideas that need to be discussed

Documents and agendas are informational based and sharing ideas out from leadership and district to teacher leaders

Decision-making & Organizational structure charts have been created to identify the processes for more autonomy

Agendas/minutes indicate teacher input is encouraged or discussion is had around topics

For example, on interview question two, participants' responses from Summer Elementary were almost verbatim and the interviews did not happen together. This arising theme of a hierarchal leadership structure was obviously a surfacing theme for this structure of school. At Winter Elementary School, the exact same thing occurred. The participants' responses were almost exact in respect to the leadership structure of their school. However, the two leadership structures between the sites were extremely different. This showed that within each respective site, the teachers had a strong perception of the leadership structure and it was vastly different between the two sites. That type of thinking process continued as I revisited each piece of data in order to create a synthesis of the data to best report the results of my study. Below I have included the themes that arose and were listed as part of matrices in the data analysis portion of my research.

Leadership structure. Leadership structure was a common theme that arose from both school sites and had a major impact on the participants' perception of their autonomy within their setting. At Summer Elementary School, there was a strong consensus in the participant interviews about the leadership structure within their school setting. All participants from this site discussed the structure beginning and ending with the two administrators on site. This elementary school has a principal and assistant principal who make the decisions on their campus

in addition to relaying or carrying out information provided to them from the district office leadership. Participants at this setting indicated a strong approachability of the administrators and some interviewees stated that they do seek some input for decisions. Louise expressed, “Our administration is very open to new ideas on how to best serve our students and ways to improve our school.” Juliette shared, “I can approach my administration and present ideas to them and sometimes those ideas are implemented.” However, in the traditional leadership structure, the decision-making is ultimately their responsibility.

In addition, there is a curriculum leadership team at Summer Elementary School that is composed of a representative from each grade level, specials area, and resource coaches that meets monthly to help disseminate information from administrators to teachers. Those participants who serve in that capacity also reported that they are consulted for some feedback and input regarding decisions, but mostly serve as messengers of the information. Whitney describes the role of the curriculum leadership team as “receiving information from administration and then passing it on to their teams.” In addition, the coaches at the school site hold meetings with teachers regarding curriculum and do seek out input and opinions regarding resources and pacing of the curriculum. Louise shared, “We meet weekly with our curriculum coaches who do ask for input about the curriculum and teaching.” This was corroborated by my site observation at Summer Elementary School.

The statements about the role of curriculum coaches were corroborated during my site observation at Summer Elementary School. I actually conducted a site observation of a curriculum meeting for a particular grade level at Summer Elementary School. The coach was there to serve as a facilitator of the meeting, but provided opportunities for teachers to share concerns about curriculum, ideas and strategies for teaching the curriculum, and concerns that

needed to be forward to either administration or district level. There was a scribe document that helped capture some of the concerns as well as celebrations for the team. As an outside observer, I was able to note that there was ample opportunity for teacher voice in this setting and the coach served in a support role and not as a disseminator of knowledge. She inserted her expertise as necessary, but she more wanted to give teachers an opportunity to collaborate and discuss the language arts curriculum. The conversation was focused and there was not freedom in the curriculum used to address the standards, but there was opportunity for teacher voice and expertise regarding strategies or different approaches to bringing this curriculum to the students at Summer Elementary School.

For Winter Elementary School, leadership structure was a strong theme, probably the most prominent, that emerged from the data I collected at their site and my analysis of it. It was a resounding common theme among participants through their interviews and my site observation. The leadership structure is a shared leadership model among the faculty of this school. There is a principal on site and a shared leadership team that is composed of eleven faculty members representing different roles within the school, including teachers. Susie described this shared leadership team in her interview by stating, “Shared leadership represents the decision making team for the entire school. There is representation from all the different committees and K-5 teams.” Five out of the six interviewed participants described the school leadership structure in this way. However, Julie was an outlier. She described the leadership structure of her school as, “A typical school with a principal, yet we are working towards a teacher powered school where decisions are shared among the principal and the staff members.” This team meets bi-weekly. However, in addition there are communities that have a representative from kindergarten through fifth grade that meet on a five-day schedule to give their voice and make decisions for the

students within their communities. Participants in their interviews continually brought up a consensus model for decision making, in which there is a fist to five to vote on every decision in order to ensure teacher voice and support in the decisions that will have a great impact on their school and students. Maura said, “We have a consensus protocol which allows for all voices to be heard.” When discussing the consensus model, Rebecca explained, “We want and strive for all staff members to feel their voice has been heard and valued in the decision making process.” A fist to five vote requires teachers to vote on every topic or item discussed using a rating scale from zero to five. A five indicates the teacher whole-heartedly supports the item the support digresses with each descending number.

My site observation at Winter Elementary School happened via technology where I was a participant in one of their genius hour community collaboration meetings. Traditionally structured schools refer to these as team meetings. Within this one hour and ten-minute site observation, I was able to observe shared leadership among the team where people got to volunteer for roles, one that included facilitator. This means the same person is not leading the meeting on a weekly basis. In addition, I saw evidence on multiple occasions of the fist to five consensus models where teachers had a vote and voice regarding the decisions that were being made at their school for their students. Rebecca shared, “Teachers are able to influence the K-5 collaboration time. We discuss honestly our beliefs, instructional strategies, and how they align.” There was also a collaboration tool that provided teachers an opportunity to give insight on the agenda items for that meeting. Therefore, a very teacher focused leadership structure was evident in multiple areas of data collection for this site.

Teacher morale. Teacher morale was another theme that I identified during the data collection and data analysis part of my study. Not only did two of my interview questions pertain

to teacher morale as it connects to teacher autonomy but was a naturally occurring topic when even observing teacher collaboration sessions. Something that was for sure a common thread among my participant interviews was that whether advertently or not, the way a school is structured has a direct impact on the morale of not only teachers, but also staff.

Summer Elementary School's participants had a split perception of the morale of teachers on their school site. While some teachers indicated that they felt the morale of the teachers was good (reported by a first-year teacher on this campus), 71% of the participants that I interviewed shared that the morale of teachers at their school was hurting and not at its strongest point, especially for those who have had a long tenure at this school site. A common thread I identified among teachers was that they did not feel as if it was the administrators' fault for the lack of morale, but rather factors beyond their control. In fact, Wanda shared that any positive aspect with school morale comes from "leaders being positive to the teachers and non-instructional staff." However, some of the common themes leading to the lack of morale included behavior, continual changes regarding administration, policies, and curriculum, and the lack of teacher discretion provided in implementing some of the mandates passed down to teachers. As Marilyn, from Summer Elementary School, shared, "those issues [referring to causes for low morale] include low pay, overwhelming curriculum changes within a short amount of time, lack of communication from the district, and increasing behavior issues with a lack of parent support or accountability."

Based on my site observation at this site, I would contend that the views shared about teacher morale at Summer Elementary School were validated because during the curriculum meeting I could hear tired voices from teachers and frustrations with a curriculum they felt very little autonomy with. Although, I commend the teachers I observed for being as positive as they

could be. They still moved forward with collaboration regarding this curriculum to best meet the needs of their students.

Winter Elementary School also had differing perceptions of teacher morale within their school site. At Winter Elementary, teachers shared two levels of morale: teacher to teacher and teacher to administration. Majority of interviewed teachers reported that teacher to teacher morale is strong and at an all time high due to the collaboration that the Teacher Powered model has afforded to them. As Rebecca explained, “Another factor that has created this [good] morale is being able to collaborate and communicate on a consistent basis.” Maura, a teacher at Winter Elementary School, shared that her school is a year and a half into this whole school design process of becoming fully teacher-powered. She shared that “this common goal/vision has brought the staff together.” Both Dolly and Reba shared during their interviews about a district level person coming in to observe the practices of the school. They shared that when receiving feedback from them that the district personnel shared how cohesive the team was and how everybody got along to do what is right for students. That speaks volume for the morale of this school if an outside district level person can feel that with just a visit within the school. Part of this morale is attributed to the increased levels of autonomy given to the teachers.

However, teachers indicated that the morale between teachers and administration is not as strong as the morale between teachers. During interviews, teachers shared that since the school is in a reorganization process, the administrator is struggling figuring out her role in this organizational structure, which has created a little bit of tension between administration and teachers. In addition, there is some confusion about the definition of roles and whose responsibility it is to make some decisions. As Susie described, “This has caused a lot of spinning and not many decision able to be made.” Reba provided a specific example of this

regarding the development of a report card to be more performance based. Reba explained that teachers were leaning to one format and the administrator was not in agreement so the issue got dropped and there was no creation of a report card.

Decision making. Teacher autonomy to make decisions is the primary focus of this study and it is a major theme that was discussed in the participant interviews of this study. In addition, the site observations also provided insight to the different systems that both sites have put into place to help with the decision-making process. At Summer Elementary School, teachers reported that they do have the autonomy on a classroom level to make decisions for their students. Several teachers indicated that they felt like simple decisions for their students are still within their control and they are grateful to have that freedom to change things up to meet the needs of some of their students. However, 100% of the teachers responded that there is little to no decision-making provided to teachers in respect to things that they feel like matter the most. In particular, curriculum was one area that was discussed and mentioned in a resounding way, particularly the language arts curriculum for Summer Elementary School. In fact, Louise commented, “This year I feel that autonomy has been discouraged due to the new curriculum.” This was a concise statement, but it eloquently summed up the feelings shared by every single person at Summer Elementary School. Teachers indicated that their creativity and autonomy to teach in a way that is engaging and creative for their students has been eliminated by the mandate to teach this new curriculum with fidelity. Moreover, Marilyn, a teacher at Summer Elementary School, shared that even though they may have the autonomy to do special projects or initiatives with their students, the mandated curriculum is so demanding that there is not enough time in the actual school day to even cover what is expected to be taught in the teachers’ guide. Therefore, this has practically eliminated any decision-making and autonomy that she did

feel like she has.

These interview findings were confirmed when I completed a site visit at this elementary school. It was very evident within a few minutes of the language arts curriculum meeting that teachers were required to be in a mandated curriculum and follow a strict pacing guide. One teacher explained that she felt as if she was cramming content down their throats just to keep up with the requirements of the curriculum and the pace. This was a very common theme shared by every teacher participant and even documented in the collaborative notes document the team was typing in. The coach was supportive in this setting, but her hands were evidently tied and could not provide more decision-making to these teachers at this school.

At the other case site, Winter Elementary School, the teachers who participated in interviews felt very strongly about the decision-making power they are provided and the autonomy to impact their students in a positive way. For instance, Susie shared, “On a scale of 1 to 4, the level of autonomy we have to make decision about our students would be a 4.” That’s a powerful statement coming from a teacher within a public school site. As Julie reported, “Teachers like to have their voice heard.” Furthermore, Maura, another teacher at Winter Elementary School, shared that their decision-making power regarding their students is at a 4 out of 4; however, with school initiatives, she rated them at a level 2. Susie explained, “As a team, we are able to look at the needs for each child and make decisions about interventions and learning environments that will be best.” Maura gave examples of some of the decision-making arenas she has voice in, which include the learning program and assessments within the school and classroom. In addition, she has voice in the scheduling at her school as well as staffing patterns. Reba, who is actually a representative on the shared leadership team, shared that she gets even some input on staff and budget concerns, but does not have the final say in those areas.

This was a common theme among all participants who participated in the interviews from Winter Elementary School. There was a unanimous consensus among all participants that teachers had a high perception of their decision-making autonomy with curriculum and the instructional program.

Roadblocks. I was able to note that a major theme when discussing teacher autonomy was the roadblocks teachers perceived to inhibit their autonomy through participants' responses to interview questions and site observations. At Summer Elementary School, a resounding response by seven out of seven teachers was the curriculum mandates from the district has blocked their ability to have instructional freedoms with their students. Many teachers reported that the district has tied their hands and limited their ability to make decisions for their students. Wanda indicated, "I think it goes higher up to the district level and state level that we don't get to make decisions about our students and school." Debra supported this assertion noting that "many are feeling a trickle-down effect." She continued by saying, "Our school based leaders are being strictly governed on how to run things by our district leaders. None of these leaders are in our classrooms. They do not see the day to day struggles and successes of our students." Louise explained it as "the decisions made at a district or state level overpower what decisions I make for myself or my students." This was a reoccurring theme from each individual who participated in interviews from this school site.

There were some other roadblocks that surfaced during Summer Elementary School's site interviews, but they were not overwhelmingly heard throughout the interviews. One example was from Juliette, a new teacher on this campus, who shared that one of her inhibiting factors was her lack of knowledge and being new to all aspects of the job. She shared that she didn't feel overly comfortable with making decisions on her own for her students in the beginning, but as

the year has progressed, her confidence has progressively increased to make decisions based on what she feels is right for her students. Another teacher at this school site shared that a roadblock for her teacher autonomy was the “lack of tolerance” for their decisions and the encouragement for all teachers to conform to the district expectations of what students should be doing in their classrooms. Debra explained, “I have often heard teachers remark that they are being told...if it’s not done in this way, perhaps this isn’t the best place for you.”

Winter Elementary School teachers also reported roadblocks in regards to their teacher autonomy. Like Summer Elementary School, teachers discussed district initiatives being an inhibiting factor for their teachers. Susie shared, “The support at the district level due to district leadership transitions has also inhibited our autonomy to make decisions for our students and our school.” One teacher, Julie, explained it as “top-down decision practices that are difficult to overcome.” Multiple teachers, 3 out of 4, at Winter Elementary School have mentioned that there have been district level transitions that has created difficulties for their autonomy to make forward progress.

Winter Elementary School also indicated that another roadblock to their autonomy to make decisions was the understanding of what it means to be a teacher-powered school. One hundred percent of the participants who participated in the participant interviews expressed that there has been some confusion about what the term, “teacher-powered” really means thus causing a barrier for true teacher-powered movements to happen within the school. Maura explains it by saying, “The other barrier is working through and defining roles within leadership.” Susie furthers this statement by saying that there is “confusion of leadership roles and responsibilities, which is inhibiting our autonomy to make decisions for students and our school.” Dolly, an original site team member, explained the struggle it has been to take this

model and do a school-wide implementation. In previous years the one community followed the teacher-powered organizational structure, but now all teachers in the school are receiving the high levels of autonomy and some aren't sure where their fit is in this process.

Research Question Responses

RQ1. What are the similarities and differences of teachers' perceptions of autonomy in a traditionally structured and a teacher-powered school?

Based on participant interviews at both Summer Elementary and Winter Elementary Schools, there are similarities between the teachers' perceptions of autonomy in each of their differently structured school sites. First, an overwhelming similarity in the collected data was that both school sites had teachers who felt there were barriers that prevented them from executing full levels of autonomy to make decisions for both their schools and students. One of the greatest contributors to this, as synthesized in the responses above, is the top-down approaches of state and district level government that creates barriers that teachers perceive as difficult to overcome when making important decisions for their schools.

Whether at a traditionally structured site or teacher-powered, teacher participants were heard expressing that district and state mandates soften their voice and overpower the decisions they get to make for their students. As Wanda from Summer Elementary School shared, "The teachers should know what is best for their classroom and their students," which is what teachers were trained to do. She also stated, "We have no say in what goes on." At Winter Elementary School, not only did the district create barriers for autonomy, but as Rebecca reported, "another factor has been district leadership transitions". Therefore, lots of turnover in leadership positions has been creating some difficulties for their abilities to make decisions within their school.

A major difference that surfaced through the data analysis of participant interviews and

site observations was that teachers had a vastly different perception regarding their autonomy with curriculum and instructional decisions for their students and school between Summer and Winter Elementary Schools. At Winter Elementary School, teachers overwhelmingly contended that they have a strong voice and power over the curriculum, assessments, and instructional decisions for their students. As four out of six teachers shared, they feel like on a scale of four, they rate a four when it comes to making decisions about curriculum and learning for their students. Susie explained in her interview, that “as a team we are able to look at the needs for each child and make decisions about interventions and learning environments that will be best. We take into consideration the whole child- academics and social emotional aspect.” Julie also shared, “We have worked hard with the decisions around curriculum.” Reba even discussed how they’ve recently adopted a new curriculum and she doesn’t even know what it means to open up a scripted curriculum and go page by page because she has never taught that way because of the autonomies they’ve been provided.

However, at Summer Elementary School, curriculum and instruction was a popular topic during interviews, but it was not in a positive light like at Winter Elementary. For example, 7 out of 7 teachers who participated in interviews mentioned that strenuous curriculum in language arts and how it was diminishing their autonomy to make instructional decisions for students. When asked what area a teacher would like more autonomy over, Marilyn answered that she would like to have more impact over curriculum and the amount of testing required. She shared, “I’ve already expressed my desire to teach in more creative and engaging ways. I would also like to spend more time teaching and less time testing. It seems as if multiple assessments are required almost on a weekly basis.” In addition, Debra shared that she feels as if this new curriculum is more worksheet driven and she does not feel like this is best for students which has

been an extreme struggle for her passion in the classroom. Whitney, an intermediate teacher at Summer Elementary School stated, “Literally, we must do CKLA (Core Knowledge Language Arts) with 100% fidelity even though our professional judgment says we should be doing something different.”

My site observations during the data collection phase also revealed some differences regarding teacher perceptions of autonomy. It was very clear from my participation in grade level or community meetings that each school site has a different approach to structure, which in turn impacted the perceptions of autonomy. At Summer Elementary School, the curriculum meeting was very focused and driven about what was coming up next in the curriculum. Most of the time in the meeting was shared discussing concerns with the curriculum, which the curriculum coach was working to capture in her note document. For instance, one teacher in the site observation shared that she felt as the assessment covered topics that were only one sentence in the teacher’s manual, which was not a primary focus of the unit. Another teacher shared how the spelling activities in the manual were difficult and there was just not enough time to incorporate all of them. The time was definitely focused around the realization that the curriculum had to be followed instead of freedom to plan different lessons that they felt could achieve the same outcome.

Conversely, Winter Elementary School’s curriculum meeting, titled the Genius Hour, was completely focused on a group of teachers within a community, no administration or curriculum coaches, discussing topics that they felt were most pertinent for their students. For instance, the members put items on the agenda and voted on their priority to ensure that time was well spent. In addition, they also discussed curriculum around a service-learning project. The teachers had 100% autonomy to decide on a theme for the project as well as the standards they

would address to prepare students for that project. Teachers worked on the timeline, decided when students would collaborate across grade levels, and possible research topics for students. In addition, teachers discussed pacing for their data analysis unit in math and teachers gave different feedback and voice about the standards and what their students needed. Teachers were very engaged in the process and had the complete autonomy to make the decisions for their students and school.

RQ2. How does teacher self-efficacy impact perception of autonomy within a traditionally structured and a teacher-powered school?

When looking at the theoretical framework of this study, I first focused my interview questions on self-efficacy and the teachers' perceptions of their efficacy as an individual educator. Just based on the demographic descriptions I gave at the beginning of this chapter, it is evident that there is a wide range of experience in regards to the years of teaching experience for the participants. However, years of experience do not directly correlate to the self-efficacy of teachers. Some novice teachers still perceived a strong sense of self-efficacy, even if only teaching for a few years. Therefore, I wanted to gain insight through interviews about teachers' perceptions of their ability to teach students. Teachers at both schools shared strong views about their self-efficacy. This perception of self-efficacy impacted the desire to have more autonomy in their schools.

Whitney, a teacher at Summer Elementary School, shared in her interview, "I feel like I know what's best for my kids. Always, I am the expert. Since I am still in the classroom, that makes my opinion and insight valid." Wanda had a similar view of her self-efficacy. She stated, "I believe my confidence in teaching my students is what makes my students succeed." Six out of seven teachers interviewed concurred with Whitney and Wanda in regards to their self-

efficacy. The outlier in this school was Juliette, who was a first year teacher. She explained that her inexperience has impacted her self-efficacy. She said that her level of newness sometimes makes it difficult to make decisions for her students. However, Juliette felt that her self-efficacy is improving.

Winter Elementary School had similar feelings about their self-efficacy. Rebecca described her self-efficacy by stating, “I feel confident in making educational decisions for my students. I try to align my work in best practice and always think and put students first.” Susie explained that her level of self-efficacy could positively impact her school. She felt that as her school is using teacher voice to improve professional development, learning program assessment, schedule, and staffing patterns and that her level of self-efficacy could contribute in a positive way in those areas.

RQ3. How does teacher proxy-efficacy impact perception of autonomy within a traditionally structured and a teacher-powered school?

Proxy-efficacy describes one’s ability to impact the decisions made by those who are in charge of their institution. Across the board at both school sites, perceptions of proxy-efficacy were different depending upon the participant being interviewed. Again, these are perceptions of participants and not validated by any administration or supervisor. There was a connection in the responses of participants regarding whether they felt a strong level of proxy-efficacy and how they perceived that to impact their autonomy.

For Summer Elementary School, majority of the teachers felt as if they had little to no impact on their administrators’ decisions. For example, Marilyn reported, “Teachers may get the opportunity to provide input but the decision making is left to school officials.” Likewise, Wanda shared, “I think as a teacher we only have as much control over our school setting as the district

will allow us to have.” Wanda continued by sharing that there is very limited control afforded by the district to teachers, thus limiting her proxy-efficacy. Whitney stated that, “I feel like my ability to influence my administration is basically non-existent. Maybe it’s minimal at best, but it really feels non-existent.” Therefore, these teachers who have shared a low level of proxy-efficacy, perceive that their autonomy is minimal.

Other teachers at Summer Elementary School did have a different perspective about their level of proxy-efficacy. For instance, Juliette explained, “I have no problem talking to administration about issues that I see or making suggestions. I feel that what I say is heard and my suggestions are sometimes implemented.” Another participant, Samantha, described her level of proxy-efficacy by saying, “I am able to communicate with my leaders and give them reasons why a change needs to be made or why we should decide something in order to what is best for our students.” Interestingly enough, both Juliette and Samantha are two of the participants who had the fewest years of experience from Summer Elementary School, while some of the others who had lower levels of proxy-efficacy had more years of expertise.

Winter Elementary School also had a widespread viewpoint in regards to proxy-efficacy within their site. For a majority, teacher participants felt as if they had a strong influence over some of the closest supervisor type roles. For example, Rebecca stated in her interview, “I feel that I have a strong voice and influence with my K-5 team, students, and families. However, other site and district teams I am apart of I feel that my voice and influence is less.” For Maura, she described her proxy-efficacy as dependent upon the relationship she has built with the person. She said, “I feel like I have a high level of influence with parents, staff, and students that trust and respect me.” I found it interesting that all participants at this site found it critical to have influence with families and colleagues in addition to school-based supervisors when looking at

proxy-efficacy.

RQ4. How does teachers' collective efficacy impact perception of autonomy within a traditionally structured and a teacher-powered school?

Education is rarely done in isolation, but rather is accomplished by a group of people coming together to do things that are best for students. This idea of collective efficacy was discussed through interview questions with participants at both Summer and Winter Elementary Schools. Based on site observations and document analysis, it is evident that both sites have a structure in place where collaboration occurs among teachers who have a common bond. At Summer Elementary School, grade level teachers who teach similar content collaborated together through a curriculum meeting that I observed. When I sat through a genius hour at Winter Elementary School, the school has a community structure where there is a teacher for each grade, K-5, which allows for a more vertical type collaboration.

At Summer Elementary School, after sifting through participant responses from their interviews, I have discovered that the collective efficacy perception depends upon the team or committee the participant is involved with. If there is strong collective efficacy, the participant felt as if their autonomy was improved and they were able to accomplish things for students. However, if the collective efficacy was weak, teachers felt it negatively impacted the autonomy they were given to make decisions for students. One example is Marilyn, a kindergarten teacher at Summer Elementary. She shared, "We work well together and make as many decisions together as we can for the benefit of our students. I believe our abilities to come together as a group are shown with the overall growth of all the kindergarteners at our school." Therefore, this group of teachers has strong collective efficacy, which has enabled them to have more autonomy to improve achievement for students.

Conversely, Samantha shared that different personalities within a collective group do impact the collective efficacy of the group. In her interview she shared, “I think the variety of personalities often make it difficult to work together as a whole.” She continued by saying, “I think that if more people worked together for a common goal for our students, then we would have a much greater impact. We could have more autonomy about issues like scheduling, curriculum, and decisions made about student behaviors.” This interview was similar to the feelings of Debra. She shared, “There is not really any of this happening (referring to collective efficacy). I wish I could say differently. The few are leading the many.” Some evidence to support her feelings includes: low morale, cross grade level collaboration being no longer encouraged, and tensions amongst team mates that are leading to hurt feelings and stress.

Winter Elementary School is a teacher-powered model, so it is built around the premise of collective efficacy. Julie explained their level of collective efficacy by sharing that “this model was designed by a group of seven teachers who taught together at the school. We have worked really hard on a culture of trust so we all can talk openly and honestly about all topics.” Julie even expressed that some teachers have left the model or school because of not wanting the autonomies that come from having such a strong collective efficacy that they are in turn empowered to design an entire school structure. Two other teachers shared that they desire for the collective efficacy to be better at the school. On a scale of one to four, one teacher rated the collective efficacy as one and another teacher rated it as a two. Although the premise of this school is to be teacher-powered, these interview responses obviously indicated there are still issues with the collective effectiveness of these participants. Maura shared that the reason for her lower rating is that there are staff members at different places in their journey of the teacher-powered model and understanding of teacher empowerment. In addition, Susie shared that since

the model has expanded to the entire school, it has been difficult to bring an entire staff into the level of collective efficacy they were experiencing. She reported, “Decisions have been made to fix small day to day issues rather than looking big picture at what is best for our school.”

I would say that my perception of collective efficacy for each group was different because I conducted a site observation at both sites. Being an outsider, I was able to have an objective view of the group’s functioning. At Summer Elementary School, I observed a strong respect for the teachers within the group, but it was very discussion based and more listing celebrations and concerns versus truly using the powers within the group to make decisions for students and their team. They focused more on what lesson they would be on tomorrow and when an Accelerated Reader celebration was going to be. Even though I would anticipate the level of expertise in that room was a lot stronger than I observed, I saw several teachers going along with the motions of teaching instead of using their efficacy to increase their autonomy.

At Winter Elementary School, I observed a Genius Hour, where teachers took complete control over the topics they felt were pertinent and most important for their students. I heard teachers sharing stances, voting about the end result, and even developing concerns about top-down initiatives that they would be addressing with administration. This group of teachers interacted with a level of collective efficacy that they knew they were effective in their practices and then used that level of confidence to make decisions for the students within their communities.

Summary

After an extensive data analysis process, I have identified common themes that have surfaced from the data collected through site observations, participant interviews, and document analysis. Both Summer and Winter Elementary schools have organizational structures that have

an impact on the teachers' perceptions of autonomy within their school setting. Based on the data, I have provided a response to my four research questions looking at the similarities and differences in teacher autonomy within the two different structured schools as well as looking at how self, proxy, and collective efficacy also impacted teachers' perceptions of their autonomy.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

This multiple-case study focuses on the perceptions of teacher autonomy within a traditionally structured and Teacher Powered School. Based on participant interviews, site observations, and document analysis, I have compiled my findings as noted in Chapter Four. Chapter Five is a conclusive chapter including a discussion of the findings in comparison to the literature, implications of this study for the education field, limitations that I experienced when conducting research, and then my recommendations for future research.

Summary of Findings

I was able to synthesize the data and literature to provide responses to my four research questions listed below from my data collection and data analysis.

Research Questions

RQ1. What are the similarities and differences of teachers' perceptions of autonomy in a traditionally structured and a teacher-powered school?

After analyzing the participant interviews and site observations at both sites, I was able to identify a couple overarching similarities in the perceptions of autonomy within these two sites. One similarity was that both sets of participants did not believe that increasing their autonomy would solve all their school's problems, but instead would be a route to help create forward momentum their school to positively impact teaching and learning. As Susie expressed in her interview, "I believe that people who have a voice, feel valued, respected and they strive to do their best. I think the morale of teachers here at Winter Elementary would greatly increase once all teacher felt the energy and empowerment from increased levels of autonomy for teachers." Morale was another similarity between teachers at both school sites. When asked about the

impact increased autonomy would have on the morale of teachers, it was an overwhelming consensus, 100% of the teachers interviewed, that the morale of teachers would benefit greatly if they were trusted more as professionals to make decisions for their students and school.

One major difference I found in the autonomies perceived by teachers within the traditionally structured and teacher-powered school was the autonomy they were afforded instructionally with curriculum and assessment. At Summer Elementary School, teachers who were interviewed unanimously expressed discontent with the current new language arts curriculum and the constraints it placing on their autonomy and freedom to teach in a way they wish. In my interviews, Louise, a teacher from the traditionally structured site, reported that autonomy is absent in the eyes of their teachers because of the new curriculum. She continued by saying that students who are struggling learners are disengaged with the curriculum, which is becoming a huge struggle for teachers to find engaging ways to implement the new curriculum effectively.

At the teacher-powered school, curriculum autonomy was a strength of their structure and teachers felt very confident in their impact they have on what they teach and how they teach it. This was a stark contrast from the interview responses listed above by the teachers at the traditionally structured school. 80% of the teachers who participated in interviews from the teacher-powered school rated their level of autonomy regarding making decisions for their students, including curriculum and assessment, at a four out of four. Susie described this instructional freedom by stating, “As a team we are able to look at the needs for each child and make decisions about interventions and the learning environment that will be best.”

RQ2. How does teacher self-efficacy impact perception of autonomy within a traditionally structured and a teacher-powered school?

Based on the teacher interviews within both elementary school sites, there is a strong consensus regarding self-efficacy. Most teachers who participated, minus a couple outliers, indicated that their self-efficacy was high although their ability to enact on that efficacy was inhibited by many different factors, particularly at the traditionally structured school. Throughout the interviews, in both schools, it was evident that teachers were “shutting their doors” and using their self-efficacy to impact learners. Louise, a teacher at Summer Elementary School, shared that due to the positive feedback she receives regarding her efficacy, she is encouraged to continue planning and making decisions that are best for her students. Similarly, Wanda shared that she believes the reason her students are successful is because of her self-efficacy. According to her, she feels confident in her ability to help students succeed. These interviews were corroborated by my observation at Summer Elementary School. When sitting in a curriculum meeting for language arts, I could tell immediately the teachers believed that they had the skillset to impact the learning of students. However, at Summer Elementary School, according to the teachers this belief of self-efficacy does not have a strong impact on the autonomy they are provided. This is supported by Wanda’s statement of “I feel like as teachers we do not always get to make decisions for our students based on our educational background.”

Just like Summer Elementary, the teachers at Winter Elementary also had a high perception of self-efficacy, but they were able to utilize that level of self-efficacy to impact instruction and learning for their school. For example, Dolly is a teacher who has several years of experience presenting professional development in the area of primary grade level literacy as well as over 60 graduate credits in the specialization. Therefore, her level of self-efficacy is extremely high. During Dolly’s interview, I was able to see how her high level of self-efficacy resulted in increased autonomy in her school. She is empowered by district level and school site

leadership to make literacy-based decisions around research for her students. She serves on a district literacy team as well as on the reading committee at her school. In addition, teachers she works with value her expertise and seek her out on ideas to help improve learning for their students.

Maura, Julie, and Dolly were actually all a part of the development team of the Teacher Powered School, referred to as Winter Elementary. During the interview, Dolly shared that after realizing the power in their own abilities, the team of seven teachers who developed this school dug deep into research and presented it to the school district. If the development team had presented their teacher-powered idea to any other district it most likely would have been denied. However, their self-efficacy was known and she said because of relationships and their instructional reputations, they were given freedom and trust to design Winter Elementary School within an already established school site.

RQ3. How does teacher proxy-efficacy impact perception of autonomy within a traditionally structured and a teacher-powered school?

When analyzing the qualitative data that I collected, this research question is where I observed some of the biggest gaps in perceptions of autonomy between the two school structures. Even when analyzing documents, it was quite evident that there were differences between how teacher leadership and voice was able to influence the governing body at the two separate schools. For instance, at Summer Elementary School, although teacher input was summoned, it appeared through notes and minutes that there was a hierarchy where decisions were finalized and made. Conversely, Winter Elementary has organizational structures designed and even in documents that show directly how teachers have an impact on the decision making of the building principal and district.

At both schools there was some form of identified leadership team. At Summer Elementary School, the leadership team consists of a representative from every grade level and specials areas. Debra describes this organizational structure by saying “The opinion and thoughts of staff are usually asked, but it doesn’t feel like they are always honored and valued. The administration makes the majority of the decisions and the rest of the team is just basically there to share decisions with the rest of the staff, with little input from others.” Whitney shared similar perceptions of this kind of proxy-efficacy with her statement that “decisions are handed down from administration to team leaders who then pass it on to their team.” Therefore, it was evident to me that these teachers felt very little impact or proxy-efficacy with their administration teams, let alone the district-level administrators. When analyzing these feelings regarding proxy-efficacy and comparing it to the research, it was evident to me that by utilizing your teacher leaders to just disseminate information, you are diminishing their potential as a leader on your campus.

At Winter Elementary School, the level of proxy-efficacy was vastly different as mentioned before. All teachers who participated in interviews rated their ability to influence their colleagues, principal, and district at an increased level. Dolly shared that the shared leadership team that is designed to govern the school does not make a final decision with any input from the communities of teachers and staff. In addition, teachers in the shared leadership team can easily bring up any issue or idea that their community’s teachers wish to implement on their campus. This open level of communication at this site has increased the autonomy teachers are afforded. One example of this comes from the site observation I conducted at Winter Elementary School. The shared leadership team had shared out the need to do cross community (whole school) collaboration of students and was recommending a rotating schedule. The teachers within the

genius hour collaboration session had some concerns about the impact this initiative would have on valuable instructional time in the morning. Every teacher's voice was heard and a consensus vote taken which showed that most teachers were not in favor. Therefore, their shared leadership team representative was going to go back to the leadership team and ask for a revised look at this initiative. This example of a team meeting truly embraced Bandura's viewpoint on proxy-efficacy. Teachers' voice had a great influence on those who are governing the school.

RQ4. How does teachers' collective efficacy impact perception of autonomy within a traditionally structured and a teacher-powered school?

At Summer Elementary School, teachers across the board unanimously shared positively about their teams they were able to work with and how their collective efficacy has helped them make progress as a grade level team of teachers. One example of this is Samantha, a newer teacher at this school site. She shared how on her fourth grade team, their collective efficacy empowered them to find solutions to a dismal reading curriculum that they felt was not meeting the needs of their learners. In her interview response, Samantha discusses how their team collaborated to develop skills-based integrated lessons within the parameters of the district mandated language arts curriculum. Whitney, who also teaches within that same team, also spoke highly of the collective efficacy felt within her school team. Marilyn, although representing another grade level, also expressed the impact the collective efficacy of her kindergarten team on the student achievement of their students. However, one common thread among their responses was that although there is a strong sense of efficacy among the team, it has still not resulted in the freedoms and autonomies they wish they could have to change curriculums or expended autonomy in the way that they teach. During the site observation at Summer Elementary School, I noticed that the team worked extremely well together and

complimented one another nicely. However, the efficacy of this team was spent more around problem-solving barriers of a new curriculum rather than planning lessons or collectively improving instruction.

Similar to the teachers at Summer Elementary, Winter Elementary teachers also spoke strongly about their levels of collective efficacy on their campus. They shared about the strong bond between the teachers and their ability to collaborate regarding instruction on a frequent basis. Like Rebecca shared in her interview, “Teachers are able to influence instructional decisions during our K-5 collaboration time. We discuss honestly our beliefs, instructional strategies, and how they align with one another.” I was able to see this in action during my site observation at Winter Elementary School. The collective efficacy I observed was exemplary as teachers were collaborating around curriculum and instruction. They started with decisions around standards, shared activities and lessons, and then discussed pacing with assessment. There was no driving curriculum force and the conversation was very standards based, but solution oriented. These teachers believed in their combined ability to improve instruction and made decisions based off of those beliefs. In fact, this meeting was geared around planning service learning projects for their students, which was a teacher driven non-negotiable when the design of the school was created.

When trying to identify how the collective efficacy of these two different structures of schools is different, I am able to conclude that where the gap is in these two schools. One school’s teams operate in isolation of one another, where at the other site there is not only a strong collective efficacy within the team, but also within the entire school building. At Summer Elementary School, all interviewees shared that there was a strong sense of collective efficacy among their team, as shared in the discussion above. However, when talking about the collective

efficacy across the campus, teachers talk less passionately about their connections with others in the school building. For example, Debra shared, “Our morale is low. Cross grade level collaboration is no longer encouraged, even on grade level teams, there are many tensions amongst team mates that are leading to hurt feelings and more stress.” Whitney even commented in her interview that she is not really sure how other teams run, but her team has a strong collective efficacy. This just solidifies that there is minimal to no cross team and school collaboration truly happening.

At Winter Elementary School, the collective efficacy is felt across the entire campus, not just within the communities they have built. Dolly, a member of the design team and teacher at Winter Elementary, shared that in all of her 20 plus years of experience in education, she has never worked on a campus where there is truly this level of buy-in. From custodial staff to paras to teachers, everybody has a role and contributes their gifts to help boost the success of all students. Dolly also mentioned that not only are their teams built vertically within the K-5 model, meaning there is a teacher representing each grade level on the team, there are also horizontal planning times as well as other committees that ensure the collective efficacy goes beyond just the communities that have been built.

Discussion

The purpose of this multiple case study was to examine the perceived teacher autonomy to make decisions for their students and school within a traditionally structured and teacher powered school. Based on Bandura’s social-cognitive theory, I attempted to study in depth, two cases, to see if teachers’ perceptions of their self, proxy, and collective efficacy had an impact on their autonomy within their school sites and then sought to determine if there were similarities or differences between the two different structured schools.

Empirical Literature

After conducting research and developing the two cases at both Summer and Winter Elementary Schools, it was evident that teacher morale would be positively impacted if there were increased levels of autonomy. This is not surprise as the literature is inundated with studies that describe autonomy as a universal need that is innately part of human nature (Paradis et al., 2015; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014; Strong & Yoshida, 2014; Wiebe & Macdonald, 2014). No matter the structure of the two schools I engaged with, teachers believed that more autonomy would improve the climate and culture of the school. This in turn would then directly correlate with higher job performance for teachers and staff members. Like Farris-Berg and Dirkswager (2013) stated, “Autonomy simply provides teachers at each school the opportunity to collectively use their discretion to choose or invent ways of operating that are associated with high performance” (p. 31). Therefore, providing more autonomy is not the end in mind, but is the beginning of a movement to empower teachers to bring positive change for their schools. That was the consensus of every participant, both in interviews and during site observations.

As Skaalvik and Skaalvik’s (2014) research shared, there is a strong correlation between increased teacher autonomy and increased job satisfaction through teacher engagement. My study directly supports this research as the teacher-powered school increased the autonomy of its teachers, which increased the engagement of the teachers within that model. This was observable during my site observation and differed vastly from the engagement I saw from teachers during my site observation at Summer Elementary School.

It was fascinating to me to see how teachers approached topics and conversations differently based on the freedoms they perceived to have to make changes regarding those issues.

Berry (2014), Nazareno (2013) and Pucella (2014) all presented research that linked higher retention rates of teachers with the amount of decision-making autonomy they are provided by leadership within their schools. Berry (2014) shared that schools who have teachers with high reported levels of autonomy had the lowest percentage of turnover. This literature was supported by my research as an overwhelming consensus of the participants, 13 out of 13, who participated in interviews shared about the strong impact increased autonomy would have on the culture of their school and morale of teachers. When asked the interview question, “How do you think the morale of teachers here on your campus would increase if there were increased levels of autonomy for teachers?” 100% of the responses mentioned or referred to the notion of increased morale and higher job performance. For example, Maura, a teacher at Winter Elementary School, shared, “When teachers feel empowered they will go above and beyond to do what is best for the students and institution.” Likewise, Debra, a teacher at Summer Elementary School, expressed, “If we had a LITTLE more professional courtesy and appreciation, I think that the morale of our staff would begin to sky rocket.” Therefore, a similarity that was strongly evident through the research was that teachers believed increased autonomy was directly correlated to increased morale for teachers.

One major difference I found in the autonomies perceived by teachers within the traditionally structured and teacher-powered school was the autonomy they were afforded instructionally with curriculum and assessment. At Summer Elementary School, teachers who were interviewed unanimously expressed discontent with the current new language arts curriculum and the constraints it placing on their autonomy and freedom to teach in a way they wish. My literature review is inundated with studies and research regarding the overwhelming response of teachers about their dissatisfaction in their jobs due to the lack of instructional

freedom with curriculum (Benson, 2010; Dierking & Fox, 2013; Ingersoll, Merrill, & May, 2016; Parais et al., 2015; Whang & Zhang, 2014). It appears in the literature that due to standardization of education, more and more schools are adopting one size fits all curriculums that teachers are pressured into teaching with “fidelity”. This decision-making results in little to no freedom for teachers to place their own creative spin on the content and curriculum they teach (Ingersoll, Merrill, & May, 2016; Strong & Yoshida, 2014). Without instruction that is inspired by teachers’ passion, teachers assume the role of regurgitating robots versus professionals who have been trained and now trusted to be instructional leaders who can make decisions that are best for their students.

In my interviews with teachers, Louise, a teacher from the traditionally structured site, reported that autonomy is absent in the eyes of their teachers because of the new curriculum. She continued by saying that students who are struggling learners are disengaged with the curriculum, which is becoming a huge struggle for teachers to find engaging ways to implement the new curriculum effectively. Whitney, another teacher at this site, expressed that she had one area that she wished she had more autonomy over and that was curriculum.

Another reoccurring theme about the lack of autonomy they perceive is the fact that they are rule followers. Multiple teachers at the traditionally structured school shared that they want to do what is asked of them, thus limiting their autonomy with the curriculum they teach. Samantha explained in her interview that sometimes people underestimate her true potential or ability because she is such a rule follower and doesn’t want to engage in any conflict. Louise also shared that even though she doesn’t agree with how the curriculum presents certain skills or content, she wants to try to implement the new curriculum with fidelity, but finds it very difficult to teach the content in the way the teacher manuals require while also engaging her learners.

However, she is continually trying to make it happen since she is a rule follower.

I believe my findings to increase the body of knowledge because when completing my literature review I found minimal to no articles discussing the internal battle teachers face when fighting for autonomy versus being compliant and obedient in their jobs. It was surprising to me that several participants, especially at the traditionally structured school, explained their concerns of swaying from the mandated curriculum even though they felt as if it wasn't best for their students because of their fear of not doing what was expected of them. My analysis of this is that in this model, teachers are forced to decide between following a scripted curriculum because of the expectation that it will be taught and doing what they feel is right in the name of students. Unfortunately, this is the reality facing teachers who teach in traditionally structured schools across the United States. The demoralization of the teaching profession has resulted in the standardization of the profession stripping away the reasons teachers joined the profession which is to make a great impact on the students they serve (Parker, 2015; Santoro, 2011).

At the teacher-powered school, curriculum autonomy was a strength of their structure and teachers felt very confident in their impact they have on what they teach and how they teach it. This was a vast difference from the interview responses listed above by the teachers at the traditionally structured school. Eighty percent of the teachers who participated in interviews from the teacher-powered school rated their level of autonomy regarding making decisions for their students, including curriculum and assessment, at a four out of four. Susie described this instructional freedom by stating, "As a team we are able to look at the needs for each child and make decisions about interventions and the learning environment that will be best."

When analyzing the documents from this school site, one structure that was fascinating and demonstrates the strong level of autonomy experienced by these teachers is how the

communities within the school support students with math and literacy. For example, a K-5 community meets to screen students to determine their current level within a literacy or math strand. For the site observation I participated in, they were focusing on data analysis in math. Therefore, after screening students, the team decides who is teaching which grade band based on the strengths of teachers and which students will learn within each band based on how they performed on the screener. This means that just because you are in fourth grade did not mean you went to fourth grade math. It may mean that a struggling learner would go to the grade level standards that are a grade beneath fourth grade. This level of autonomy to make such innovative decisions about instruction and school structure directly correlates to the satisfaction these teachers are experiencing. Ingersoll et al. (2016) focused their research on two types of low-performing schools, those that place heavy sanctions on teachers and those that increase autonomy. Their findings supported that more teachers stayed at schools where there was increased autonomy due to higher morale, which is exactly what the findings at the teacher-powered model support.

Several research studies included in my literature review also shared the desire of teachers to make a greater impact on students not just within their own classrooms. Dierking and Fox (2013) reported that teachers need to be encouraged to make the impact they are capable of on the students within their classrooms, but also be empowered to move beyond the classroom and help make that impact on other students as well. The model at the Teacher Powered School has empowered teachers to do just that and corroborates the research indicating the desire for teachers to have that level of impact. Based on the instructional model I described above, teachers do not just use their expertise to impact the students within their anchor grade. Instead, due to the pathway modules for literacy and math, teachers have the ability to expand their

impact to teach a grade level module that is not their assigned grade level, but may be their passion. This enables teachers to expand their impact to help more students within their school site. Another way this impact happens was brought to my attention through Dolly's interview. Dolly shared that because of the open classroom model, another teacher empowered decision, veteran teachers get to watch and listen in to novice teachers' instruction and vice versa. She said this is equally beneficial because the novice teachers realize that veteran teachers could potentially be listening in which forces them to ensure their planning and preparation is detailed. In addition, the veteran teachers get to hear new and fresh ways to present materials which could in turn impact the way they teach students.

Although the findings of my research do indicate that the teachers within the teacher-powered school had higher perceptions of autonomy, there were still some challenges even within this model that correlated with concerns shared by the traditionally structured school. The major concerns I heard from teachers at Winter Elementary School was that the site principal as well as some of the teachers are still growing to understand the meaning of teacher-powered and their roles in that process. Winter Elementary School has been recently redesigned to help enhance teacher autonomy, which is what Weiner (2011) shared in his research. In order for teacher leadership to work and bring positive impact to student achievement, traditional structures of school might have to be rethought and reorganized to empower teachers with the autonomy to lead (Lopez, 2010; Weiner, 2011).

When redesigning a school that is formally governed by a principal to now be powered by teachers with a principal still on site, redefining roles will be a challenge, which is what Winter Elementary School is facing. For example, Julie expressed in her interview that the principal is still trying to get a full understanding of what teacher powered truly means. While

Dolly shared that the principal is balancing the decisions that she just has to make versus those that she can empower the teachers on site to create.

Based on my participant interviews, the principal at Winter Elementary School does not fit the mold of what the current research defines as a barrier to the success of teacher leadership. Research reports that current school leadership can impede autonomy and the success of teacher leadership initiative by micromanaging, withholding valuable information from teachers, and building systems that leave teachers working in isolation (Dierking & Fox, 2013; Sterrett & Irizarry, 2015). Obviously, the organizational structure of Winter Elementary disproves the notion that the principal is creating systems where teachers work in isolation. However, the lack of understanding of her role could potentially create some barriers to the forward movement of the school. When analyzing this concept, I feel as if this is a place in research where my findings can contribute new learning and possibly encourage further research. I think more research could be done similar to mine that focuses on the role of a governing person in a fully autonomous school for teachers.

Theoretical Literature

In my multiple-case study, research questions two through four focused on the theoretical framework of my study, Bandura's social cognitive theory. Bandura's theory is built on the premise of human agency to impact one's own life and circumstances (Bandura 1987, 2000, 2002). There are three human agencies that work together to influence one's life: self-efficacy, proxy-efficacy, and collective efficacy.

Bandura (1989, 1997, 2000, 2002) defines self-efficacy as the belief that an individual possesses the skill set to achieve desired results in life. It is inferred based on Bandura's theory that if teachers have high levels of self-efficacy, their perceptions of teacher autonomy will be

significant. Based on the teacher interviews within both elementary school sites, the consensus regarding self-efficacy is pretty significant. The findings of my study indicated that teachers found themselves to be efficacious in their practice but did not feel as if that directly correlated to the autonomy they were afforded to make decisions for their students.

In the literature, Paradis et al. (2015) expressed the importance of teachers being the ones who break the silence about the autonomy they are desiring and be vocal about their level of self-efficacy to improve learning for students. Bandura (1989) theorized that one's own belief about his or her efficacy directly impacts the performance of that individual. Self-efficacy impacts whether an individual hinders himself or herself or empowers his or her cognitive thinking to reach their desired outcome. Based on the interviews, teachers at both sites have the belief that they can achieve their desired outcomes for their students and schools. However, through my study, I realized that having a strong level of self-efficacy is not enough to ensure autonomy for teachers. Even if teachers believe they have the skillset to impact the learning of their students in a powerful way, if there are systems or other factors forcing them to do otherwise, their self-efficacy is limited by outside barriers, which is what teachers at both sites somewhat felt, especially those at Summer Elementary School.

At Winter Elementary School, I was able to observe and analyze responses from teachers to see that their self-efficacy was trusted and empowered by not only the district level administration, but school-based administration as well. In addition, the teachers at Winter Elementary School value and trust the self-efficacy of each other, which is a noble accomplishment. They were able to utilize that level of self-efficacy to impact instruction and learning for their school. For example, Dolly is a teacher who has several years of experience presenting professional development in the area of primary grade level literacy as well as over 60

graduate credits in the specialization. Therefore, her level of self-efficacy is extremely high. During Dolly's interview, I was able to see how her high level of self-efficacy resulted in increased autonomy in her school. She is empowered by district level and school site to make literacy based decisions around research for her students. In addition, teachers she works with values her expertise and seeks her out on ideas to help improve learning for their students.

Maura, Julie, and Dolly were actually all a part of the development team of the Teacher Powered School, referred to as Winter Elementary. During the interview, Dolly shared that after realizing the power in their own abilities, the team of seven teachers who developed this school dug deep into research and presented it to the school district. She said had they presented it to any other school district, it most likely would have been denied. However, their self-efficacy was known and she said because of relationships and their instructional reputations, they were given freedom and trust to design Winter Elementary School within an already established school site. This model of teacher autonomy resulting in a positive movement of teacher leadership is embedded in the literature. Multiple research studies discuss the restructuring of traditional models of schools to help create better models of teacher leadership that empower teachers to utilize their high levels of self-efficacy (Lee Bae et al., 2016; Weiner, 2011). These innovative school structures are successful because teachers are still functioning in the classroom setting impacting student achievement, while also using their self-efficacy to create forward progress in their entire school, just like Winter Elementary (Pucella, 2014).

When looking at proxy-efficacy, Bandura (2002) shared that very few individuals have the power and influence to directly control what happens within their institution, which is the proxy-agency component of his Social-Cognitive Theory. Proxy-efficacy is described as an individual's ability to influence situations or people who have control over the decisions made

within their current setting (Bandura, 1989, 1997, 2000, 2002). This area of efficacy is where teachers most rely as in most traditional structures, teachers have limited influence over those making the decisions for their schools, especially at the federal level.

Pearce's (2015) findings concluded that healthy school cultures embrace the mentality that every teacher can be a leader and that those gifts just need to be developed and then trusted within a school campus, which would increase the proxy-efficacy of those individuals. Unfortunately, based on the proxy-efficacy responses received in interviews, I feel like teachers at Summer Elementary School are not necessarily being empowered to their fullest leadership potential. At Winter Elementary School, the level of proxy-efficacy was vastly different as mentioned before. All teachers who participated in interviews rated their ability to influence their colleagues, principal, and district at an increased level. Just for instance, Dolly shared that the shared leadership team that is designed to govern the school does not make a final decision with any input from the communities of teachers and staff. This example of a team meeting truly embraced Bandura's viewpoint on proxy-efficacy. Teachers' voice had a great influence on those who are governing the school.

The aforementioned organizational model is heavily discussed in the literature as a distributive leadership approach. Models of school organization that stray away from the traditional hierarchy type system are more impactful for student achievement because it does not isolate the views of teachers to their own classrooms, but rather empowers effective educators to have a broader influence on more students (Bush & Glover, 2012; Pucella, 2014; Tian, Risku, & Collin, 2016). If the site principal at Winter Elementary School was trying to make decisions on all the matters that I heard discussed during my hour site observation, she would be excluding years of educational experience as well as perspectives of people who are serving in the trenches

daily. Instead she empowered their voices and collectively was able to answer a variety of topics and problems based on the viewpoints of her teachers. Most importantly, as Bush and Glover (2014) shared in their research, distributive leadership models are only successful if the people are self-disciplined and time is devoted to meeting and collaborating, which is what I saw at both school sites, but more leadership structured at Winter Elementary School.

As Bandura (2002) expressed, individuals typically have to depend on those with the abilities and resources to directly impact their outcomes (proxy-efficacy). In traditional thinking, even in the business world, this historically is the boss or leader of the organization. However, when looking at Bandura's definition of proxy-agency, it would be inferred that anybody with the ability to make informed decisions should in turn be given some right to impact the outcome of their institution (Bandura, 2002). If looking at Bandura's theory through that lens, it would be inferred that distributive leadership approaches should be adopted in school settings to utilize those with abilities, the teachers within the school site, to help make decisions to impact their students and institutions.

The final component of the theoretical framework of my study is the collective agency of people, known as collective efficacy. Bandura (1989, 1997, 2000, 2002) explains collective efficacy as the belief of a group of individuals on a combined level of efficacy to achieve the desired outcomes. The current body of research regarding teacher autonomy is rich in discussion about how empowering groups of teachers to make decisions that impact the entire school leads to higher performance and increased job satisfaction (Abdolhamid & Mehdinezhad, 2016; Bush & Glover, 2014; DeMatthews, 2015; Wilson, 2016). Like these studies all explain, when groups of teachers are given a voice and ability to lead within the organization, they are engaged with the mission and vision of the school.

Based on interviews, it would appear that the collective efficacy of both schools was synonymous, but the perceived autonomy the teams received was different. When analyzing what might be the cause of this, I dug deeper into the documents I received to analyze. When analyzing documents from Winter Elementary School, I was able to gain a deeper understanding of their instructional block structure. The teachers within the school designed pathways for literacy and math based on standards. The teams of teachers have come together to design screener assessments to pretest students to see which module they fall within based on that subject's pathway. From there teachers split kids based on their instructional needs and then they assessed the strengths of their teachers with the content and standards in the pathways. Based on those conversations, teachers are assigned to certain modules to teach. For example, the kindergarten teacher has strong expertise in intermediate math interventions, so he teaches that module for the math pathway during the math block. This entire structure was designed and built by the collective effort of teachers, which is a testimony to the collective efficacy I have concluded from the data analysis.

The above instructional structure was developed by teachers to best meet the needs of all students. This innovative design is not in isolation. The current research is filled with several other innovative approaches that were designed by the collective efficacy of educators who are trying to design high-yield approaches to boosting student achievement. Some of these innovative designs mentioned in my literature review include the charter school movement (Torres, 2014), the expanded learning time (ELT) model (Berry & Hess, 2013), and the Collaborative Inquiry Teacher project (Jao & McDougall, 2015).

At Summer Elementary School, all interviewees shared that there was a strong sense of collective efficacy among their team, as shared in the discussion above. However, when talking

about the collective efficacy across the campus, teachers talk less passionately about their connections with others in the school building. For example, Debra shared, “Our morale is low. Cross grade level collaboration is no longer encouraged, even on grade level teams. There are many tensions amongst team mates that are leading to hurt feelings and more stress.” Whitney even commented in her interview that she is not really sure how other teams run, but her team has a strong collective efficacy. This supports the idea that there is minimal to vertical team and school collaboration truly happening.

Although it may appear that the teacher-powered model I observed at Winter Elementary School is without problems, they still have their struggles with collective efficacy as well. For example, several teachers including Rebecca, Susie, and Maura, all share that right now there is a collective approach to making quick decisions to provide immediate fixes to problems within their campus. However, they all indicated a desire to enhance this collective efficacy to make the model solid and help impact the school’s vision. Susie shared that she would like to see their collective efficacy improve in order to focus on big topics such as schedule, learning program, and professional development. Like Lopez (2010) shared, teachers have a yearning to have a greater impact on things that matter more than what questioning strategy they will utilize during a lesson. Teachers want to become researchers and problem solvers to help bring about positive change for the issues they are seeing on a daily basis in the classrooms they are serving. Lopez (2010) also stated that the administrator’s role is to support these teacher leaders in their pursuit to achieve their aspirations for the school and students, which is what the teachers at Winter Elementary School are yearning for. Their next step in autonomy is for the school and district level administration to release even more autonomy to their teams so that they can utilize their collective efficacy to boost student achievement.

As Bandura (1987, 2000, 2002) shared, collective efficacy encompasses self-efficacy as the collective efficacy of a group of people is only as good as the individuals who are part of the team. My study supported this because as I interviewed teachers at Winter Elementary School, I noticed how many of the teachers had graduate degrees in content areas or were pursuing those degrees. 60% of the participants from that site had a master's degree while 20% was in the process of pursuing a degree. Factors such as money could have an impact on this, but I also believe that because of the autonomy their school structure affords, these teachers realize the importance of their collective efficacy. In turn, as individual teachers, they want to increase their self-efficacy to better contribute knowledge and expertise to the collective group.

Implications

After conducting my research, analyzing the data, and discussing the findings, I believe these to be the implications in the following three areas: empirical, theoretical, and practical.

Empirical

“Teacher autonomy’s success as a strategy for K-12 improvement is dependent on whether groups of teachers seek autonomy and use it to advance teaching and learning” (Farris-Berg & Dirks-wager, 2013, p. xii). As the researcher of this study, I believe that the implications of my findings are founded in this statement. Autonomy is only as good as what educators do with once they have been afforded the opportunity to have some. After immersing myself in two school sites, one traditionally structured and one teacher-powered, I immediately realized that the literature is correct, autonomy is an innate human desire that all educators desire. The interviews I conducted with participants from both sites corroborate that viewpoint. However, what I found to be different is that within the teacher-powered site, not only were the teachers provided increased autonomy for decision-making within their campus, but these teachers used it to

advance teaching and learning for their students (Farris-Berg & Dirkswager, 2013).

Unfortunately, based on the site observation and participant interviews with the traditionally structured school, I quickly realized that these teachers were never truly given the opportunity to use autonomy to make decisions to prove their self-efficacy. Instead, they've been handed down mandates and curriculums that they overwhelmingly indicated they are not pleased with. Therefore, my biggest implication of my research is that school leadership will never understand the full impact of increased teacher autonomy unless they are willing to take risks and try trusting teachers with the success of their students and our schools.

The teachers at Winter Elementary School have been given a prized possession, trust from their superiors to lead their campus from the walls of their classrooms. Based on my site observations, document analysis, and participant interviews at Winter Elementary School, I hear and see teacher voice in every decision made for their students. Observing their genius hour meeting demonstrated that they have the full autonomy to select curriculum, set the pacing that is appropriate for their students, and even structure the instructional block and personnel of those classrooms to best meet the needs of students and fit the passions of teachers. As an outside observer, I was able to witness teachers doing what they've been trained to do, plan and execute highly effective instruction. It was reassuring to me as a leader within a school and gave me hope that autonomy does work.

Another implication of my study is that structure means everything. Innovation is key to success and what the teacher-powered model has that differs greatly from the traditionally structured school is a school structure that is built around increased teacher autonomy, which was evident even in their organizational structure documents that I was able to analyze. The schedule of day and even layout of the building has all been built around a model that trusts

teachers to make the decisions for what is best for the students within their community. This defies the status quo for the current public education system. Just because something has been done a particular way for a long period of time, does not necessarily mean it is effective. The current educational picture allows the schedule and structure of the school day to impact the autonomy and constraints placed on teachers.

However, at Winter Elementary School, I immediately realized that they've built a structure around the vision of their school. It is almost like Understanding by Design in lesson planning. The teacher-powered model teachers knew they wanted a school that had pathways and modules that were not restricted by grade levels and a curriculum focused on service learning. Maura, Julie, Reba, and Dolly were all a part of the development team for Winter Elementary School and cumulatively have over 80 years of teaching experience. During their interviews they shared the vision they had for how school could look different than it had looked in their district, which is where their pathway and service learning concepts were birthed. After casting that vision, they then built a structure around how to make that happen for teachers and students. Imagine the impact these findings can have on the classrooms of public school systems around the country. It's almost as if public school systems need to flip their current mindset so that they may be able to increase the autonomy that the teachers' self-efficacy and collective-efficacy deserve.

My final implication of my study is that autonomy leads to increased job performance. When observing at both sites during curriculum planning meetings, I was immediately surrounded by the gambit of teachers. I had veterans with 20 plus years of experience sitting alongside novice teachers. However, it wasn't years of experience that created a different outcome of the meetings. At Summer Elementary School, the meeting was very scripted.

Teachers were conversing about how to cover the content in their current unit and get through with it in a timely manner to stay up with the district provided pacing guide. These are experts of their field who are being told what to do, with limited to no autonomy to break this weekly planning cycle. Therefore, my research implies that school leadership cannot use the excuse that it is a lack of knowledge and expertise that is requiring the limitations on the amount of autonomy given to teachers. Instead it's a lack of trust in teachers and their ability to perform their job of educating students. This implication is not stating that all teachers live up to the high expectations that should be in place for teacher performance. However, when teachers do not meet the expectations, those situations should be addressed and handled in order to not punish the many for a few. Many passionate and innovative educators, like the ones interviewed at both sites, have been stripped of their autonomy due to the inefficacy of a small percentage of teachers.

Based on these implications, my recommendations for the educational system, especially those who are in decision-making positions, is to look at the current traditional structures we've put into place within schools. The traditional hierarchal organizational structure of Summer Elementary School is mirrored in a large percentage of schools across the nation. It represents 100% of the school structures in my current district. However, the findings from my research imply that when given more autonomy and trust to make decisions, teachers have proven to be successful in their approach to meet the academic and social needs of students. Instead of assuming that a model or structure such as Winter Elementary School cannot work, I would recommend to policy makers at the district levels to encourage innovation at the school levels to build organizational structures that empower teachers to lead and use their autonomy to positively impact students.

My recommendation does not include giving teachers full reign of school decision-making as there is some knowledge required in operating a public school that may not be known by individuals who have only served in the classroom. For instance, there are state statutes that dictate policy around topics like exceptional student education, English Language Learners, and attendance that must be followed in order to stay out of trouble with the federal government. Therefore, if trying to build a model like Winter Elementary School, my recommendation would be to still have a person on campus who has the knowledge and expertise in those areas to help serve as wise counsel for teacher leadership teams when making decisions that may interfere with state statute. This does not mean I recommend placing all final decision-making in the hands of a supervisor, but do recommend that this position exist so that it can be consulted and engaged in the decisions being made by teachers.

Theoretical

Bandura's work on Social-Cognitive Theory has informed this entire study and the findings from my research imply that his theory is appropriate to the educational setting. In regards to self-efficacy, there is a wide spectrum for which teachers fall. Just from my interviews, I have veteran teachers who are presenting professional development at the district level to a brand new teacher who is finding her way in the profession. Therefore, the first theoretical implication from my study is that education systems must find the barriers that are withholding teachers from their belief that they can have a positive impact on student achievement and make decisions for their students and school. Leaders in the school and teachers who are efficacious must mentor and encourage those who are lacking that level of self-efficacy so that they can reach that level of increased job performance. Taking away their autonomy is not the answer. Instead, monitored autonomy should be offered to allow them to explore and fail

so that they are learning is more authentic, just like teachers do for their students.

As for proxy-efficacy, the implication from my findings is that when Bandura defines entrusting the people with the abilities and influence to make decisions for an institution, school systems must begin to question the norms of who those people are. Traditionally we would say those people are bosses or principals, but that is not what Bandura is saying as the rule for proxy-agency. Anybody with the ability to influence an institution should be given the opportunity to do so. In this case, who better to influence the decision making for students and schools than those serving within the classrooms. Teachers have the ability and knowledge to make decisions about what is right for students. Not saying that teachers should be solely in charge, however, when coming to the decision making table, sometimes teacher voice is the last one consulted and the softest heard. It should be the loudest voice heard because it is the closest to students. My findings show that teachers, especially those teaching in traditionally structured settings, do not feel as if their voices are being able to have a great enough influence over the decision making in their schools.

Finally, Bandura (1989, 2000, 2002) talks about how self-efficacy is a direct correlation to collective efficacy, as evident in the research I conducted at Winter Elementary School. The teachers at this school have strong perceptions of self-efficacy and they are able to collectively work to make decisions particularly those impacting teaching and learning. Although they feel as if the collective efficacy at their site could improve, their reflections are not in comparison to the isolated teams that are felt from the traditionally structured model. I believe that my findings imply that collaboration is key to the success of organizations, especially schools. My site observations alone showed that need for teams of experts to be able to come together to brainstorm and sharpen each other in order to best meet the needs of learners. As Bandura (2002)

shared, collective efficacy should be greater than each individual's self-efficacy totaled together. In order for this to happen, I'm implying that schools need to build structures like Winter Elementary, where weekly collaboration is encouraged and desired by teachers so that collective efficacy can flourish. In the end, if this occurs student achievement will be significantly impacted.

Based on these implications, I recommend that school structures create schedules that are conducive to encourage high levels of collective efficacy, not only horizontally, but vertically also. If schools desire teachers to collaborate in order to make effective decisions, it cannot be assumed that teachers will be able to find time to meet. Instead, I strongly recommend any school structure to strategically build a school schedule that includes extensive amount of time during the day for teachers to have uninterrupted planning and collaboration time. In both school settings where I conducted site observations, there were special times where meetings could occur among the teams. I observed an example of this at both sites.

However, my recommendation would be for there to be assigned roles within these collaboration times so that the self-efficacy of each individual teacher can contribute to the greater collective efficacy of the team, like Bandura's social-cognitive theory describes. At Winter Elementary School, teachers on the team took different roles such as facilitator, scribe, and timekeeper to help ensure the productivity of the session, which differed from Summer Elementary School. In addition, there was an agenda process where every individual could contribute important topics to be discussed and then voted to determine the topics that were most important to make sure time was spent on topics that mattered most. My recommendation is for current collaboration type meetings be reevaluated within school systems in order to assess the productiveness of their structure. If teachers are not assigned roles and agendas are not in place,

then I recommend that such structures be implemented in order for true collective efficacy to improve within a school.

Practical

Practical implications from my study are directed towards school stakeholders who are sitting in a position of leadership or governance that could impact the structure of our schools. After immersing myself within two schools, I immediately realized that Winter Elementary School was given something by the district that Summer equally desires, the trust to try something innovative. Because of the autonomy provided to restructure their school, Winter Elementary School designed a model around the things they found important for their students, differentiated learning to meet the needs of all learners and service learning. The district trusted them and from there Winter Elementary was born. It may have appeared that the teachers at Summer Elementary School are completely dissatisfied with their administration, but in reality most of the interviewees spoke highly of their direct supervisors. Their frustrations came directly from those who are above the principal and assistant principal. My desire is that the teachers at Winter Elementary School could hear the voices of those at Summer because they would be encouraged by just how ahead they are in the area of autonomy with teaching and learning and school structure. Therefore, based on my findings I am imploring school districts to quit following status quo because it's the way it has been done for a set number of years. School systems need to listen to teachers and give them the trust to be innovative for students. The literature and my findings both support, when that happens, the job performance of teachers will increase greatly and so will morale. This will create a positive environment for students.

There have been some struggles at Winter Elementary School since the school structure has gone to a full school model instead of a single pilot community, which was reflected in my

findings and in the data. Their current model has a school of three communities instead of seven teachers on one community. As Reba shared in her interview, the full school implementation has created a set back from the original momentum of the movement.

However, Reba also shared that those who started the movement knew the work would be challenging and that they must continue pursuing autonomy so that the model they are built for their school can continue to evolve. Just based on the teacher interviews from that school alone, the most practical implication I can find is that autonomy is not for everyone. Although all teachers I interviewed agreed, autonomy is a desire of every teacher. However, when asking for a school structure that is founded on full teacher autonomy, it requires hard work, dedication, and a commitment to a vision that cannot be shaken by setbacks and failures. That is the most profound take away I learned from Winter Elementary School. They've asked for autonomy, they've received it, and now they must work diligently to prove that it is a model that works for both teachers and students. During interviews, Dolly and Reba explained that a person from the district office came to do a yearly visit at their school and she shared that the teachers at Winter Elementary School work harder than any other school in the district. Surprisingly enough, that is exactly the way the teachers at that school want it because they have the autonomy to do what they feel is best for students on a day to day basis.

My practical recommendation from my research is for any school possibly interested in transitioning from a traditionally structured to a teacher-powered model. I would recommend school leadership to do an internal assessment of the organization before irrationally transforming an entire organizational structure. First, it must be identified if there is buy-in from a large percentage of teachers and staff members on the campus. If only half of the teachers desire to have more autonomy to make decisions, the model will not be successful. This will

result in a few teachers doing a majority of the work leading to burn out and dissention among staff members. However, if a large majority of a staff is eager to be empowered to have more autonomy, then my recommendation is to start building systems to allow this type of model to occur. If teachers have a desire to lead and they are being discouraged or limited from doing that, then teacher morale and school culture will be negatively impacted.

Delimitations and Limitations

Delimitations

When designing this multiple case study regarding teachers' perceptions of autonomy, there were two delimitations placed on the study to help ensure that my results were concise and truly informed the purpose of this study. The first delimitation for this study was that the participants' role must involve working as a full-time teacher in their school setting with students. I did not want to include special area teachers or resource coaches as their role within the sites may have a different perspective of the autonomies provided to teachers to make decisions. For example, a music teacher may have more autonomy than a second-grade teacher as he or she can determine the music selections they choose, dates of concerts, etc. Due to the innovative structure of the teacher-powered school, I did identify a position that was placed in communities at their schools that was not grade specific, but served in the same capacity of working with students on a daily basis and serving in the same roles as the general education teachers so I deemed that role as fitting the delimitation of the study.

The second delimitation is the limited number of participants. Due to the nature of a case study in regards to the in-depth study of a case, or in my study, two cases, there is not a large quantity of data, but instead a deeper level of data collected that is associated with site observations and participant interviews. The reason I chose a case study approach for the

purpose of this particular study was that I wanted to get an in-depth understanding of these two different structures of public education schools and in order to do that I needed to immerse myself in the cultures of these schools. Consequently, this lessens the amount of people or places that I got to interact with. However, it did ensure that I received a deep understanding of my two cases in order to address the research questions.

Limitations

In addition to the delimitations listed above, there were some limitations associated with the study. First and foremost, I was not able to control the demographics of the participants of my study as I had to accept those who were willing to participate in interviews as well as those who are employed at the two sites that I was granted permission to conduct my research. Therefore, you will notice that within my sample there is a strong representation of Caucasian female. This could impact the results of my study as the views and perceptions of these teachers represent one demographic population of educators and may not be generalized to different demographics of teachers.

Another limitation of this study is that my two sites are not identical in population of students. The traditionally structure school serves a lower socioeconomic population in comparison to the teacher-powered school. However, there are very few teacher-powered schools across the nation so therefore in order to truly study these two types of school structures, I had to accept any willing school that would participate and fit within the parameters of teacher-powered, which is how I got Winter Elementary School.

Thirdly, due to the timeline of my study, I was involved in schools during their testing seasons so I could not control the site observations and availability of the schools to allow me in. I was able to still conduct curriculum site observations, but was not able to widen my scope of

observing other types of leadership events as in one case the principal cancelled the meeting due to the increased testing pressures. Therefore, I followed my study procedures while also working around the schedules of the schools who participated in my study. This also impacted the interviews. I offered teachers different avenues to provide me their responses for my interview questions. Some teachers accepted the invitation to do a phone interview, which provided more rich information. Some did the written responses, which provided answers to my questions, but weren't as detailed as a face-to-face interview. However, when teachers are volunteering their service, you must be willing to take whatever information they can provide.

Recommendations for Future Research

Since the teacher-powered movement is currently new to the arena of innovative school design there is minimal research regarding this area, although the foundations of the design have been heavily studied including topics such as distributive leadership, teacher leadership, and teacher autonomy. Therefore, the next steps from this research study would be to identify more teacher-powered Schools and to potentially conduct a phenomenological study on the phenomenon of the teacher-powered structure of schools and identify differences as well as similarities among how these innovatively designed schools are structured. No two teacher-powered schools are identical in all facets of their organization. Therefore, this research would help to identify common threads that are critical to the success of initiating a teacher-powered movement within a school.

In addition, the two sites within my study are not closely aligned in regards to the demographics of the students for which the schools serve. Therefore, I believe that conducting another multiple-case study following very similar procedures as outlined for my study with two schools that have closely aligned socioeconomic status may provide a little bit of a different

perspective than that which was provided by my case study.

Summary

The purpose of this multiple-case study was to determine similarities and differences between the perceptions of teacher autonomy within a traditionally structured and Teacher Powered school. Based on the collected data from the study, it was determined that self-efficacy of teachers within the two school sites were very similar, indicating that teachers perceived to have high levels of ability to positively influence the success of their students. However, regarding proxy-efficacy and collective-efficacy, the traditionally structured school teachers had a lower perception of their autonomy to make decisions for their school in comparison to those teachers who served in a teacher-powered school. Therefore, this research pushes the current status quo in educational policy to stop looking at teachers as the blame for poor performance and instead starting to trust them to be the agents of change to improve instruction and learning for students. When a school structure is built to empower teachers to make decisions for not only their students, but for their school, the morale and efficacy of the school will boost, as concluded by the results of this study.

REFERENCES

- Abdolhamid, A., & Mehdinezhad, V., (2016). School principals' collaborative leadership style and relation it to teachers' self-efficacy. *International Journal of Research Studies in Education*, 5(3), 3-12. doi: 10.5861/ijrse.2015.1218
- Angelle, P. & Teague, G. (2014). Teacher leadership and collective efficacy: Teacher perceptions in three US school districts. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 56(6), 738-753.
- Aziz, N., Asimiran, S., Fooi, F., & Hassan, A. (2015). Literature review on the relationship between principal instructional leadership and teacher readiness to implement change. *International Refereed Research Journal*, 6(1), 12-19.
- Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control*. New York, NY: Freeman. doi:10.1037/0033-295X.84.2.191
- Bandura, A. (1989). Human agency in social cognitive theory. *American Psychologist*, 44(9), 1175-1184.
- Bandura, A. (2000). Exercise of human agency through collective efficacy. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 9(3), 75-78.
- Bandura, A. (2002). Social cognitive theory in cultural context. *Applied Psychology: An International Review*, 51(2), 269-290.
- Berry, B. (2014). Going to scale with teacherpreneurs. *The Phi Delta Kappan*, 95(7), 8-14. doi:10.1177/003172171409500703
- Berry, B. (2014). *Yes, teacher morale really is low -- despite a report to the contrary*. Washington: WP Company LLC d/b/a The Washington Post.
- Berry, B., & Hess, F. M. (2013). Expanded learning, expansive teacher leadership. *The Phi Delta*

- Kappan*, 94(5), 58–61.
- Blömeke, S., & Klein, P. (2013). When is a school environment perceived as supportive by beginning mathematics teachers? Effects of leadership, trust, autonomy, and appraisal on teaching quality. *International Journal of Science & Mathematics Education*, 11(4), 1029-1048. doi:10.1007/s10763-013-9424-x
- Bolyard, C. (2015). Test-based teacher evaluations: Accountability vs. responsibility. *Philosophical Studies in Education*, 4674-82.
- Bush, T. & Glover, D. (2012). Distributed leadership in action: Leading high-performing leadership teams in English schools. *School Leadership & Management*, 32(1), 21-36. doi: 10.1080/13632434.2011.642354
- Cameron, J., Mercier, K., & Doolittle, S. (2016). Teacher-led change in secondary school physical education. *The Physical Educator*, 73(1), 32-60.
- Chomsky, N., & Robichaud, A. (2014). Standardized testing as an assault on humanism and critical thinking in education. *Radical Pedagogy*, 11(1), 3.
- Cook, J.B. (2012). Navigating mandates: Teachers face "troubled seas". *Language and Literacy*, 14(3), 112-n/a.
- Creswell, J. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches (third edition)*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications.
- DeMatthews, D.E. (2015). Clearing a path for inclusion. *Journal of School Leadership*, 25(6), 1000-1038.
- Dierking, R. & Fox, R. (2013). Changing the way I teach: Building teacher knowledge, confidence, and autonomy. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 64(2), 129-144.
- Elwood, S. (2014). A Clean, Clear View. *California English*, 19(4), 9-10.

- Fairman, J.C., & Mackenzie, S.V. (2015). How teacher leaders influence others and understand their leadership. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 18(1), 61-87, doi: 10.1080/13603124.2014.904002
- Fairman, J., & Mackenzie, S. (2012). Spheres of teacher leadership action for learning. *Professional Development in Education*, 38(2), 229-246. doi:10.1080/19415257.2012.657865
- Farris-Berg, K. & Dirkswager, E. (2013). *Trusting teachers with school success: What happens when teachers call the shots*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.
- Grant, S., Danby, S., Thorpe, K., & Theobald, M. (2016). Early childhood teachers' work in a time of change. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood*, 41(3), 38-45.
- Greene, K. (2016). How They LEAD. *Educational Leadership*, 73(9), 42-46.
- Hall, D., Gunter, H., & Bragg, J. (2013). The strange case of the emergence of distributed leadership in schools in England. *Educational Review*, 65(4), 467-487.
- Høigaard, R., Giske, R., & Sundsli, K. (2012). Newly qualified teachers' work engagement and teacher efficacy influences on job satisfaction, burnout, and the intention to quit. *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 35(3), 347-357.
doi:10.1080/02619768.2011.633993
- Ingersoll, R., Merrill, L., & May, H. (2016). Do accountability policies push teachers out? Sanctions exacerbate the teacher turnover problem in low-performing schools--but giving teachers more classroom autonomy can help stem the flood. *Educational Leadership*, 73(8), 44-49.
- Jao, L., & McDougall, D. (2015). The collaborative teacher inquiry project: A purposeful professional development initiative. *Canadian Journal of Education*, 38(1), 1-22.

- Kipkoech, L. C., & Chesire, S. (2011). The levels of teachers' involvement in managerial decision making in schools in Kenya. *Problems of Education in the 21st Century*, 3479-87.
- Klassen, R. M., Tze, V. C., Betts, S. M., & Gordon, K. A. (2011). Teacher Efficacy Research 1998-2009: Signs of progress or unfulfilled promise?. *Educational Psychology Review*, 23(1), 21-43. doi:10.1007/s10648-010-9141-8
- Krise, K. (2016). Preparing the standardized teacher: The effects of accountability on teacher education. *JCT: Journal of Curriculum Theorizing*, 31(2), 24-32.
- Latifoglu, A. (2016). Staying or leaving? An analysis of career trajectories of beginning teachers. *International Studies in Educational Administration (Commonwealth Council for Educational Administration & Management (CCEAM))*, 44(1), 55-70.
- Lee Bae, C., Hayes, K.N., O'Connor, D.M., Seitz, J.C., & Distefano, R. (2016). The diverse faces of teacher leadership: A typology and survey tool. *Journal of School Leadership*, 26(6), 905-937.
- Meier, L. (2012). The effect of school culture on science education at an ideologically innovative elementary magnet school: An ethnographic case study. *Journal of Science Teacher Education*, 23(7), 805-822. doi:10.1007/s10972-011-9252-1
- Minckler, C. (2014). School leadership that builds teacher social capital. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 42(5), 657-679. doi: 10.1177/1741143213510502
- Myers, N., & Dillard, B. (2013). An action research project's impact on teachers' leadership attitudes and perceptions. *Journal of College Teaching and Learning*, 10(1), 69-78.
- Nazareno, L. (2013). Portrait of a teacher-led school. *Educational Leadership*, 71(2), 50-54.

- Oberfield, Z. (2016). A bargain half fulfilled: Teacher autonomy and accountability in traditional public schools and public charter schools. *American Educational Research Journal*, 53(2), 296-323. doi: 10.3102/0002831216634843
- Olivant, K. F. (2015). "I am not a format": Teachers' experiences with fostering creativity in the era of accountability. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, 29(1), 115-129. doi:10.1080/02568543.2014.978920
- Paradis, A., Lutovac, S., & Kaasila, R. (2015). A Canadian teacher's perceived autonomy and self-confidence in the midst of an educational reform. *Problems of Education in the 21st Century*, 6642-53.
- Pearce, K. (2015). Creating leaders through the teacher learning and leadership program. *Educational Forum*, 79(1), 46-52. doi:10.1080/00131725.2015.972812
- Priestley, M. (2011). Schools, teachers, and curriculum change: A balancing act? *Educational Change*, 12(1).
- Pucella, T. J. (2014). Not too young to lead. *Clearing House*, 87(1), 15-20. doi:10.1080/00098655.2013.818524
- Quartz, K. H., Kawasaki, J., Sotelo, D., & Merino, K. (2014). Supporting assessment autonomy: How one small school articulated the infrastructure needed to own and use student data. *Journal of Educational Change*, 15(2), 125-152. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10833-013-9219-4>
- Reeves, T. & Lowenhaupt, R. (2016). Teachers as leaders: Pre-service teachers' aspirations and motivations. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 57, 176-187.
- Ringler, M. C., O'Neal, D., Rawls, J., & Cumiskey, S. (2013). The role of school leaders in teacher leadership development. *Rural Educator*, 35(1), 34-43.

- Rooney, E. (2015). "I'm just going through the motions": High-stakes accountability and teachers' access to intrinsic rewards. *American Journal of Education, 121*(4), 475-500.
- Santoro, D. A. (2011). Good teaching in difficult times: Demoralization in the pursuit of good work. *American Journal of Education, 118*(1), 1-23.
- Skaalvik, E. & Skaalvik, S. (2014). Teacher self-efficacy and perceived autonomy: Relations with teacher engagement, job satisfaction, and emotional exhaustion. *Psychological Reports: Employment Psychology & Marketing, 114*(1), 68-77.
- Sterrett, W. & Irizarry, E. (2015). Beyond autopsy data: Bolstering teacher leadership, morale, and school improvement. *Educational Leadership, 18*(1), 3-13. doi: 10.1177/15555458914551828
- Tian, M., Risku, M., & Collin, K. (2016). A meta-analysis of distributed leadership from 2002-2013: Theory development, empirical evidence, and future research focus. *Educational Management, Administration, & Leadership, 44*(1), 146-164.
- Torres, A. C. (2014). "Are we architects or construction workers?" Re-examining teacher autonomy and turnover in charter schools. *Education Policy Analysis Archives, 22*(124).
- Tschannen-Moran, M., Woolfolk, Hoy, A., & Hoy, W. K. (1998). Teacher efficacy: Its meaning and measure. *Review of Educational Research, 68*(2), 202-248. doi:10.3102/00346543068002202
- Wang, D., Waldman, D., & Zhang, Z. (2014). A meta-analysis of shared leadership and team effectiveness. *American Psychological Association, 99*(2), 181-198.
- Wang, Q., & Zhang, H. (2014). Promoting teacher autonomy through university-school collaborative action research. *Language Teaching Research, 18*(2), 222-241. doi: 10.1177/1362168813505942

- Weiner J. M. (2011). Finding common ground: Teacher leaders and principals speak out about teacher leadership. *Journal of School Leadership, 21*(1), 7-41.
- Wenner, J., & Campbell, T. (2016). The theoretical and empirical basis of teacher leadership: A review of the literature. *Review of Educational Research, 20*(10), 1-38.
- Wilson, A. (2016). From professional practice to practical leader: Teacher leadership in professional learning communities. *International Journal of Teacher Leadership, 7*(2), 45-62.
- Yin, R. (2014). *Case study research: Design and methods (5th edition)*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications.
- Yoshida, R. K., & Strong, L. G. (2014). Teachers' autonomy in today's educational climate: Current perceptions from an acceptable instrument. *Educational Studies, 50*(2), 123-145.
doi:10.1080/00131946.2014.880922
- Zakeri, A., Rahmany, R., & Labone, E. (2016). Teachers' self- and collective Efficacy: The case of novice English language teachers. *Journal of Language Teaching & Research, 7*(1), 158-167. doi:10.17507/jltr.0701.18

Appendix A: Recruitment Form

[Insert Date]

Dear [Recipient]:

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Education degree with a focus in curriculum and instruction. The purpose of my research is to understand the perceptions of teachers regarding the autonomy they have in their school setting and how that impacts their effectiveness in their school setting. I am emailing to invite you to participate in my study.

If you are currently a full time teacher in a general education setting at your school site and are willing to participate, you will be asked to participate in a one-on-one interview and if deemed necessary, possibly sit in on a focus group regarding teacher autonomy. It should take approximately 1-2 hours of your time for you to complete the procedure[s] listed. Select the appropriate sentence: Your name and other demographic information will be requested as part of your participation, but the information will remain confidential.

To participate in this study, click on the link below to complete a screening survey. Once I receive your screening survey, I will email you a consent form that you will be required to sign and return to me. Once I receive your consent form, I will work with you to set up a time to conduct a one-on-one interview. There are three formats for the interviews, face to face, phone, or written response. You will be given the opportunity to participate in the way that is best for your schedule.

If you choose to participate, you will receive a \$15 restaurant gift card as a small token of my appreciation for your willingness to participate in this study.

Sincerely,

Jerry Lee Wright
Doctoral Candidate
Liberty University

Appendix B: IRB Approved Consent Form

The Liberty University Institutional
Review Board has approved
this document for use from
2/13/2018 to 2/12/2019
Protocol # 3109.021318

CONSENT FORM

*A Multiple Case Study on the Perceptions of Teacher Autonomy in a Traditionally Structured
and Teacher Powered School*

Jerry Lee Wright
Liberty University
School of Education

You are invited to be in a research study regarding your perception of teacher autonomy within your current school site. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a full-time general education teacher at one of my study's sites. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Jerry Lee Wright, a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

Background Information: The purpose of this multiple-case study is to examine the perceived teacher autonomy to make decisions for their students and school within a traditionally structured and teacher powered school. The research questions of this study seek to find out how your belief of your efficacy impacts the perception of the autonomy you have in your school.

Procedures: If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:

1. Participate in a one-on-one interview. The interview could be conducted face to face, over the phone, or via written response. If face to face or phone based, I would ask permission for your responses to be audio recorded to help with the accurate transcription of your answers. Depending on the format you select for the interview, the one-on-one interview should last between 30-60 minutes.
2. If there are common themes that arise through the interviews, I will host a focus group in which you will be invited to participate with other participants from your site. This would most likely happen via technology and would also be recorded. The focus group would last approximately 1 hour.
3. I will also be conducting site observations at your school, which could include observing your grade level meeting, curriculum leadership team meeting, or your classroom. In addition, I will be gaining access to minutes and/or agendas to such meetings. This procedure will last approximately 1-2 hours.

Risks: The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

Benefits: Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study. However, the benefits to society include the opportunity to present an idea of a different organizational structure for schools that could possibly increase the autonomy provided to teachers to make decisions for students and their schools.

Compensation: Participants will be compensated for participating in this study. If participants participate in a complete one-on-one interview for this study, they will receive a \$15 restaurant

Appendix C: Participant Interview Questionnaire

Perceptions of Teacher Autonomy Research Questions

* Required

Email address *

Your email

Please introduce yourself to me by including your name, educational background, years of teaching experience, and current years of teaching at this current site.

Your answer

Please describe the organizational structure and leadership design of your school site. (Ex: What is the hierarchy of decision making personnel?)

Your answer

How would you describe the teacher morale within your school? What are the factors that have created this level of morale?

Your answer

How would you describe the level of autonomy you have to make decisions about your students and school-wide initiatives?

Your answer

What are some of the factors that you feel are inhibiting your autonomy to make decisions for students and your school?

Your answer

What are some of the decisions in your school and classroom that you currently have the autonomy to impact? What are some of the decisions you have no autonomy to impact?

Your answer

How would you describe your self-efficacy in regards to teaching and making educational decisions for your students and school?

Your answer

How do you feel your level of self-efficacy could impact your ability to embrace the autonomy to make decisions for your students and school?

Your answer

Some people might say that a lack of teacher (self) efficacy is what has limited autonomy for teachers. How do you feel others' perceptions of your efficacy impact the amount of autonomy that you have?

Your answer

Proxy-efficacy is defined as one's ability to influence those who have control over their institution or society. How would you describe your level of proxy-efficacy in your school setting?

Your answer

Describe the ways teachers in your school setting are able to influence or persuade those who make decisions impacting your students and school?

Your answer

If you could improve your proxy-efficacy, what are some of the things you'd like to have more autonomy or influence over? Why are these topics important to you?

Your answer

Collective-efficacy is defined as a group of individuals combining knowledge and resources to benefit the majority of the group. How would you describe the collective efficacy of your school setting?

Your answer

What is some evidence to support either a weak or strong collective efficacy on your campus?

Your answer

If your school's teachers could strengthen your collective efficacy, what are some areas of concern or issues that you believe your teachers would use their collective efficacy to seek the autonomy to improve?

Your answer

Thank you for taking your time to share with me about your school site and the autonomy you possess here on your site. My last question is how do you think the morale of teachers here on your campus would increase if there were increased levels of autonomy for teachers?

Your answer

Appendix D: Teacher Autonomy Observation Instrument

Date:

Type of Event:

Participants:

Description of Leadership/Organizational Structure of the Event (Collaboration Fostered, etc.):

Description of Topics/Issues Discussed or Presented:

Description of Opportunities for Teacher Input/Discussion:

Description of How Decision was Made or Solution Found:

Detailed Notes of What Occurred:

Appendix E: Findings Coding Matrices

Summer Elementary School

	Teacher Morale	Leadership Structure	Decision-Making	Roadblocks
Louise	<p>*Teacher morale is struggling</p> <p>*Several changes in admin as well as the curriculum changes has many people overwhelmed</p> <p>*Collective efficacy is improving. I feel that we have work to do, but great people are in place and working hard at it.</p> <p>*If autonomy was increased, it would drastically improve the morale of the teachers at our school.</p>	<p>*Principal/assistant principal</p> <p>*Staff is surveyed for our input</p> <p>*Meet weekly with curriculum coaches who do ask for input</p> <p>*Our admin is very open to ideas on how to best serve our students and to improve our school.</p>	<p>*Teacher autonomy has been discouraged because of the new curriculum</p> <p>*I have autonomy in how I teach. I was invited to attend a Kagan training in the district which allowed me to add to my instructional techniques.</p> <p>*I do not have any autonomy to in what I teach. The curriculum must be followed with autonomy and I have limited to no decision making regarding it.</p> <p>*I am a rule follower by nature, but it is hard to adhere to what is asked and still teach in the way that I want.</p>	<p>*Many teachers are struggling with implementing the curriculum in a way that is able to engage all learners, especially those who haven't been successful</p> <p>*It has been a challenge to find a way implement the skill strand (Curriculum) exactly the way it has been written, while keeping kids interested and engaged</p> <p>*We would love to find ways to help with behavior of some of our most needy students.</p>
Samantha	<p>*Overall the morale is good, was much better at the beginning of the school year</p> <p>*End of year leads to pressure building up for standardized assessment which leads to morale dropping</p> <p>*This year has been a rough year</p>	<p>*very organized structure at our school</p> <p>*principal/assistant principal who work closely with county to make decisions</p> <p>*three coaches who occasionally step in as administrators as needed</p> <p>*Curriculum Leadership Team that helps relay</p>	<p>*I have some control over decisions about my students</p> <p>*I am a rule follower so I like to make the decisions that follow what has been asked or required of me</p> <p>*Overall what the district says goes and we just adapt as we go</p>	<p>*So much change has happened at the district level that it has been hard to maintain a balance</p> <p>*I have no control over the fast pacing of curriculum, district mandates with curriculum, home life and instability of my students</p>

	<p>as a whole</p> <p>*Morale has lowered because of district mandates</p> <p>*I think that if teachers had more say and results actually produced because of our say, then morale would BOOST tremendously.</p>	<p>information back to teams of teachers</p> <p>*Curriculum team leader relays information back to the administration if needed</p> <p>*Can meet with admin if wanted/desired</p>	<p>*I have NO autonomy about curriculum, state standardized assessments, and the amount of time I have instructionally</p> <p>*I do control how I present the material and engage my students.</p>	
Whitney	<p>*I think the morale at LPE is low.</p> <p>*I think a certain amount of autonomy is necessary to increase morale across the entire teaching profession.</p>	<p>*As far as I can tell, decisions are handed down from administration to team leaders who then pass it on to their team</p> <p>*Administration is new to its role which presents problems in and of itself. It appears that they've been left to figure things out on their own without little help from the district.</p> <p>*We also have a MTSS coach, reading coach, and math coach who serve as leaders who delineate information</p>	<p>*With the new ELA curriculum, there is little to NO AUTONOMY allowed.</p> <p>*Literally, we must do CKLA with 100% fidelity even though our professional judgment says we should be doing something different.</p> <p>*It seems to me that students should dictate our practices and not a tool/format.</p> <p>*I can impact my attitude, what time I sign in, where I park, etc.</p> <p>*I cannot impact basically anything such as curriculum, where I take recess or anything like that</p> <p>*I feel like my ability to influence my admin is basically non-existent. Maybe minimal at best, but it really FEELS non-existent</p>	<p>*I think the curriculum and student behavior are the cause of the low morale.</p> <p>*The decision making is coming straight from the district with little to no real contact with us in the schools.</p> <p>*I wish I had more impact with the curriculum. It is a real barrier.</p>

<p>Debra</p>	<p>*The morale is not great this year. * I do not feel as if it is fully on our school site for the reason why the morale is so low. *We are doing a lot more work with a lot less appreciation *Many feel like we are not being treated like professionals with degrees *There is really not a lot of collective efficacy happening.</p> <p>*Our morale is low. Cross grade level collaboration is no longer encouraged even on grade level teams.</p> <p>*If we had a little more professional courtesy and appreciation, I think the morale of our staff would begin to sky rocket.</p>	<p>*Curriculum leadership team comprise of grade level team leaders, specials area, reading coach, MTSS coach, STEM coach, and administration.</p> <p>*Our administration consists of a principal/assistant principal</p> <p>*Many are feeling the trickle down effect</p> <p>*The few are leading the many</p>	<p>*Our opinions are asked/consulted but it does not feel like our opinions matter or that they are honored.</p> <p>*The administration makes majority of the decisions. The rest of the curriculum team is basically there to share decision with the rest of the staff, with little input from others.</p> <p>*There is little tolerance for teacher discretion about the teaching of curriculum.</p> <p>*Less tolerance for our decisions and what's best for kids...</p> <p>"If it's not done this way, then perhaps this is not the place for you"</p> <p>*So many decisions are being based on the data</p>	<p>*More responsibilities, meetings, work load has increased *More focus on student performance and less on building relationships with students so that we can meet all of their needs.</p>
<p>Marilyn</p>	<p>*teacher morale is LOW but not as low as some other locations</p> <p>*Most factors that are contributing to a low morale are issues not in the control of our administrators</p> <p>*District impacts the low morale *I think teachers feel untrusted and micromanaged. We are the ones putting in the long hours to</p>	<p>*Principal/Assistant Principal</p> <p>*Curriculum coaches</p> <p>*Each grade level has a team leader who meets monthly with admin and coaches to share information and make decisions when appropriate</p>	<p>*If it is a school level decision, our administrators do collect input and allow for us to incorporate school wide initiatives in ways that work best for our classrooms</p> <p>*We do not have a lot of say in the curriculum we teach which is impacting our autonomy to teach or present curriculum in a way that is engaging for our students.</p>	<p>*Low pay, overwhelming curriculum changes within a short amount of time, lack of communication from the district, and increasing behavior issues with lack of parent support or accountability</p> <p>*The requirement to follow a district curriculum with FIDELITY. These programs are not feasible in the time</p>

	<p>teach our children.</p> <p>*Given the freedom to help make decisions for these kids that we grow to love so much will increase the morale greatly.</p>		<p>* I would love more autonomy within the teaching profession. We spend the most time with our students and know the varying academic levels and learning styles within our classroom.</p> <p>*We may get the opportunity to provide input but the decision making is left to school officials</p>	<p>we have to teach them.</p> <p>*It often feels like the district does not take into account our opinions or concerns. Even when they do reach out for input, it often feels as if the decision is already made.</p> <p>*Curriculum and the amount of testing required.</p>
Wanda	<p>*teacher morale is upbeat and positive</p> <p>*morale comes from leaders being positive towards teachers/non-instructional staff</p> <p>*describes collective efficacy as the school coming together to work together as one team for the school</p> <p>*collaborate well together and come together in times of need to get things done</p> <p>*I think morale of teachers would increase more if autonomy because it would be a boost of confidence that they are trusted as teachers</p>	<p>*principal/assistant principal make decisions</p> <p>*may ask input from teachers, but not always the case</p>	<p>*get to make decisions about our classroom students</p> <p>*teachers should know what is best for their students</p> <p>*autonomy to impact students' learning and how they learn</p> <p>*don't have autonomy to impact the curriculum and standards</p> <p>*we do have autonomy to impact our school based on our communication and ability to work as a team</p>	<p>*we do not always get to use our educational background to make decisions about our students, instead we are told what to do</p> <p>*I wish we had more control over behavior and the curriculum we are required to teach</p>
Juliette	<p>*The morale is good. I am a new teacher so it helped me to attend a summer institute with my team so that I got know them.</p>	<p>*Principal/Assistant Principal</p> <p>*I can approach my administration and present ideas to them and sometimes those</p>	<p>*I was very limited on the decisions that I could make at the beginning of the year.</p> <p>*As time has gone on, I've learned to</p>	<p>*One of my roadblocks is being new to my job so I don't have a lot of experience in order to make decisions for my students.</p>

		<p>ideas are implemented. Not always.</p> <p>*There are committees that meet on campus and bring information to the rest of the group to discuss information.</p>	<p>just do what is best for my students and shut my door to what is right for my students.</p> <p>*We can have some decisions for things within our school such as what we would like to do for the PBiS celebrations.</p> <p>*I have power to decide how I teach my students and how to use the time within my block.</p> <p>*I have very little autonomy over the schedule of my classroom.</p> <p>*I was told that I MUST teach a certain way to help my students.</p> <p>I didn't get a lot of say in the instructional strategies.</p>	<p>*For a first year teacher, I had a lot of students with IEPs so it impacted the teaching in my classroom. I wasn't really sure how to present content to some of these students.</p>
--	--	---	---	---

Winter Elementary School

	Teacher Morale	Leadership Structure	Decision Making	Roadblocks
Rebecca	<p>*Teacher to teacher morale is great. Creating a school has helped bring teachers together for a common vision</p> <p>*Morale has been boosted</p>	<p>*Shared leadership team with 11 staff members and a principal</p> <p>*K-5 teams collaborate to make decisions about students, service learning, and teaching practices.</p>	<p>*We have a strong power to make decisions for our students (four out of four).</p> <p>*We have autonomy over the learning program,</p>	<p>*district directives and administration factor into inhibiting our autonomies.</p> <p>*misunderstanding and readiness of what it means to be teacher powered</p>

	<p>because of the ability to collaborate and communicate on a consistent basis</p> <p>*Teacher to administration morale is a little bit of a struggle. One factor that has led to this struggle is there not being a clear/common understanding of the administrator and teacher roles in teacher-powered.</p> <p>*Some decisions have been made without respecting the integrity of the decision making model in teacher-powered schools which has lead to some division among the staff.</p> <p>*I feel the morale of teachers would increase because they feel valued,</p>	<p>*We want and strive for all staff members to feel their voice has been heard and valued in the decision making process/model</p>	<p>assessments, daily schedule, and utilizing FTEs</p> <p>*I do not have a lot of autonomy around the budget and I do need work on/in this area.</p> <p>*Teachers are able to influence the K-5 collaboration time. We discuss honestly our beliefs, instructional strategies, and how they align.</p> <p>*I'd like more decision making authority around staffing processes, PD, and budget. These topics directly impact me as a professional and how I grow.</p>	<p>*transitions in district leadership</p>
--	---	---	---	--

	heard, believed in, and trusted.			
Maura	<p>*Teacher to teacher morale is strong and positive</p> <p>*Teacher to leadership morale is more of a struggle as we are trying to transition to teacher powered</p> <p>*Common goal/vision has brought the staff together</p> <p>*High level of collaboration has brought the staff closer together</p> <p>*If autonomies increased, teachers would continue to work hard and put students first. When teachers feel empowered they will go above and beyond to do what is best for the students.</p>	<p>*A shared leadership team focuses on the decisions that affect the entire school</p> <p>*K-5 teams/communities collaborate through genius hours</p> <p>*Strong desire to build systems for all students and teachers to exercise their voice and feel valued as a team member</p>	<p>*Follow a consensus protocol which allows for all voices to be heard</p> <p>*4 out of 4 when it comes to making decisions about students. School initiatives we are a 2 out of 4.</p> <p>*Autonomy to impact the learning program and assessments in our classroom and school.</p> <p>*Autonomy in scheduling and staffing patterns</p> <p>*We want to have more autonomy to improve schedules, professional development, and strengthening our learning program</p>	<p>*Struggle with leadership has been defining roles and who makes decisions for different things</p> <p>*District initiatives are a barrier</p> <p>*Working through and defining roles</p>
Julie	*Currently	*Typical school	*We have the	*District impacts

	<p>working on the teacher-powered model. Teachers like their voices being heard, which has impacted morale.</p> <p>*Principal is working on finding her role in the teacher powered model, which has had some impact on morale.</p> <p>*This school model was built by a group of 7 teachers who taught together at the school. We have worked really hard on a culture of trust so we talk openly and honestly about all topics.</p>	<p>with a principal, yet we are working towards a teacher powered school where decisions are shared among the principal and the staff members</p> <p>*Current format is a team of 11 members and a principal. We call it a shared leadership team.</p>	<p>autonomy with our schedule, some say in the hiring process, and we have worked very hard around the decisions dealing with curriculum.</p> <p>*We do not have a say when it comes to setting tenure policies and other district level initiatives.</p>	<p>our decision making. Since we are a part of the bigger school district, they still impact our autonomy and some of our decisions.</p> <p>*Top down decisions can be difficult to overcome.</p> <p>*People defining and understanding their roles in the teacher powered school.</p>
Susie	<p>*Teacher morale is GREAT because a group of teachers have been working together to launch a new school, working towards a common goal.</p>	<p>*Shared leadership represents the decision making team for the entire school. There is representation from all the different committees and K-5 teams.</p> <p>*Each K-5 team</p>	<p>*Our autonomy to impact decisions is STRONG. As a team we are able to look at the needs for each child and make decisions about</p>	<p>*Confusion of leadership roles and responsibilities</p> <p>*Support at the district level</p> <p>*Transitioning from one community to an entire school that</p>

	<p>*Morale has been impacted with the leadership of the school and teachers because of a lack of role definition. This has caused some spinning and many decisions not being able to be made.</p>	<p>collaborates on a weekly basis to make decisions about students, service learning, and teaching practices.</p>	<p>interventions and a learning environment that will be best. We take into consideration the whole child- academics and social emotional aspect (Service Learning).</p> <p>*We have complete autonomy over the instruction and curriculum of our classrooms. We do not have any autonomy to impact the hiring and firing of colleagues or leadership selection.</p> <p>*We want to increase our autonomy with professional development. If we receive more decision making power in this area, I feel confident in my ability to use it to make decisions that</p>	<p>is teacher-powered has been a challenge</p>
--	---	---	---	--

			will in turn help my students.	
Dolly	<p>*Everyone support everyone. We just had a meeting with district people and they shared about how hard we work and how everyone gets a long.</p> <p>*Strong collaboration both vertically and horizontally</p> <p>*Everyone from custodian, para, teacher, principal are there for the students. We come together to do what is right by kids every single day.</p> <p>*Whenever teacher has buy-in or has a say, I feel like their attitude with kids has increased. Everybody is working all the time and all teachers are involved.</p>	<p>*Shared leadership model that consists of 11 members including a principal</p> <p>*Topics shared during shared leadership come to the communities during genius hour. Teachers give input/voice and then it is taken back to shared leadership for final decision.</p> <p>*In addition there are other committees that teachers can be a part of like literacy, math, and culture/climate.</p>	<p>*We are always striving for more autonomy. However, when I talk with other schools we are most definitely leaps and bounds ahead of where other people are.</p> <p>*We get to choose about most of our PD, some hiring processes, schedule things.</p> <p>*We have HUGE autonomy over the learning program and how we group students to teach them.</p>	<p>*District directive still impact us since we are part of the district.</p> <p>*Changes in district leadership. We had a superintendent who supported the innovation and she has since left. New superintendent is budget heavy.</p> <p>*Student behaviors</p>
Reba	*We are all	*We have a	*Our	*Sometimes our

	<p>committed to supporting one another and doing what is best for students. A district level person came in and complimented us on our cohesion and ability to work together.</p> <p>*Trust in the leadership is still evolving, but I strive to stay out of that and focus on the positives.</p> <p>*I am committed to the evolution of this school. I know it's going to be challenging, but it will be worth it. Other teachers know the same so we work together.</p> <p>*I think once we solidify our model, morale will soar even more because the autonomy has increased.</p>	<p>principal and a shared leadership team with representatives from each community and some at large representatives.</p> <p>*Shared leadership team is designed to give more teachers a say and voice in decision making.</p> <p>*Most decisions are still principal made, but we are working towards a system where more decisions are teacher driven.</p> <p>*There is a decision making flow chart that ensures that teachers are able to be a part of the decision making within the school.</p> <p>*There are committees such as literacy, math, culture/climate that teachers can be a part of.</p>	<p>autonomies are majorly focused around the curriculum, learning program, and designing learning spaces.</p> <p>*We do have some autonomy over budget and personnel. I might have a little more input since I'm on the shared leadership team.</p>	<p>principal might inadvertently interfere with the decision making.</p> <p>*District systems that are in place or any initiative for which we are accountable to the district for.</p> <p>*Student behavior</p> <p>*When we were just one community it might have been a little easier. Transitioning to an entire school model has been a little bit of a struggle.</p>
--	--	--	---	---