AN EXPLORATION OF HOW TEACHER LEADERS PERCEIVE THEIR INFLUENCE ON STUDENT LEARNING: A TRANSCENDENTAL PHENOMENOLOGY OF THE EXPERIENCES OF TEACHER LEADERS

by

Allison A. Crum

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

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APPROVED BY:

Traci Eshelman, Ph.D. Committee Chair

Katelynn Wheeler, Ph.D. Committee Member

Abstract

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenology was to describe how teacher leaders perceive their influence on student learning at the primary and secondary levels at a K-12 charter school system. The theory guiding this study was social cognitive theory. The interpretive framework was social constructivism. The central research question was: How do teacher leaders describe how students learn under the leadership of teacher leaders? A qualitative transcendental phenomenology research design was employed, and the setting was the primary and secondary K-12 school levels. The sample size of 16 participants included both informal and formal teacher leaders at the elementary, middle school, and high school levels. Candidates qualified for participation via a screening survey (see Appendix D). Eligibility required a self-report score between 124-155 meaning the candidate qualified as a teacher leader. Data were triangulated through interviews, physical artifact discussions, and observations. Data analysis included Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phases of thematic analysis and Moustakas' (1994) epochè, transcendental phenomenological reduction, and imaginative variation. Results found that teacher leaders perceive their influence on student learning through transformative learning connections produced by connections and trust impacting student learning and changing student minds and behaviors.

Keywords: *teacher leadership, student learning, social cognitive theory, teacher attrition, student achievement, professional learning communities*

Copyright Page

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my heavenly Father who walked before me, held me, and sustained me for the journey.

I dedicate this dissertation to my husband who showed his true love for me in many ways throughout the years of this journey but mostly by supporting me with belief in my ability to succeed.

I dedicate this dissertation to my sons who cheered for me when I was down and understood when I could not participate.

I dedicate this dissertation to my parents who prepared me for this day by telling me I could be whatever I wanted to be.

I dedicate this dissertation to the teacher leaders everywhere who do what they do because of the students who love them.

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I would like to acknowledge my dissertation chair for her tireless dedication to me and the journey. Thank you for being an answer to prayer, Dr. Eshelman! I would like to acknowledge and thank my committee member, Dr. Wheeler for her time and dedication to higher education. I would like to acknowledge the Truth Seekers cohort for their collaboration, advice, prayers, and support. I would like to acknowledge the teacher leaders who participated in the research study for their willingness and support. Finally, I would like to acknowledge my colleagues and friends who supported me with understanding and compassion along the way.

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List of Abbreviations

Central Research Question (CRQ)

Chief Education Officer (CEO)

Chief Financial Officer (CFO)

Professional Growth Plan (PGP)

Professional Learning Community (PLC)

Social Cognitive Theory (SCT)

Sub-Question 1 (SQ1)

Sub-Question 2 (SQ2)

Sub-Question 3 (SQ3)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Teacher leadership is related to many positive outcomes, including job satisfaction for the teacher experiencing leadership and higher achievement for the students being led (Fernández Espinosa & López González, 2023). The words of Heather, a participant from the research study and teacher leader of eight years, perfectly support how teacher leadership generates positive results. Heather said, “It's easy to get overwhelmed and think, I'm done. This [notes from students] is a good reminder that I love my job, and it does make an impact. There's a good reason why I do what I do, and why I’m tired.” As a teacher leader, Heather experiences stress, but feedback from her students validates her decision not only to teach but to lead. Teacher leadership persists as a dedicated means of teacher empowerment, diffusion of principal burdens, and improvement of student achievement (Pan et al., 2023; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). The research study focuses on how teacher leaders perceive their influence on student learning at a K-12 charter school system in the Southeastern United States. The research study presented the theoretical framework of social cognitive theory (SCT) (Bandura, 1977a, 1986, 1997) with the research design of transcendental phenomenology. The study includes formal and informal teacher leaders in elementary, middle, and high school settings. The qualitative design of transcendental phenomenology was selected to explore the phenomena of teacher leadership through the description of lived experience, making meaning of the teacher leader's everyday experiences of student learning (van Manen, 1997). This chapter includes explanations of the historical, social, and theoretical contexts of teacher leadership, along with a clear articulation of the study's problem statement, purpose statement, and significance. This section includes the research questions, key definitions, and chapter summary.

Background

Historically, teacher leadership has evolved from quasi-administrative roles (Smylie et al., 2002) with minimal collaborative effort into whole-school collective reform movements supporting accountability initiatives impacting conditions within and outside the classroom (Nguyen et al., 2020; Wenner & Campbell, 2017). Socially, teacher leadership affects many stakeholders, including the teacher leader, students, and colleagues, as well as the success of school initiatives, including professional learning communities (PLCs) and overall school improvement (Nguyen et al., 2020; Wenner & Campbell, 2017; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Additionally, teacher leadership affects school climate and culture, often resulting in increased job satisfaction for both the teacher leader and peers (Bellibaş et al., 2021; Schott et al., 2020; Y. Liu et al., 2021). Theoretically, teacher leaders find motivation for leadership through the concepts and principles of the social cognitive theory (SCT) of self-efficacy and collective efficacy (Bandura, 1977a, 1986, 1997). SCT emphasizes the social environment in learning, making assumptions about how learning occurs through the reciprocal interactions among people, behaviors, and environments, including vicarious and enactive learning and self-regulation (Schunk, 2020).

Historical Context

Teacher leadership has grown in popularity due to its powerful influence on educational stakeholders, including teacher leaders and overall school reform (Bellibaş et al., 2021; Sawalhi & Chaaban, 2022; T. Wang et al., 2022). Beginning in the 1900s (Smylie et al., 2002) with the call for a democratic education and teacher embracement and dissemination of democratic knowledge (Smith, 2020), teacher leadership existed as the embodiment of democracy within school organization and governance (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). As a means of school reform in

the 1980s, one of the many goals of teacher leadership was to professionalize teaching by activating the classroom teacher as a leader (Smylie et al., 2002; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Professionalizing teachers aimed to increase teacher retention by empowering teachers and supporting over-burdened school administrators (Smylie et al., 2002; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). At the turn of the century, teacher leadership shifted from informal roles and individual recognition and improvement to a collective power affecting a greater audience of stakeholders and solidifying the power of teacher leadership regarding school reform (Smylie et al., 2002).

Moreover, with the rise and constancy of school accountability measures such as No Child Left Behind and Every Student Succeeds Act (Smith, 2020), teacher leadership provided a distributed means for meeting the impossible demands of testing measures seeking continued improvement in school performance and answers to teacher attrition (Hallinger et al., 2020). Through distributed leadership, teacher leadership occurs often at the organizational level (Spillane, 2005). Distributed leadership increases internal capacity, resulting in shared influence between school administration and teachers (Sawalhi & Chaaban, 2022). Consequently, teacher leadership remains central to school reform efforts, placing it at the center of much educational leadership research. Due to the emphasis on teacher leadership in educational reform and educational leadership, York-Barr and Duke (2004) reviewed the literature on teacher leadership, seeking to extrapolate what is known about the concept, reporting little clarity or application of theory. Also, the research addressed the absence of a definition and a lack of exploration between teacher leadership and student learning.

The lack of conceptualization, empiricism, and understanding of the paths of influence of teacher leadership related to student learning provoked further research by Wenner and Campbell (2017) and later by Nguyen et al. (2020). Although at least 12 years have passed since York-Barr

and Duke's seminal research and Wenner and Campbell's research in 2017, the two studies are similar. Wenner and Campbell (2017) reported a need for a standard definition, robust data, and empiricism lest teacher leadership fail to realize its potential. Accordingly, Nguyen et al. (2020), 15 years after York-Barr and Duke (2004), reported ambiguity surrounding the definition of teacher leadership, an absence of theory and empiricism, thereby calling for more sophisticated and methodological research on the concept of teacher leadership and its influence and effects on student outcomes.

Social Context

The practice of teacher leadership affects the educational process on many levels (Nguyen et al., 2020), both directly and indirectly, through the influence of the teacher leadership role on self, peers, students, parents, and administration (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Teacher leadership affects the teacher leader directly through pedagogical excellence (Harris & Jones, 2019) within the classroom gained by leading students and peers toward improvement (Shen et al., 2020). The teacher leader is influenced by the recognition of school administration and appointment to the position of leader, creating the experience of increased self-agency and self-efficacy (Nguyen et al., 2020), often resulting in increased job satisfaction and teacher retention (Schott et al., 2020). Furthermore, teacher leadership directly affects the teacher leader's peers by influencing teacher learning and pedagogical excellence via mentorship and professional development (Nerlino, 2020; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Teacher leadership also indirectly contributes to the collective efficacy (Bandura, 2000) of peers and colleagues through distributed leadership (P. Liu, 2021; T. Wang et al., 2022).

Teacher leaders' attitudes and views aid students' and parents' educational journeys (Yalçın & Çoban, 2023). Teacher leadership also creates pedagogical excellence (Harris &

Jones, 2019) through instructional practices within the classroom and beyond its four walls (Nerlino, 2020). As teacher leadership influences classroom learning, so does it influence learning and school effectiveness (Polatcan et al., 2021). Furthermore, school leadership reflects teacher leadership by distributing influence, decreasing the principal's workload, and lending teacher voice to instructional and schoolwide policies (Yalçın & Çoban, 2023). Teacher leadership holds significant power through human and social capital (Nguyen et al., 2020) via relationships with peers, students, parents, and administration. Due to this influence, continued research on teacher leadership benefits a large audience with the possibility of positive change regarding teacher retention, student learning, and overall school effectiveness.

Theoretical Context

Teacher leadership has been widely investigated through educational research within the last 20 years (Nguyen et al., 2020). Nevertheless, the research rarely extends the practice of teacher leadership due to the continuing problem of a paucity of theory (Nerlino, 2020; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Since its conception in the 1900s (Smylie et al., 2002), teacher leadership has involved many theories, including instructional theory, transformational theory (V. Robinson & E. Gray, 2019), and distributed leadership theory (Gronn, 2008; Spillane, 2005). However, no definitive work exists on teacher leadership theory (Wenner & Campbell, 2017). The seminal work by York-Barr and Duke (2004) proposed a conceptual framework supporting a theory of action for teacher leadership. Yet, few studies extended the conceptual framework (Nguyen et al., 2020).

Extant literature remains atheoretical, with few studies extending the research base (Berg & Zoellick, 2019; Nerlino, 2020; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). With only 46% of educational leadership since the 2010s mentioning theory, the application of theory seems optional within the

field, so the goal of the research study was to make a substantive theoretical contribution by extending the existing educational leadership research (McGinity et al., 2022; Pan et al., 2023) through the theoretical framework of SCT with a focus on efficacy including but not limited to research by, Bandura (1986), Hoogsteen (2020), Shen et al. (2020), Schunk (2020), Shafiee and Ghani (2022), Y. Liu et al. (2021). Therefore, to extend the intellectual structure of the teacher leadership knowledge base (Pan et al., 2023), SCT is the theoretical context framing the transcendental phenomenology with its relationship to efficacy.

Viewing the experience of teacher leaders through the lens of Bandura's SCT refines the existing field of knowledge by extending understanding regarding the path of influence on student learning exhibited by teacher leadership through the perspective of motivation. SCT primarily revolves around motivation that initiates and sustains activities supporting achieving goals (Kasalak & Dağyar, 2020) influencing teachers' relations with students (Zakariya, 2020). Self-efficacy is a teacher's belief in their ability to form relationships with students, initiating paths of influence (De Coninck et al., 2020). Additionally, studies have shown that teachers with higher self-efficacy form closer relationships with less conflict with students (Yin et al., 2022). Furthermore, through observational learning, SCT promotes modeling behaviors for observation (Bandura, 2000). SCT modeling places the teacher as a role model for colleagues and students, creating additional paths of influence and learning (P. Chen et al., 2022).

Problem Statement

The problem is that student achievement at the primary and secondary school levels remains low due to the mitigating effects of recent school closures and teacher attrition (Lovett, 2023; Pineda-Báez et al., 2020; Shen et al., 2020). In the 1980s, educational leaders introduced teacher leadership to solve the untenable demands of rising accountability measures and school

reform (Amels et al., 2021; Hallinger et al., 2020; Shen et al., 2020). Four decades later, teacher leadership remains a viable solution to school reform issues such as student achievement and teacher attrition. Nevertheless, the concept has not reached its full potential due to many impediments, including too many gaps in the literature regarding the positive outcomes of teacher leadership, such as understanding how students learn under the leadership of teacher leaders (Nguyen et al., 2020; Schott et al., 2020; Shen et al., 2020) and understanding how teacher leadership increases job satisfaction and teacher retention (Gordon et al., 2021; Y. Liu et al., 2021; Nerlino, 2020; Schott et al., 2020). The volume of teacher leadership studies has steadily increased (Hallinger et al., 2020; Nguyen et al., 2020; Shen et al., 2020), and the positive outcomes concomitant with teacher leadership (Schott et al., 2020) have multiplied. Yet the general focus of extant literature resides on the antecedents and outcomes of teacher leadership mostly at the organizational level (Nguyen et al., 2020; Pan et al., 2023; Shen et al., 2020; York-Barr & Duke, 2004), including focus on formal teacher leadership and social and human capital (Gordon et al., 2021; Nguyen et al., 2020; York-Barr & Duke, 2004) and distributed leadership (Pan & Chen, 2021) rather than the exploration of the influence of teacher leadership (Nguyen et al., 2020) at the classroom level concerning student learning. Teacher leadership within the classroom is normative (York-Barr & Duke, 2004), including the facilitation of improvement in curriculum and instruction (Shen et al., 2020).

Nevertheless, normal instructional activities in the classroom do not constitute teacher leadership as defined in the literature because most seminal definitions of teacher leadership include leadership outside of the school (Nguyen et al., 2020; Wenner & Campbell, 2017; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Additionally, teacher leadership at the classroom level includes quality teacher collaboration, participation of teachers in professional working environments, and the

exercise of instructional leadership by teachers (Supovitz & Comstock, 2023; Wenner & Campbell, 2017; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Further empirical research about student learning under the leadership of teacher leaders is necessary to define existing gaps in the literature, maximize school reform efforts, and fully understand the value of teacher leadership (McGinity et al., 2022; Nerlino, 2020). When teacher leadership places the teacher leader as a facilitator of work focused on the classroom level as opposed to the organizational level with the improvement of curriculum and instruction at the center, student learning is positively impacted (Harris, 2005; Shen et al., 2020). Nevertheless, how students learn under the leadership of teacher leaders is far from established (York-Barr & Duke, 2004) and further confounded by the lack of a standard definition of teacher leadership, creating difficulty for measurement and analysis (Wenner & Campbell, 2017; York-Barr & Duke, 2004) supporting the value of teacher leadership relating to student learning and overall school reform. The lack of common language related to teacher leadership interferes with the determination of what equals teacher leadership and what teacher leadership accomplishes (Berg & Zoellick, 2019), thereby diminishing the value of teacher leadership and impeding the potential of teacher leadership for school reform. However, teacher leadership work focusing on classroom-level practice shows student effects more readily supporting a condensed and operational definition of teacher leadership (Nguyen et al., 2020; Shen et al., 2020). This transcendental phenomenology exploring the experiences of teacher leaders was necessary to extend the current body of literature and strengthen school reform efforts by filling the gap represented by the lack of understanding concerning how students learn under the leadership of teacher leaders (Nguyen et al., 2020; Schott et al., 2020; Shen et al., 2020; Wenner & Campbell, 2017; York-Barr & Duke, 2004).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to explore how teacher leaders perceive their influence on student learning for K-12 teachers at a K-12 charter school system in rural Southeastern United States. Teacher leadership is defined as the individual or collective manner by which teachers influence peers, principals, students, and stakeholders improving instructional practices to increase student achievement (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). The theory framing this study is Bandura's social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1977a, 1986, 1997; Schunk, 2020).

Significance of the Study

Teacher leadership, regardless of the ambiguity surrounding its definition and other obstacles reported in the extant literature, involves the influence of teachers on students (Nguyen et al., 2020; Wenner & Campbell, 2017; York-Barr & Duke, 2004), the primary group upon which leadership occurs. The power of an effective teacher on student learning is more significant than all other school-level factors, including short-term achievement and long-term outcomes (Lee, 2022). Therefore, the theoretical significance of the research study was SCT due to the influence exhibited through teacher leadership and motivation promoting behavior achieving goals (Schunk et al., 2014). The empirical significance of the study was to fill a gap in the existing literature by exploring the experiences of teacher leaders' paths of influence related to student learning. This research study's practical significance was effectively operationalizing teacher leadership within the K-12 charter school system and maximizing student learning through teacher leadership.

Theoretical

The theoretical significance of the research study was to add the application of theory to teacher leadership research through the lens of SCT. A significant impediment to the

effectiveness of teacher leadership is teacher autonomy and the closed door whereby teachers remain isolated (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Therefore, conceptualizing teacher leadership via SCT (Bandura, 1977a, 1986, 1997) opens the door to increased stakeholder decision-making (Hallinger et al., 2020; Pan & Chen, 2021) through social behaviors such as modeling and related methods of motivation such as collective efficacy (Goddard et al., 2021). SCT includes perceived self-efficacy related to a personal sense of agency and activating and sustaining goal-oriented behaviors (Schunk, 2020). Self-efficacy relates to job satisfaction and persistence behaviors related to challenging situations affecting teachers' commitment, practices, and teaching behaviors (Marcionetti & Castelli, 2023).

Additionally, SCT includes the concept of collective efficacy, the promotion of collective impact through teachers' shared belief regarding instructional ability, which promotes collective efficacy (Bandura, 1997; Hoogsteen, 2020) a theory known to relate to student learning (Gordon et al., 2021). Moreover, the study contributes to the theoretical underpinnings of the problem by connecting existing SCT of motivation for learning to existing evidence of teacher leadership (Ford et al., 2020). Existing teacher leadership literature is atheoretical (Ford et al., 2020; McGinity et al., 2022), so viewing teacher leadership through SCT extends and refines the existing knowledge base.

Empirical

The empirical significance of the research study was to fill a gap in the current research by exploring the experiences of teacher leaders related to student learning (Nguyen et al., 2020; Wenner & Campbell, 2017; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Although much research into educational leadership and teacher leadership has occurred recently, empiricism and theory attribution require additional work (McGinity et al., 2022). Moreover, the conceptual ambiguity of the term

teacher leadership creates confusion, resulting in the lack of a common language, thus perpetuating limitations to theory building. The ambiguity surrounding the term teacher leadership negatively impacts the enabling of the identification of paths of influence through the textural and structural descriptions (Moustakas, 1994) of teacher leadership (Berg & Zoellick, 2019). Furthermore, the relationship between teacher leadership and student learning requires additional exploration to determine how teacher leaders address student learning, for example, by improving curriculum and classroom instruction (Shen et al., 2020). Additionally, teacher leadership research remains rife with high variance and lacks systematic approaches and methodological quality (Schott et al., 2020), resulting in little scientific knowledge advancement since York-Barr and Duke (2004). It is imperative that methodologically sophisticated studies exploring the experience of teacher leaders and their paths of influence related to student learning occur (Nguyen et al., 2020; Schott et al., 2020; Shen et al., 2020).

Practical

The practical significance of the research study was to effectively operationalize teacher leadership within the five-school organization Charter Academy, Inc., to maximize influence on student learning. Through the exploration of the experiences of teacher leaders and the paths of influence related to student learning, this research study examined the experiences of teacher leaders and their paths of influence to operationalize and condense the definition and role of the teacher leader (Nguyen et al., 2020). The study sought to understand the influence of teacher leadership to impact the greater audience of primary and secondary schools utilizing teacher leadership for school reform targeting improved student learning (Nguyen et al., 2020; Wenner & Campbell, 2017; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). The significance of the scientific knowledge gained by this research study on understanding how students learn under the leadership of

teacher leaders implicitly regards the individual teacher leader (Smylie et al., 2002) and the larger school community through the collective empowerment and activation of teachers (Nerlino, 2020) influencing lasting relationships on student learning (Harris & Jones, 2019). The exploration of the experiences of teacher leaders and the paths of influence related to student learning supports the identification of a generalizable, condensed, and operational definition of teacher leadership (Nguyen et al., 2020; Wenner & Campbell, 2017; York-Barr & Duke, 2004) through the descriptions acquired through qualitative transcendental phenomenology.

Research Questions

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to explore how teacher leaders perceive their influence on student learning for K-12 teachers at a K-12 charter school system in rural Southeastern United States. Formal and informal teacher leaders participated in the research study. One central research question and three sub-questions were created to explore the phenomenon.

Central Research Question

How do teacher leaders perceive their influence on student learning?

Sub-Question 1

How do teacher leaders perceive themselves as agents controlling events affecting learning outcomes?

Sub-Question 2

How do teacher leaders describe their experiences with self-efficacy?

Sub-Question 3

What experiences do teacher leaders have with collective efficacy and student learning?

Definitions

The following list of terms are included in the study and defined here for the reader's ease of understanding.

1. *Collective efficacy* - The group's shared belief regarding their ability to achieve a desired end regardless of obstacles (Bandura, 1997).
2. *Formal teacher leader* - A teacher with a position or title such as team leader or department chair as seen in a career ladder or hierarchy of power and authority selected by administration (Oppi et al., 2023; Pineda-Báez et al., 2020; Reid et al., 2022)
3. *Informal teacher leader* - A teacher without an official leadership title who exerts influence on their peers and school community through self-initiative (Oppi et al., 2023; Pineda-Báez et al., 2020).
4. *Professional learning community* - Communities of practice supporting sustainable school improvements through building professional skill and capacity (Harris, 2005).
5. *Self-agency* - One's desire to control life events and perception of being an agent (Bandura, 1997).
6. *Self-efficacy* - Personal beliefs concerning one's capabilities to organize and implement actions necessary to learn or perform behaviors at designated levels (Bandura, 1977a, 1986, 1997; Schunk, 2020).
7. *Social cognitive theory* - SCT emphasizes the social environment in learning making assumptions about how learning occurs through the reciprocal interactions among people, behaviors, and environments including vicarious and enactive learning and self-regulation (Bandura, 1986; Schunk, 2020).

8. *Teacher leadership* - The individual or collective manner by which teachers influence peers, principals, students, and stakeholders improving instructional practices to increase student achievement (York-Barr & Duke, 2004).

Summary

The problem addressed by the study was that student achievement at the primary and secondary school levels remains low due to the mitigating effects of recent school closures and teacher attrition (Lovett, 2023; Pineda-Báez et al., 2020; Shen et al., 2020). In the 1980s, educational leaders introduced teacher leadership to solve the untenable demands of rising accountability measures and school reform (Amels et al., 2021; Hallinger et al., 2020; Shen et al., 2020). Four decades later, teacher leadership remains a viable solution to school reform issues such as student achievement and teacher attrition. Nevertheless, the concept has not reached its full potential due to many impediments, including too many gaps in the literature regarding the positive outcomes of teacher leadership, such as understanding how students learn under the leadership of teacher leaders (Nguyen et al., 2020; Schott et al., 2020; Shen et al., 2020) and understanding how teacher leadership increases job satisfaction and teacher retention (Gordon et al., 2021; Y. Liu et al., 2021; Nerlino, 2020; Schott et al., 2020). Research within the field of educational leadership continues to explore the concept of teacher leadership because of its potential positive influence on peers, students, and stakeholders (Nguyen et al., 2020; Wenner & Campbell, 2017; York-Barr & Duke, 2004), making it a worthy endeavor. The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to explore how teacher leaders perceive their influence on student learning for K-12 teachers at a K-12 charter school system in rural Southeastern United States. At this stage in the research, teacher leadership will be generally defined as the individual or collective manner by which teachers influence peers, principals, students, and

stakeholders improving instructional practices to increase student achievement (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). The theory framing this study is Bandura's social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1977a, 1986, 1997; Schunk, 2020).

The ambiguity surrounding the definition of teacher leadership warrants clarification to extend the field of educational research and support the practical application of the concept at the school level (Nguyen et al., 2020; Wenner & Campbell, 2017; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Teacher leadership research holds high variance, calling for systematic approaches and methodological quality (Schott et al., 2020). The ambiguous definition of teacher leadership and unknown paths of influence of teacher leadership (Morris et al., 2020), along with questionable research practices, stymies the extension and refinement of teacher leadership research (Berg & Zoellick, 2019; Nguyen et al., 2020). The relationship between teacher leadership and student achievement remains to be determined (Schott et al., 2020; Shen et al., 2020). Therefore, the goal of this research study was to explore the experiences of teacher leadership related to student learning through the lens of SCT (Bandura, 1986) with sound research practice and quality, thereby advancing the field of teacher leadership research (Hallinger et al., 2020; McGinity et al., 2022; Schott et al., 2020).

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to explore how teacher leaders perceive their influence on student learning for K-12 teachers at a K-12 charter school system in rural Southeastern United States. At this stage in the research, teacher leadership will be generally defined as the individual or collective manner by which teachers influence peers, principals, students, and stakeholders improving instructional practices to increase student achievement (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). The theory framing this study is Bandura's social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1977a, 1986, 1997; Schunk, 2020). Following the theoretical framework, a synthesis of the relevant and scholarly literature surrounding teacher leadership occurs. The related literature section includes an in-depth look at distributive leadership as a positive antecedent of teacher leadership (Hallinger et al., 2020) and collective and self-efficacy as positive outcomes of teacher leadership at the organizational level (Bandura, 2000; Bellibaş et al., 2021; Y. Liu et al., 2021). The related literature section explains the need for a common language describing teacher leadership and explores the myriads of definitions and dimensions of teacher leadership (Bellibaş et al., 2021; Berg & Zoellick, 2019; Nguyen et al., 2020; T. Wang et al., 2022) and the informal and formal roles of teacher leaders (Hallinger & Kovačević, 2022; Oppi et al., 2023; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Next, the section explores accountability measures and challenges to teacher leadership, including the role's duality (Nerlino, 2020). Finally, this section includes an analysis of the influence of teacher leadership and ends with a look into teacher leadership and student learning, addressing learning loss and teacher attrition (Perryman & Calvert, 2020; Shen et al., 2020).

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this transcendental phenomenology was SCT, defined by Bandura (1986) and Schunk (2020), due to its explanation of how learning occurs within social environments through the reciprocal interactions among people and behaviors, including vicarious and enactive learning and self-regulation (Bandura, 1986; Schunk, 2020). SCT includes reciprocal interactions such as self-agency, modeling processes, motivational processes, self-efficacy, and collective efficacy (Schunk, 2020). Overall, SCT provides the framework in which these factors operate as part of social influence and the internal and external components of social reinforcement (Xie et al., 2019) integral to the environments created by teacher leadership. With continued attention given to teacher leadership and the prevalence of atheoretical literature and empirical research, future research on teacher leadership must remain grounded in theory and empiricism (Smylie & Eckert, 2018; Wenner & Campbell, 2017; York-Barr & Duke, 2004).

According to Bandura's SCT, learning occurs in social environments like the classroom through observing others model behavior and demonstrating skills (Schunk, 2020). A central tenet in Bandura's work is the individual's desire to exert personal influence on motivational processes over life events by exhibiting a sense of agency through cognitive and self-regulative capabilities (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020). Bandura's comprehensive theory regarding observational learning encompasses principles occurring within motivation and personal and social influence and is often applied to educational research (Schunk, 2020).

SCT promotes reciprocal actions occurring internally and externally between the personal, behavioral, and environmental processes (Schunk, 2020). Personal processes of influence include one's beliefs, perceptions, and emotions. Behavioral processes of influence include motivational outcomes such as effort, persistence, and achievement. Environmental processes of influences include socially modeled influences affecting the motivation of learners

(Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020). The central tenet of SCT is perceived self-efficacy, personal beliefs concerning one's capabilities to organize and implement actions necessary to learn or perform behaviors at designated levels (Bandura, 1977a, 1986, 1997; Schunk, 2020). Self-efficacy promotes a sense of agency related to one's ability to influence or control essential life outcomes (Bandura, 1977a, 2000). Research reports a positive relationship between self-efficacy and student achievement and positive behavior outcomes at the organizational level related to teacher leadership, such as adaptability, idea generation, and job performance due to job satisfaction (Cansoy et al., 2022).

Bandura believed learning to be enactive, learning by doing, and vicarious, learning by observing with a focus on behavioral consequences as sources of motivation. Moreover, SCT maintains that people strive to understand and exhibit valued and desirable behavior with favorable consequences rather than punishable and unsatisfactory behavior, emphasizing cognition instead of consequences (Schunk, 2020). Further, SCT recognizes the dependability of factors like motivation, interest, incentive to performance, social pressure, and reinforcement in determining performance. Other fundamental tenets of SCT are perceived self-efficacy, self-agency, self-regulation, whereby a person acts as an agent controlling events affecting their life, and collective efficacy (Schunk, 2020). In consideration of the influence of teacher leaders on peers, principals, students, and stakeholders (York-Barr & Duke, 2004), viewing the experiences of teacher leaders through the lens of SCT informs the research base by exploring the concept of teacher leadership through the exercise of personal influence, thereby adding theoretical research to a largely atheoretical field (Berg & Zoellick, 2019; Nerlino, 2020).

Related Literature

The literature review has many purposes, including analyzing and synthesizing research related to a topic, determining existing gaps, and developing a solid understanding of the topic (Koons et al., 2019; Paul & Criado, 2020; Snyder, 2019). Although teacher leadership remains popular in educational leadership, how teacher leaders describe how students learn under the leadership of teacher leaders remains misunderstood (Nguyen et al., 2020; Schott et al., 2020; Shen et al., 2020; Wenner & Campbell, 2017; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). This literature review presents a synthesis of the existing knowledge surrounding teacher leadership and addresses the gap in the literature regarding understanding how students learn under the leadership of teacher leaders (Shen et al., 2020).

A Positive Antecedent of Teacher Leadership

As one of the most popular methods of educational leadership and empowerment of teachers (Gordon et al., 2021; Pineda-Báez et al., 2020), teacher leadership occurs most often at the organizational level through distributed leadership, placing teachers in the position of school leaders (Hallinger et al., 2020). Within distributed leadership, teacher leaders collaborate with the school administration in a shared role (Spillane, 2005). Distributed leadership is a leadership perspective focusing on the practice and acts of individual leaders and followers within a system (Spillane, 2005). The distribution or disbursement of authority among a school staff instead of centralized authority displays positive and effective outcomes (DeMarco & Gutmore, 2021; Hallinger & Kovačević, 2022; Harris et al., 2022; Smylie & Eckert, 2018). This view differs from others, focusing on interdependent rather than independent actions, allowing multiple leaders to operate within an organization and improving opportunities for change (Hallinger & Kovačević, 2022; Harris et al., 2022; Shen et al., 2020). Distributed leadership, an inclusive

model, supports the collective nature of school leadership instead of more formally recognized, hierarchical, and dedicated leadership roles (York-Barr & Duke, 2004).

Within schools, teacher leadership assumes the perspective of distributed leadership through the collective action of teachers exhibiting leadership to achieve increased teacher empowerment and overall organization and individual improvement (Shen et al., 2020). Distributed leadership through teacher leadership can strengthen the school's collaborative culture, a precondition of school improvement (Oppi et al., 2023; Vangrieken & Kyndt, 2020). However, of the studies on teacher leadership published between 2004 and 2013, 20% apply knowledge drawn from distributed leadership to inform the studies, making distributed leadership an essential conceptual framework for teacher leadership yet preventing the field from moving forward in a unified way (Schott et al., 2020). Moreover, research studies need to agree upon the impact of distributed leadership on performance outcomes, stating inconsistency within organizational change and calling for further study of how leadership is distributed rather than simply distributing leadership (Harris et al., 2022). Extant research aims to gain additional evidence regarding the outcomes of teacher leadership on instructional practice, student learning, and organizational change (Smylie & Eckert, 2018). A further area of concern related to distributed leadership is the potential adverse outcomes of teacher leadership due to the dispersion of responsibility creating invisibility of the lines of authority, resulting in an increased lack of mutual trust and relationship, producing reduced stability and security among staff (Harris, 2003, 2005). Notwithstanding, extant literature also reported current empirical evidence of successful teacher leadership via distributive leadership (Y. Liu et al., 2021; Shen et al., 2020). Most noteworthy among the positive outcomes of distributed leadership is increased job satisfaction and teacher self-efficacy (Bellibaş et al., 2021; Muijs & Harris, 2003).

Distributed leadership removes the exclusivity of leadership roles related to hierarchy and character traits and instead rightly focuses on teachers' collective and integrative acts of leadership (Mifsud, 2023; Spillane, 2005). Distributed leadership involves both formal and informal teacher leaders taking responsibility for a variety of school tasks (Spillane, 2005; Supovitz & Comstock, 2023), yet the principal cannot be removed from the implementation and effectiveness of distributed leadership (Hallinger & Kovačević, 2022; Spillane, 2005). With the allowance and support of leaders, distributed leadership produces highly effective instructional capacity (Leithwood et al., 2020; Mifsud, 2023) through collaboration and teacher autonomy with initiatives related to professional development and school reform (T. Wang et al., 2022). Nevertheless, there is more evidence regarding the outcomes of distributed leadership on student learning outcomes (V. Robinson & E. Gray, 2019; Smylie & Eckert, 2018) and the challenges that arise for teachers placed in leadership roles (Morris et al., 2020).

Distributed leadership exists through informal and formal leadership roles at multiple levels, supporting the engagement of complex systems through collaborative networks (Lumby, 2019) and promoting the disbandment of hierarchy through shared leadership, responsibility, and authority (Pan et al., 2023). Nevertheless, hierarchy, like distributed leadership, also includes leadership at many levels (Lumby, 2019). This ambiguity questions distributed leadership's authenticity and application in the educational setting. As the answer to the power differential within one-person hierarchies (Harris, 2003), like the principal-led school, distributed leadership bodes well as a system empowering teachers through democratic methods of shared authority (Y. Liu et al., 2021; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). However, a closer look at the research reveals troubling and contradictory evidence (Harris, 2003; Lumby, 2019), such as the pervasive lack of shared authority and severe limitations to teacher empowerment. A significant impediment to

authentic distributed leadership is the principal's failure and unwillingness to distribute authority and share responsibility (Harris, 2003; Woo et al., 2022), a factor embedded within educational leadership as teachers, even teachers within distributed leadership systems, continually look to principals to retain authority and provide vision and direction (Nerlino, 2020; Oppi et al., 2023). Additional barriers to authentic distributed leadership reside within the limitation of teacher empowerment due to a lack of focus on teaching and learning (Y. Liu et al., 2021) and ubiquitous egalitarianism producing isolationism (Nerlino, 2020; York-Barr & Duke, 2004), all leading to low teacher morale and teacher attrition to which teacher leadership is indispensable (Conan Simpson, 2021; Ismail & Jarrah, 2019).

Additional criticism of distributed leadership exists because of the normative nature of the research and the lack of empirical data (Leithwood et al., 2020). Criticism for teacher leadership also exists in this regard, most notably the lack of empirical analyses related to the enactment and influence of teacher leaders (Nguyen et al., 2020). The teacher-leader role, central to the success of distributed leadership, needs to be developed and defined clearly (Wenner & Campbell, 2017; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Much of what passes for normative teacher actions, roles, and responsibilities, such as leading students and conducting professional development for colleagues, has been universally attributed to leadership (Sawalhi & Chaaban, 2022). Therefore, for teacher leadership to grow in legitimacy, research into informal and formal teacher leadership, rather than distributed leadership, and its influence on school and student outcomes remains integral (McGinity et al., 2022; Nguyen et al., 2020; Wenner & Campbell, 2017; York-Barr & Duke, 2004).

Positive Outcomes of Teacher Leadership

The distributed leadership concepts of collective action and influence partner well with significant features of SCT, the theoretical framework for this study (Bandura, 1977a, 1986, 1997). These significant features of the theory include self-efficacy and collective efficacy (Bandura, 2000; Bellibaş et al., 2021; Y. Liu et al., 2021). Collective efficacy occurs when the perceptions of teachers in a school believe they are capable, as a whole faculty, to exact positive effects on students (Goddard et al., 2000). SCT reports that high levels of collective efficacy produce organizational commitment, increased group performance, teacher empowerment for instructional decisions, and increased student achievement (Goddard et al., 2021). Additionally, relevant to this study is research reporting teacher leadership relative to the task of exhibiting influence on essential school decisions as a prerequisite for collective teacher efficacy, producing a healthy relationship between teacher leadership, collective teacher efficacy, and teacher influence (Donohoo et al., 2020).

Collective efficacy extends personal agency (Bandura, 1986), the idea that individuals produce and shape events. The extension of personal agency results in the shared belief of a group of people that they can utilize their collective power to achieve goals. Within this construct, collective efficacy is not the sum of efficacy beliefs, but the combined interdependent level of efficacy shared by all members. In this manner, all members unite to achieve goals (Bandura, 2000), making collective efficacy more strongly related to student achievement than all student and school demographic variables (Goddard et al., 2021). Collective efficacy produces improved teacher attitudes and patterns of participation regarding professional learning (Y. Liu et al., 2022). Therefore, collective efficacy makes schools successful, whereas self-efficacy makes individual teachers successful (De Jong et al., 2022).

Unlike collective efficacy, self-efficacy refers to a person's individual and future beliefs (Khan et al., 2024) about holding the ability level to effect change and create desired outcomes (Bandura, 1977a). Teacher self-efficacy pertains to an individual teacher's belief about the innate ability to produce desired outcomes in student learning and engagement (Shafiee & Ghani, 2022). Efficacious individuals visualize successful outcomes when facing challenges. Subsequently, the literature reveals a connection between the leadership of teachers and perceived self-efficacy, positing that teachers with a greater sense of perceived self-efficacy are more active in teacher leadership (Bellibaş et al., 2024; Kılınç et al., 2021). Conversely, teacher leadership induces greater self-esteem and self-efficacy in the teacher experiencing leadership (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 1996, 2009), resulting in increased morale and other positive outcomes (Fernández & López, 2023; King & Holland, 2022).

A teacher's sense of self-efficacy has significant outcomes for teachers and students (Yada et al., 2022). Efficacious teachers make innovative and collaborative instructional decisions that benefit student learning and increase student efficacy, leading to higher student achievement (Goddard et al., 2021). Additionally, teacher self-efficacy is positively related to student motivation through instructional practices (Schiefele & Schaffner, 2015), with a significant relationship between teacher self-efficacy and student achievement (Yoon & Goddard, 2023). Teacher outcomes related to teacher self-efficacy include resilience when faced with burnout and emotional exhaustion and a positive relationship between teacher self-efficacy and job satisfaction (Yoon & Goddard, 2023). Both collective efficacy and self-efficacy positively correlate with teaching and teacher leadership (Donohoo et al., 2020).

Furthermore, SCT explains that enactive experiences, learning by doing, and leadership by teachers are highly influential components supporting efficacious beliefs in students and

teachers (Bandura, 1997; Goddard et al., 2021). Should only one member or teacher have greater self-efficacy, collective efficacy is not greater. When school faculties believe in their collective ability to impact students' learning, the effect is robust for academic achievement (Goddard et al., 2000). Extant literature expressed the strong relationship between teacher leaders experiencing teacher self-efficacy and collective efficacy and student learning and achievement (Bellibaş et al., 2021; Goddard et al., 2000; Hoogsteen, 2020). Notably, collective teacher efficacy indirectly influences student achievement via teacher-selected instructional methods and behavior; conversely, learning loss occurs with poor teacher leadership relating to instructional capacity and choice (Öqvist & Malmström, 2018).

The degree of collective efficacy belief among teachers predicts student learning differences (Goddard et al., 2021; Sun et al., 2023). Teacher leadership and collective efficacy influence teacher and student motivation (Çoban et al., 2023), motivating teachers to persist when challenged and exhibiting resiliency toward reaching collective goals like those promoted in school reform efforts (Goddard et al., 2021). Moreover, school leadership promoting collective efficacy influences overall school effectiveness by impacting students' low motivation and behavioral problems (Cansoy et al., 2022). Teacher leaders experiencing a sense of shared identity and collective efficacy retain the power to positively impact the school and individual students (P. Liu, 2021). The power of collective teacher efficacy influence extends to teacher beliefs in the school's goals and values, encouraging teachers to commit to their educational institutions leading to retention (Hosseingholizadeh et al., 2023; Qadach et al., 2020).

Teacher self-efficacy predicts student achievement and maintains that teachers with greater teaching experience have higher self-efficacy (Schunk, 2020). However, research indicates that years of experience do not significantly impact teacher self-efficacy (Çoban et al.,

2023). Teacher leadership and well-supported teacher collaboration significantly impact teacher self-efficacy and collective efficacy (Çoban et al., 2023).

Collective efficacy occurs within departments and grade-level teams of experienced teachers under the direction of an invested principal focused on instruction and improvement (Çoban et al., 2023). In this manner, teacher leadership through distributive leadership is critical in improving teacher self-efficacy and collective efficacy by mobilizing teacher leaders actively working and learning, thereby developing as individuals and teams alongside school administration (P. Liu, 2021; Y. Liu et al., 2021). Teacher leadership via distributive leadership creates a school environment nurturing collective teacher efficacy and improved opportunities for student learning and achievement (Hallinger et al., 2020) and increased job satisfaction (Y. Liu et al., 2021; Shen et al., 2020). Nevertheless, the full potential of teacher leadership will occur with additional research into how students learn under the leadership of teacher leaders.

The Need for Common Language

In 1988, Judith Warren Little, a national teaching scholar, called for teachers' involvement in the leadership of teachers for meaningful school reform to occur (Lieberman, 1988). However, the full potential of teacher leadership remains lost due primarily to the lack of a common language and precise definition of the concept of teacher leadership (Berg & Zoellick, 2019; Pan et al., 2023; Sawalhi & Chaaban, 2022; Szeto & Cheng, 2018). Because the term teacher leadership is ill-defined and varied, the term has been broadly applied and generally accepted as a positive means of solving problems related to school reform without evidence of how students learn under the leadership of teacher leaders (Nguyen et al., 2020; Pan et al., 2023). While educational leadership literature overtly reports positive antecedents and outcomes of teacher leadership, the confusion surrounding the meaning of teacher leadership and the lack of a

common language for use in the field of education bring the positive results into question, motivating the increase in research challenging the vitality of teacher leadership (Harris, 2003; Schott et al., 2020; Wenner & Campbell, 2017). Therefore, the following section explores the definitions of teacher leadership included in the literature and the lack of a common language to situate the context of the research study and promote the belief that a clear definition and a common language serve as a pre-requisite to the identification of teacher leadership roles and behaviors supporting improved student learning and school reform (Berg & Zoellick, 2019; McGinity et al., 2022; Nguyen et al., 2020).

With the analysis of terms, discovery of meaning, and identification of a common language (Berg & Zoellick, 2019), language's subtleties, nuances, and semantics require careful attention. Judith Warren Little introduced a critical distinction that was overlooked under the umbrella term of teacher leadership (Berg & Zoellick, 2019; Lieberman, 1988). In 1988, Warren called for teachers' involvement in the leadership of teachers, meaning teachers leading teachers. This aspect of teacher leadership brings to question supervisory and managerial roles often associated with school administration and traditional school hierarchy (Comstock & Margolis, 2021; Sawalhi & Chaaban, 2022; T. Wang et al., 2022), including formal roles, titles, and authority. In 2004, York-Barr and Duke noted this teacher leadership method as the focus of most studies. The phrase also means teachers who lead informally by example and practice through influence and collaboration. At this point, the term teacher leadership begins to fragment and splinter into a myriad of teacher leadership roles not attaining the original goals of increased student learning and achievement (Wenner & Campbell, 2017; York-Barr & Duke, 2004) or overall school reform (Lieberman, 1988; Pan et al., 2023; Wenner & Campbell, 2017).

Due to the conflicting meanings and descriptions of teacher leadership, including determined informal teacher leadership (Gordon et al., 2021), ill-defined teacher leadership (Pan et al., 2023), hybrid teacher leader (Comstock & Margolis, 2021), teacher leadership connected to professionalism and collegiality (Szeto & Cheng, 2018), and teacher leadership as an umbrella term for informal and formal roles (Sawalhi & Chaaban, 2022), recent studies have made intentional delineations of the term sharing precisely what is meant by teacher leadership. Current research studies define teacher leadership in ways such as deliberately moving beyond teachers simply leading inside and outside the classroom (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001; Wenner & Campbell, 2017; York-Barr & Duke, 2004) to placing authentic teacher leadership in the classroom next door (Bezzina & Bufalino, 2019). Some researchers also define teacher leadership as the responsibility of all teachers (Fairman & Mackenzie, 2015).

Fairman and Mackenzie (2015) reported teacher leadership as collective expertise, Park et al. (2024) reported teacher leadership as supporting teacher professional practice, and Harris and Jones (2022) reported every teacher as leading through behavior, action, and advice. Regardless of the definition or role, extant literature agreed upon the value of teacher leadership due to its influence (Nguyen et al., 2020) as a resource for improvement (P. Liu, 2021; Szeto & Cheng, 2018). Teacher leadership enhances student achievement, performance, and school organization (P. Liu, 2021). Consequently, this section continues to explore definitions and dimensions of teacher leadership presented in the literature to determine the dimension of teacher leadership most valuable as a solution to the problems of low student achievement and teacher attrition, enabling an understanding of how students learn under the leadership of teacher leaders.

The Definitions of Teacher Leadership

The literature presents variations of the definition of teacher leadership, thereby splintering the role of the teacher leader and creating ambiguity surrounding the roles, functions, and positions of the teacher leader. Given teacher leadership's varied definitions and generality, the ambiguity of roles and functions of teacher leadership is the natural but unsatisfactory outcome. York-Barr and Duke (2004) reported a need for more definitions in the literature due to the breadth of the term and the myriads of actions and behaviors correlated with the role. Extending the research of York-Barr and Duke (2004), Wenner and Campbell (2017) reported comparable results in their extensive analysis of over 72 pieces of literature, noting teacher leadership as an umbrella term encompassing concepts and themes instead of settling upon one definition. Pervasively, definitions and meanings settling upon themes, actions, and behaviors associated with teacher leaders, such as mediation, advocacy, collaboration, decision-making, and relationships, rather than operational definitions and roles are promoted (Gümüş et al., 2022; Wenner & Campbell, 2017). Negligibly, practices such as these unjustifiably elevate the normative actions of teachers to that of leadership without equipping teachers to be leaders beyond the classroom (Nguyen et al., 2020).

Additionally, the umbrella term of teacher leadership covers many meanings and actions spanning from within the classroom to outside (P. Liu, 2021). These meanings include the acceptance and desire for extra roles and duties, the delineation of a list of conceptualized duties and behaviors (Smylie & Eckert, 2018), both formal and informal roles, and the assumption of authority (Sawalhi & Chaaban, 2022). The variations, differences, and interpretations of the meaning of teacher leadership call for a consolidation of the term within an operational meaning (Nguyen et al., 2020). Further, teachers must be allowed to move beyond teacher and teacher

leaders into teacher leadership. To that end, teacher, teacher leader, and teacher leadership must be defined and differentiated by exploring teacher leadership roles.

The ambiguity surrounding the meaning of teacher leadership stymies research (Berg & Zoellick, 2019; Nerlino, 2020), not allowing forward progress since the seminal work of York-Barr and Duke (2004). From informal leadership roles whereby, neighboring teachers open the door to one another sharing ideas (Gordon et al., 2021) to formal roles in which titled teacher leaders lead formal PLCs (Sawalhi & Chaaban, 2022), the term teacher leadership remains unclear due to many competing definitions. York-Barr and Duke (2004) defined teacher leadership as the individual or collective manner by which teachers influence peers, principals, students, and stakeholders to improve instructional practices to increase student achievement. Wenner and Campbell (2017) situated teacher leadership within the K-12 classroom, designating teacher leaders as teachers who maintain classroom responsibilities while also enacting leadership responsibilities outside the classroom. However, Crippen and Willows (2019) reported a desire to maximize the unique position of teacher leadership to make change happen as a servant leader.

Additional seminal and contemporary works presented a variety of definitions for teacher leadership. Early research on teacher leadership suggested that presence and performance are central to teacher leadership, maintaining that teachers who make an impression on teaching by influencing how others think, plan, and conduct their work exercise teacher leadership (Lieberman, 1988). Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001), Nguyen et al. (2020), and Wenner and Campbell (2017) reported the exercise of influence central to teacher leadership, resulting in improved instructional practice through the contribution to a community of teacher learners and leaders. Muijs and Harris (2003) referred to dimensions defining teacher leadership, focusing on

four: creating a school community through relationships and networking, collaborating on instructional practice, exercising high levels of instructional practice as mediators, and forming trusting relationships with colleagues.

Fairman and Mackenzie (2015) extended the definition presented by York-Barr and Duke (2004) through spheres of leadership, describing the means of leadership influence, such as trusting and constructive relationships. Few contemporary research studies extend or expand upon seminal definitions instead of implementing new, unique ones. Oppi et al. (2023) defined teacher leadership as informal and formal positions individually or collectively supporting improving teaching and learning to enhance student learning through professional development. Supovitz and Comstock (2023) stated that teacher leadership is an expansion of distributed leadership or coaching, noting that teacher leadership influence adds empirical support to educational research studies. Nerlino (2020) responded to the call for increased legitimacy by referring to the four teacher leadership dimensions of legitimacy, support, objective, and method proposed by Berg and Zoellick (2019) related to teacher leadership and created a unique working definition referring to a specific titled and compensated school district position dependent upon the teacher leadership system. Pineda-Báez et al. (2020) stated that teacher leadership negotiates additional challenges and responsibilities, creating a unified school community through actions promoting success for the community (Friesen & Brown, 2022; Hart, 2021).

Nguyen et al. (2020) reviewed 150 empirical articles on teacher leadership, reporting 17 definitions, with only six explicitly stating their chosen definition. Furthermore, Nguyen et al. (2020) reported only eleven articles reporting their definition of teacher leadership. Subsequently, Nerlino (2020) reported that the definition of teacher leadership includes K-12 hybrid teacher roles with expertise within and outside the classroom, adding that teacher leaders

have formal roles and receive payment for duties. Similarly, Berg and Zoellick (2019) concurred that a lack of precise definitions and theoretical knowledge hinders teacher leadership progress. Therefore, in answer to the call given by recent studies for the extension of current seminal definitions of teacher leadership to add empiricism and legitimacy to the field (Berg & Zoellick, 2019; Nerlino, 2020; Nguyen et al., 2020), the qualifying definition for the study is that reported by York-Barr and Duke (2004), teacher leadership is the individual or collective manner by which teachers influence peers, principals, students, and stakeholders improving instructional practices to increase student achievement.

The Dimensions of Teacher Leadership

The need for a consolidated and operational definition of teacher leadership persists due to the need to clarify roles related to the concept. Through the exhibition of SCT concepts (Bandura, 1986), teacher leadership encompasses a myriad of aspects, including teacher agency, enactive and vicarious learning, collaboration, and leadership within and outside of the classroom through the traditional top-down hierarchical structure and informal roles and responsibilities (Harris & Jones, 2019). Additionally, teacher leadership involves influential behavior at the ground level in the classroom and school building, guiding and supporting students and peers (Öqvist & Malmström, 2018). Many definitions of teacher leadership focus on the dimensions of teacher leadership, including but not limited to teacher learning, collaboration with peers, and continuous improvement, suggesting that accomplished teacher leadership correlates with demonstrating how colleagues have improved, adding legitimacy to the role of teacher leadership (Reid et al., 2022). However, the dimensions of teacher leadership are varied, lacking agreement on the core theoretical dimensions of teacher leadership (Bellibaş et al., 2021; Nguyen et al., 2020; T. Wang et al., 2022).

Existing scholarship presents a breadth of teacher leadership dimensions following various definitions, thereby frustrating research efforts (Nguyen et al., 2020). York-Barr and Duke (2004) reported that the dimensions of teacher leadership include relationship building and collaboration. Subsequent research adds to the number and depth of teacher leadership dimensions, reporting that dimensions have a strong and significant relationship with student achievement, with some dimensions showing more association with student achievement than other dimensions (Shen et al., 2020). Moreover, extant literature reported school improvement as a typical dimension of teacher leadership (Hallinger & Kovačević, 2022; Pan & Chen, 2021). Therefore, understanding the dimensions of teacher leadership holds value related to student achievement, making exploring and synthesizing the dimensions of teacher leadership necessary.

The dimensions of teacher leadership are as varied as the definitions of the term, ranging from behaviors within and outside the classroom. However, central to each dimension resides the influence of teacher leaders on students, peers, and other stakeholders (Nguyen et al., 2020). Muijs and Harris (2003) reported four dimensions of teacher leadership: working within and across school boundaries, participative leadership, collegial work, mediating instructional expertise, and forging close relationships. Similarly, York-Barr and Duke (2004) reported two dimensions of teacher leadership: relationship building and collaboration. In 2007, Muijs and Harris added activism, professional learning, school improvement, collaboration, and decision-making to the dimensions of teacher leadership. Regardless of the differences within reports on teacher leadership, relationships, trust, and collaboration are paramount to teacher leadership (Kılınç et al., 2021; Supovitz & Comstock, 2023).

Focusing on trust as a critical component of teacher leadership, P. Liu (2021) reported the dimensions of teacher leadership as recognition, congeniality, participation, positive

environment, and collective teacher efficacy. Each reported dimension must have trust and influence to produce desirable school improvement outcomes. Moreover, collective efficacy surpasses trust with belief in peers' ability (Hoogsteen, 2020). Fairman and Mackenzie (2015) also reported that collaboration and learning are dimensions of teacher leadership. Kılınç et al. (2021) reported collective professional learning and establishing collaborative relationships as teacher leadership dimensions, requiring partnership and trust for success.

Similarly, Harris and Jones (2022) reported collaborative professional inquiry as a dimension of teacher leadership. Reid et al. (2022) reported fostering a collaborative culture as one of the seven dimensions of teacher leadership. Extant literature reported collaboration with teachers as the most influential factor in nurturing teacher professional learning (Hosseingholizadeh et al., 2023).

Furthermore, Shen et al. (2020) reported teacher leadership to have a significant positive relationship with student outcomes, sharing seven dimensions of teacher leadership with the dimension of facilitating improvements in curriculum, instruction, and assessments as having the strongest association with positive student outcomes. Findings like this support teachers and professional learning through collaborative avenues such as PLCs (T. Wang et al., 2022; Yoon & Goddard, 2023). The support and enactment of PLCs affirm the importance of learning together, a powerful dimension of teacher leadership, supporting the inception of a collaborative learning community in the school (Sancar et al., 2021). PLCs bring formal teacher leadership and contrived collegiality to the forefront because the PLC is a traditional requirement of school improvement led by the department chair or formal teacher leader following an administrative directive (Hargreaves, 2019). The informal and authentic collaborative communities where teacher-created interests and activities happen produce true collaboration (Buchanan et al.,

2023). Authentic collaborative communities require teacher leadership that is both formal and informal, supporting teacher trust and legitimacy (Azorín et al., 2020; Berg & Zoellick, 2019; Gordon et al., 2021).

Formal and Informal Roles of Teacher Leadership

Teacher leadership occurs formally and informally, with different characteristics, roles, and activities. Gordon et al. (2021) reported that formal teacher leaders are committed, confident, organized, communicative, empathetic, flexible, and reflective. Further, Reid et al. (2022) stated that formal teacher leaders are legitimate leaders due to the power and authority retained in the traditional school hierarchy of authority. The decisions of formal teacher leaders align more often with managerial choices rather than the exhibition of compassion toward others or the passionate drive to improve teaching and learning exhibited by informal teacher leaders (Gordon et al., 2021). Informal leaders are described as courageous in their willingness to stand up for others (Gordon et al., 2021) and navigate leadership structures, revealing an ability to act due to experience and legitimacy from their peers (Reid et al., 2022; M. Wang & D. Ho, 2020). Moreover, informal teacher leaders have no official leadership title yet exert influence on their peers and school community through self-initiative (Oppi et al., 2023; Pineda-Báez et al., 2020). In contrast, formal teacher leaders hold roles selected by the administration, such as department head, curriculum specialist, instructional coach, and assigned mentor (Oppi et al., 2023). Comparatively, informal teacher leaders show self-initiative, opting to conduct activities improving colleague professionalism such as demonstrating new instructional strategies, observing, providing feedback, sharing resources, and acting as informal mentors (Hallinger & Kovačević, 2022; Oppi et al., 2023; York-Barr & Duke, 2004).

Extant literature reported that informal teacher leadership is more effective and holds

more significant potential than formal teacher leadership (Nguyen & Ng, 2020) in making school changes and improvements (Fairman & Mackenzie, 2015). Moreover, informal teacher leadership predominates in improving student learning and exhibiting influence on peers and the school community (Anselmus Dami, 2021; Conan Simpson, 2021; Fairman & Mackenzie, 2015). The influence and effectiveness of informal teacher leaders are partly due to the trust teachers convey in informal teacher leadership. Informal leadership arises from within their ranks instead of being selected and appointed by the administration (Fairman & Mackenzie, 2015; Gordon et al., 2021). Trust, influence, and effectiveness are integral to the legitimacy of teacher leadership, and informal teacher leaders are viewed as legitimate because peers assign value to the role of informal teacher leadership (M. Wang & D. Ho, 2020). Nevertheless, both formal and informal teacher leadership hold legitimacy (Reid et al., 2022; M. Wang & D. Ho, 2020).

Legitimacy refers to the validation and credibility assigned by peers and colleagues to a leader's worthiness for a particular role (Reid et al., 2022; M. Wang & D. Ho, 2020). Yet, formal teacher leaders might not be viewed as effective because the legitimacy of formal teacher leaders derives from the titles and positions held (Fairman & Mackenzie, 2015). Moreover, because teachers assign legitimacy to teacher leadership, formal teacher leaders sharing authority with the administration inhibits the trust of colleagues and brings to question the value of school reform (Lovett, 2023). Nerlino (2020) reported the legitimacy of formal teacher leadership as referring to a specified title and position appointed by school leadership, warranting a title and compensation, and allowing teacher leaders differentiated opportunities based on unique skills and experience. In contrast, Lovett (2023) reported that informal teacher leadership challenges the common understanding of leadership equated with authority and position, questioning the dominance of leadership from only position holders. The distinction between informal and

formal teacher leadership legitimacy should not be argued because the school community assigns values to the actions of teacher leadership (Conan Simpson, 2021). Legitimacy remains important to teacher leadership because it is a pre-condition to teacher leadership (Berg & Zoellick, 219) and an antecedent to teacher empowerment (Reid et al., 2022).

Teacher leadership occurs informally and formally, and formal mentors stand opposite the more informal, natural, ground-level, open-door teacher leadership (Öqvist & Malmström, 2018) promoted by most literature, making most teachers leaders through the exhibition of normative behaviors (Shen et al., 2020). Manifestly, the difference in meanings pinpoints the confusion regarding the lack of a clear definition and theory related to teacher leadership (Morris et al., 2020; Nguyen et al., 2020; Smylie & Eckert, 2018). Additionally, the teacher leadership role of mentor presents a nuanced difference in meaning from that of the teacher or one who leads students (P. Liu, 2021). Teacher mentors place the teacher leader in a place of influence on peers, not students (Shen et al., 2020). In contrast, normative classroom roles are exhibited on students, often not elevating a teacher to leader status. Elevating the teacher leader to a position of influence on peers calls for consideration of the role of teacher leaders related to leadership development (Szeto & Cheng, 2018) and school reform. Extant literature pointed to the rise of teacher leadership resulting from the inception of accountability and the impossibility of school leaders accomplishing the work necessary to meet stringent measures implemented by state and federal government initiatives (Hallinger et al., 2020; Shen et al., 2020; Smylie & Eckert, 2018). Therefore, this transcendental phenomenological study described how teacher leaders perceive their influence on how students learn under the leadership of teacher leaders at the primary and secondary levels, lending legitimacy to teacher leadership.

Accountability Measures and Teacher Leadership

Within the theme of accountability and continuous school improvement, teacher leadership shifted from quasi-administrative functions such as manager into distributed leadership behaviors, including providing resources, opening the classroom door to colleagues for observations, and conducting professional teacher learning related to school improvement and policy (Çoban et al., 2023; Smylie & Eckert, 2018). The shift away from a manager into a leader occurred in reaction to accountability measures calling for collaboration between the school principal and administrative team, and the faculty requiring distributive leadership and capacity building rather than the perpetuation of hierarchy and the heroic leader (Hallinger & Kovačević, 2022; Y. Liu et al., 2021; Morris et al., 2020; Smylie & Eckert, 2018). This manner of distributed and collective leadership occurs via teacher leaders who exhibit leadership and are recognized as doing so by the school administrative team and by their colleagues directly relating to the theoretical framework of SCT (Morris et al., 2020), placing accountability in a shared position (Smylie & Eckert, 2018). However, there is more than one opinion regarding accountability and the inception of teacher leadership to accomplish what some deem impossible. Teacher leadership, primarily reported in the literature as a positive aspect of school leadership (Bellibaş et al., 2021), faces many challenges.

Challenges to Teacher Leadership

The full potential of teacher leadership as a means of reducing the workload of the school principal has yet to occur, as only 45% of school principals reported utilizing teachers in management teams (OECD, 2019). When asked about teacher leadership, principals failed to discuss the role of teacher leaders in professional collaborative learning, revealing that school principals could not recognize the full potential of teacher leadership to reduce the

responsibilities of the school principal (Oppi et al., 2023). Nevertheless, because conventional views of school leadership persist in ignoring teachers as an available resource to assist school principals (Kılınç et al., 2021), the extant literature called for the reorganization of school leadership to include all school personnel, especially teachers, and to examine the influence on teaching and student learning (Nguyen et al., 2020; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). The literature on teacher leadership described the importance of administrative support and how the involvement and support of principals in teacher leadership lend legitimacy to the role of teacher leadership (Azorín et al., 2020).

Empirical studies reported the positive effects of principal leadership support of teacher leadership on teacher professional learning and the development of professional communities (Gaikhorst et al., 2019; Hallinger et al., 2019). When principals and teachers share leadership, building a community of sharing and taking risks together, trust ensues as does a culture of collaboration (Conan Simpson, 2021), yet when principals share leadership, rarely are new avenues for teacher leadership created due to the retention of power and control by the principal thwarting the teacher leaders from embracing and instituting leadership roles (Woo et al., 2022). Moreover, there is more than one opinion regarding accountability and the inception of teacher leadership to accomplish what some deem impossible. The accountability measures that support teacher leadership also remain a constant factor in teacher attrition, with teachers leaving the profession attributing their decisions to accountability and workload factors (Perryman & Calvert, 2020).

Teacher Leadership Development

A significant challenge for teacher leadership is the need for teacher leadership development (King & Holland, 2022; Yin et al., 2019). Most teacher leaders are experienced

classroom teachers with years of professional learning and development for student instruction and learning. However, professional learning regarding the instruction and learning of colleagues or adult learners is a rarity in teacher leadership (P. Liu, 2021). Additionally, teacher leadership as mentorship is a popular dimension of the term, placing the teacher leader in adult learning related to school reform (Conan Simpson, 2021; Harris, 2003; Yalçın & Çoban, 2023). Often, teacher leaders mentor colleagues, necessitating formal professional development with structured training for mentors related to teacher leadership development, thereby strengthening the contribution of teacher leadership and encouraging continued improvement of practice for the school community (Gul et al., 2019).

The challenges associated with teacher leadership, such as the need for teacher leadership development preparing teacher leaders to not only lead in the classroom with students but also outside the classroom with colleagues and adult learners, demand support from the school principal (Gaikhorst et al., 2019; Hallinger et al., 2019) professional leadership training for teachers transitioning into teacher leadership roles, whereby confidence and expertise will increase (Sawalhi & Chaaban, 2022). Teachers as leaders experience mastery daily via interactions with students and with normative procedures occurring within the confines of the classroom (P. Liu, 2021). Teacher leaders frequently experience frustration and discouragement related to legitimacy and trust when placed in leadership positions requiring expertise in adult learning and training with no prior experience or training (Morris et al., 2020). The advocacy of teacher leadership differs from its development, and the mistaken assumption that teachers accepting leadership roles hold the capacity to lead perpetuates the negative side of teacher leadership. Yet, school principals and programs promote efficacious strategies whereby teacher

leadership develops and eradicates the negative side of teacher leadership (Smylie & Eckert, 2018).

Teacher leaders' development has recently gained much attention (Wenner & Campbell, 2017), with calls to restructure the hierarchy of school leadership to enact shared leadership and extend the influence of teacher leaders through continuous learning (Hosseingholizadeh et al., 2023). Teacher leadership development empowers teacher leaders. It fosters a school climate that supports teacher learning and development (Yin et al., 2019). Yet, how teacher leaders develop the skills, knowledge, and characteristics that qualify as teacher leadership remains a mystery (Woo et al., 2022). Consequently, increased development of teacher leaders continues to be a relevant need (Oppi et al., 2023). Extant literature reported several methods of teacher leadership development, including the promotion of Master Teaching Fellows engaging teachers in programs for developing teacher leaders (Reid et al., 2022) and the inclusion of leadership training in teacher training programs (Oppi et al., 2023).

Szeto and Cheng (2018) reported that the frequency of interactions between teacher leaders and principals indicates the degree of teacher leadership development. Wenner and Campbell (2017) reported that the preparation of teacher leaders includes professional development, local training, and attending conferences. Other researchers reported deeper levels of professional development, such as the development of skills and knowledge related to specific leadership roles, including leading groups and workshops, collaborative work, mentoring, conducting action research, and nurturing teacher learning (Fairman & Mackenzie, 2015; Harris, 2005; Supovitz & Comstock, 2023). Teacher leadership development is necessary to maximize the positive impact of teacher leadership within the classroom on student learning and within the school (Azorín et al., 2020).

Duality of Teacher Leadership

While the extant literature on teacher leadership was positive, opposing sides of teacher leadership exist, further complicating the roles of teacher leaders (Nerlino, 2020). Teacher leadership has been reported as overly optimistic, resulting in benefits to the individual teacher leader, the school, parents, and professional networks (Schott et al., 2020). Additionally, teacher leadership, through co-construction of change, exacts a potentially positive and empowering effect upon the teacher leader (Harris & Jones, 2019), with some studies reporting improved teacher self-efficacy and overall improved collective efficacy because of teacher agency exercised through leadership (Johnson, 2019; Nguyen et al., 2020). Teacher leadership creates growth and professional learning opportunities (Nerlino, 2020), offering a solution to high teacher attrition rates due to the role of teacher leadership. This growth in development attracts strong candidates to the profession (Berg & Zoellick, 2019).

Teacher leadership incurs negative experiences for teacher leaders as well. The transition to the role of leader engenders opposition from peers who feel teacher leaders are stepping out of line because of the egalitarian nature of teaching and the promotion of the ideal that everyone is equal (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Accusations such as these lead to feelings of guilt and confusion on the part of the teacher leader, often isolating them from peers as they experience resistance (Sawalhi & Chaaban, 2022) when leading colleagues toward change, further exacerbating feelings of discomfort and stress (Nguyen et al., 2020). Adverse experiences like these, as well as juggling teaching and leading roles (York-Barr & Duke, 2004), potentially lead to stress, burnout, and work-home interference for the teacher leader (Schott et al., 2020). The traditional teacher professional norms and restrictive school organizational structures promote isolation and egalitarianism, fueling resistance from peers and administration when teacher

leaders challenge the status quo (Nerlino, 2020; Wenner & Campbell, 2017; York-Barr & Duke, 2004).

Influence of Teacher Leadership

Although the term teacher leadership remains to be consolidated and operationalized, analysis of the roles of the teacher leader brings the literature closer to identifying a teacher leadership framework and theory. Additionally, analysis of teacher leadership roles and related concepts reveals one central truth: teacher leadership involves exerting influence. Primarily, teacher leadership affects the teacher leader. To be entrusted by leadership and colleagues to lead builds belief in self to achieve goals, thereby improving self-efficacy (Bellibaş et al., 2021). Teacher leadership strengthens teacher agencies by allowing teachers to take active roles in decision-making (Polatcan et al., 2021), and overall job satisfaction increases with distributed leadership, such as teacher leadership (Y. Liu et al., 2021). Teacher self-efficacy manifests in classroom management, student engagement, and instruction (Shafiee & Ghani, 2022). Teacher self-efficacy with student engagement equates to teacher belief concerning student motivation and active engagement, extending the influence of teacher leadership on the student (Y. Liu et al., 2021).

Examining the teacher leader as an influencer leads to an analysis of the literature surrounding the outcomes of teacher leadership. As noted earlier, teacher leadership impacts the individual with increased teacher efficacy and student outcomes with improved math and reading scores and overall motivation (Shen et al., 2020). As for the impact of the teacher leader on the school community, a significant positive relationship between collective teacher efficacy and student achievement exists due in part to increasing teacher power to make decisions (Hoogsteen, 2020). Comparatively, teacher leaders hold a level of collective efficacy impacting

the effectiveness of instructional strategies and implementation of PLCs (Öqvist & Malmström, 2018). Teacher-professional learning is positively associated with collective efficacy, maintaining a positive relationship between motivational constructs and collaborative professional learning (Hosseingholizadeh et al., 2023). Thus, teacher leadership, with the support of the school principal, holds the potential to engender teacher self-efficacy and collective teacher efficacy (P. Liu, 2021).

Consequently, the power of thriving PLCs impacts the role of teacher leaders and what teacher leaders do in the classroom and school through teacher empowerment and subsequent collective efficacy (Hosseingholizadeh et al., 2023). Additionally, PLCs promote teacher learning, collegially supporting student learning, and job-embedded learning (Yin et al., 2019). PLCs comprise professionals who come together to learn in a community, such as in a school (Grimm, 2023). Harris (2005) reported that an organization's ability to foster professional learning determines its success with improvement and that PLCs lead to measurable improvements in student learning. PLCs occur within schools as an official directive of the school principal or in an organic, bottom-up manner led by teachers controlling their learning needs (Vangrieken & Kyndt, 2020). The PLC efforts produce a sense of ownership and collegiality, thereby increasing the capacity for teacher agency (Bellibaş et al., 2021), and PLCs energize the potential of teachers as leaders (Fairman & Mackenzie, 2015). Teacher leadership influences the individual teacher and school community.

PLC literature reported that teacher leaders influence professional learning through trusting and constructive relationships supporting teacher self-efficacy (Nguyen et al., 2020; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Teacher leaders who nurture trust and safe learning environments within the PLC strengthen the self-esteem of participating teacher peers (Kılınç et al., 2021). The

motivation behind PLCs is that improving teacher learning will improve student learning. PLCs are most successful when teachers critically examine and discuss, in an action-oriented manner, the methods necessary to improve instructional capacity and student learning (Grimm, 2023). Admiraal et al. (2021) reported that it is unclear what kind of professional development a school could implement to support teacher professional learning and collaboration, noting that training teacher leaders to lead PLCs effectively is rare. Additionally, Riggins and Knowles (2020) reported on the ineffectiveness of PLCs due to teacher isolationism and an overall misunderstanding of an actual PLC's goals, workings, and outcomes. Nevertheless, when school leadership fails to implement effective PLCs, it is most often attributable to omitting collective commitments and working on the wrong work by not clarifying the work that must take place to accomplish school goals (Campbell, 2020).

Teacher Leadership and Student Learning

Learning loss has drastically affected student learning after the COVID-19 pandemic, especially in mathematics, due to the nature of mathematics instruction requiring prior knowledge for future success (Sattem et al., 2022). Kuhfeld et al. (2020) reported that prolonged periods of absence from school significantly affect learning loss, rationalizing the learning losses caused by school closures during the pandemic. Toker (2022) reported a loss of one and a half years in Turkish mathematics. Irwin et al. (2023) reported declines in scale scores for fourth- and eighth-grade students from 2019 to 2022 in mathematics, with scores from 2022 reported lower than 2019. In Grade 9, Moliner et al. (2022) reported that the COVID-19 pandemic significantly affected students' mathematics achievement. Information regarding mathematics achievement is integral to teacher leadership research because the instructional skill and expertise necessary to

intervene and remediate students is complex, requiring precise identification of skills gaps (Sattem et al., 2022).

Improving mathematics achievement requires an increase in teacher leadership which has been inhibited by a lack of qualified, experienced, and certificated mathematics teachers due to worse teacher attrition in STEM classrooms (Han, 2023). Teacher attrition remains a longstanding problem in the teaching profession, whereby many experienced teachers leave within five years (Perryman & Calvert, 2020). Another factor impacting teacher attrition is teacher career stagnation, to which teacher leadership provides avenues for change and growth when experienced teachers face plateaus (Wenner & Campbell, 2017). Teacher leadership is indispensable in teacher preparation programs to address teacher attrition (Conan Simpson, 2021). With the increased interest in teacher leadership as a school reform effort addressing student learning outcomes and teacher attrition, teacher leadership research must produce high-quality evidence (Wenner & Campbell, 2017). Therefore, this transcendental phenomenological study described how teacher leaders perceive their influence on how students learn under the leadership of teacher leaders at the primary and secondary levels.

One dimension of teacher leadership, facilitating improvements in instruction and curriculum like those implemented via mentorship and PLC work, impacts student achievement, especially in math (Grimm, 2023; Harris, 2003). Also, regardless of the conceptualization of teacher leadership, the instructional importance of teacher leadership remains consistent at both elementary and secondary levels (Shen et al., 2020). Regarding the ambiguity surrounding the roles and concepts associated with teacher leadership, most definitions focus on influence in association with peer collaboration via trusting relationships (Nguyen et al., 2020). Specifically, the powerful influence of teacher leadership often includes professional development, school

change, and school improvement (Y. Liu et al., 2021). Although educational research fails to report one formal definition of teacher leadership, the behavior of teacher leaders influences colleagues, students, and school culture (Bezzina & Bufalino, 2019; Gümüş et al., 2022; Wenner & Campbell, 2017; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). To that end, extant research continues to reveal the association between teacher leadership and student achievement through the behaviors of teacher leaders (Shen et al., 2020). Additional studies of this nature retain prominent positions in teacher leadership literature (Öqvist & Malmström, 2018). Since teacher behaviors remain central to the meaning of teacher leadership, continued research must occur to build the empirical database, define a teacher leadership framework, and employ teacher leadership theory.

Although teacher leadership as a term remains ambiguous, the roles of the teacher leader are becoming increasingly apparent as most literature agreed that teacher leaders exhibit influence upon themselves, through SCT and increased self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986; Çoban et al., 2023), the student, and the school community (Bezzina & Bufalino, 2019; Gümüş et al., 2022). Therefore, the teacher leader exacts more influence than a designated or formal role due to job-embedded functions involving collegiality and collaboration exhibiting a statistically significant relationship between teacher leadership, professional teacher learning, and teacher self-efficacy (Gümüş et al., 2022). Teacher leadership positively influences student outcomes as a natural by-product of improved pedagogy, resulting in higher math and reading performance (Shen et al., 2020). Teacher leadership occurs in the privacy of the classroom, yet additional studies posit that little evidence exists regarding the experiences of teacher leaders related to student learning (Bezzina & Bufalino, 2019). Extant research aims to acknowledge that teacher

leadership behavior impacts student motivation, stating that when teacher leadership is poor, students lose motivation (Öqvist & Malmström, 2018).

Summary

Teacher leadership has been a topic of interest in recent years due to its positive relationship with factors inside and outside of the classroom affecting the overall school culture and performance (Harris & Jones, 2019; Johnson, 2019; Schott et al., 2020). Additional research into the definition, role, and influence of teacher leadership is worthwhile, especially regarding the need for more research addressing the development of teacher leadership and the experiences of teacher leaders with student learning (Nguyen et al., 2020; Shen et al., 2020; Wenner & Campbell, 2017; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). As researchers continue to seek answers regarding the topic of teacher leadership, it is imperative that such work no longer remains atheoretical (Nguyen et al., 2020; Wenner & Campbell, 2017; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Extant teacher leadership studies suggest the applicability of distributed leadership (Spillane, 2005) as an organizational framework supporting teacher leadership. Furthermore, collective efficacy (Hoogsteen, 2020) within the theoretical framework of SCT (Bandura, 1986, 2000) occurs as a positive outcome of teacher leadership. The theoretical framework of SCT includes reciprocal interactions such as self-agency, modeling processes, motivational processes, self-efficacy, and collective efficacy (Schunk, 2020), through which the influence of teacher leadership is exhibited in the classroom and with peers. Overall, SCT provides the framework in which these factors operate as part of social influence and the internal and external components of social reinforcement (Xie et al., 2019) integral to the environments created by teacher leadership, such as PLCs through which the influence of teacher leaders is exhibited (Nerlino, 2020).

The relationship between teacher leadership, student achievement, and classroom and

school effectiveness remains positive (Shen et al., 2020; Smylie & Eckert, 2018), yet empirical research addressing related issues regarding teacher leadership and its relationship with student learning remains sparse along with research addressing teacher leadership development (Ahn et al., 2021; Smylie & Eckert, 2018; Wenner & Campbell, 2017; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Teacher leaders face a duality of emotions when acting as leaders, with some experiences being positive (Schott et al., 2020) and other experiences being negative (Nerlino, 2020). With the persistent demand for continuous improvement and increasing levels of teacher attrition, the need for empirical research on teacher leadership development and investigation into the leadership dimensions that influence teacher self-efficacy, school improvement, and increased student outcomes persists (Ahn et al., 2021; Shen et al., 2020; Smylie & Eckert, 2018).

Overall, teacher leadership exercises influence on peers, students, and the school (York-Barr & Duke, 2004), yet the experience of teacher leaders related to student learning remains a mystery (Nguyen et al., 2020; Schott et al., 2020; Wenner & Campbell, 2017). This transcendental phenomenological study describing how teacher leaders perceive their influence on how students learn under the leadership of teacher leaders at the primary and secondary school levels holds practical significance for K-12 school leaders enacting teacher leadership as a form of school reform and the study fills the gap in literature addressing teacher leadership and student learning (Nguyen et al., 2020; Wenner & Campbell, 2017; York-Barr & Duke, 2004).

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to explore how teacher leaders perceive their influence on student learning for K-12 teachers at a K-12 charter school system in rural Southeastern United States. At this stage in the research, teacher leadership will be generally defined as the individual or collective manner by which teachers influence peers, principals, students, and stakeholders improving instructional practices to increase student achievement (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). The theory framing this study is Bandura's social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1977a, 1986, 1997; Schunk, 2020). The study involved 16 teacher leaders from the primary and secondary settings. This qualitative study aimed to explore teacher leaders' influences on student learning by describing the lived experiences of teacher leaders to reveal their everyday experiences (van Manen, 1997). This chapter represents an in-depth overview of qualitative transcendental phenomenology research design the research questions framed by SCT, the setting, the participants, and the participant recruitment process occurring via email and screening survey. The researcher's positionality and philosophical assumptions as well as role as an instrument is covered. Data collection occurred via individual interviews, physical artifacts, and focus groups. Data were analyzed by applying Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phases of thematic analysis and Moustakas' (1994) epochè, transcendental phenomenological reduction, and imaginative variation. Finally, this chapter comprises a trustworthiness section outlining credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Ethical considerations, permissions, and the chapter summary conclude chapter three.

Research Design

This study implemented qualitative research methodology because it focuses on describing vicarious human affairs through an empathic nature (Stake, 2010) and exploring the essence of experience (van Manen, 1997). Qualitative research relies firsthand on human experience and understanding both individually and collectively, with the researcher as a tool working personally at times even subjectively, to describe human experience (Stake, 2010). Further, pedagogy is well suited to qualitative research because it focuses on human science and the person and describes experiences through writing (van Manen, 1997). Moreover, qualitative research aims to employ theoretical frameworks and careful data collection within natural environments with inductive and deductive data analysis centered on human experience (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). The topic of teacher leadership is personal to the individuals experiencing the phenomenon and influential to students and other people associated with education, making qualitative research a fitting methodology for the research study.

Phenomenology is the type of research design within qualitative research because teacher leadership is enactive, vicarious, and relational, and phenomenology intends to reveal meaning through personal interaction (Neubauer et al., 2019; van Manen, 1997). Enactive learning involves doing, whereas vicarious learning involves observing others (Schunk, 2020). Teacher leaders learn by doing while vicariously teaching and influencing others, such as students and colleagues, through relationships within and outside of the classroom (Fernández Espinosa & López González, 2023; Pan et al., 2023; Wenner & Campbell, 2017). Phenomenology seeks to make people feel understood (Moustakas, 1994; Neubauer et al., 2019), and the study explored the experiences and paths of influence of teacher leaders making descriptions and eventual reflexive structural analysis resulting in meaning through the essence of experience (Moustakas,

1994). Further, experiences are unique from a Husserlian perspective derived within the lifeworld free from theory and reflection (van Manen, 1997), so phenomenology rationally pairs with the unique and personal subject of teacher leaders' experiences and paths of influence.

The study implemented the specific research design of transcendental phenomenology. Transcendental phenomenology focuses more on the experiences of the participants and less on the researcher's descriptions (Moustakas, 1994). Bracketing supports the ability to focus on the participants' experiences, which occurs when the researcher sets aside their personal experience with the phenomenon and focuses on it freshly (Moustakas, 1994). Although bracketing is rarely perfectly achieved, the researcher aimed to achieve bracketing by disclosing their own experiences with the phenomenon by bracketing their experiences before describing the participants' experiences (Moustakas, 1994). Transcendental phenomenological procedures included identifying a phenomenon to study, bracketing personal experience, and collecting data through interviews, physical artifact discussions, and focus groups from a group of heterogeneous participants having experienced the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Transcendental phenomenology requires the researcher to analyze data through reduction and imaginative variation, portraying a textural and structural description of the phenomenon through significant statements describing what and how the participants experienced the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).

Research Questions

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe how teacher leaders perceive their influence on student learning at primary and secondary schools in rural Southeastern United States. Formal and informal teacher leaders participated in the research study. One central research question and three sub-questions explore the phenomenon.

Central Research Question

How do teacher leaders perceive their influence on student learning?

Sub-Question 1

How do teacher leaders perceive themselves as agents controlling events affecting learning?

Sub-Question 2

How do teacher leaders describe their experiences with self-efficacy?

Sub-Question 3

What experiences do teacher leaders have with collective efficacy and student learning?

Setting and Participants

The following sections provide information about the setting and participants of the research study. The setting was a K-12 charter school system with five schools. The system comprises two K-5 elementary schools, two sixth-eighth grade middle schools, and one ninth-12th grade high school. All the schools are in one city in rural Southeastern United States. The charter organization has approximately 3,700 students. The participant pool consisted of formal and informal teacher leaders with the formal roles of grade-level team leader in grades kindergarten through 12 and subject area department and grade-level leaders in grades six through 12. At the site, formal teacher leaders are selected by the administration. These formal teacher leaders receive a stipend and hold a titled position such as department chair or grade-level team leader (Oppi et al., 2023; Pineda-Báez et al., 2020; Reid et al., 2022). Informal teacher leaders without an official leadership title influence their peers and school community through self-initiative (Oppi et al., 2023; Pineda-Báez et al., 2020).

Setting

The site for this study was chosen based on maximum variation because of its specific characteristic of consistently exhibiting high student achievement in math and reading. The study site was a K-12 charter school system in rural Southeastern United States. The study explored teacher leadership and its influence on student learning, so the rationale for this site is that it offered access to a high-performing school system with informal and formal teacher leaders because of either leading the grade level team or department in grades kindergarten through 12. The K-12 charter school system consistently outperformed neighboring schools in reading and math achievement and retained teachers in leadership for several years beyond expectation.

The charter school system hierarchy includes a governing board, chief education officer (CEO), chief financial officer (CFO), administrative leadership team of nine, three instructional specialists at the primary and secondary levels, and teacher leaders at the kindergarten through 12th grade levels. The charter school organization strives to grow from within, beginning with the classroom-level teacher leader. Subsequently, the current administrative leadership team of nine administrators includes three principals, with two who once taught in the charter school system at the primary and secondary levels. All three assistant principals taught in the charter school system, with one rising from paraprofessional to assistant principal. Two of the three administrative assistants once taught in the charter school system.

The administrative team reports to the CEO. However, the CEO reports to the governing board. The governing board directs organizational issues, including policy and finances. The CEO directs all educational matters in addition to organizational matters. The CEO holds a non-voting position on the governing board. The CFO directs the human resources departments and reports to the governing board. Classroom teachers and school staff report to the school

principal. The school-level leadership team comprises a school principal, an assistant principal, and an administrative assistant. Each school has teacher leaders, one from each grade level for grades kindergarten through 12 and one for each department, including social studies, math, science, and language arts. The teacher leadership team operates distributively, addressing school-level decisions, including school improvement concerns and daily operational issues.

The charter school opened in 2000 and offers a guaranteed and viable curriculum based on state standards and the school's vision of High Expectations and High Achievement. The charter school system has five schools consistently ranked as schools of excellence and maintained school grades of A based on student achievement on state reading and math tests. The charter school-organized high school is the only school to receive the designation of school of excellence. The charter school system offers traditional courses with inclusive learning in grades kindergarten through 12 with on-grade-level and advanced instruction in core subjects such as math, language arts, history, and science.

Participants

Participants in this study included teacher leaders in grades K-12 working as grade-level leaders, department chairs, and classroom teachers in grades K-12. All the teacher leaders are certified teachers. Some teacher leaders were formal teacher leaders with the title of department chair and grade-level team leader and received a stipend or held the title of teacher on special assignment or interventionist. Other teacher leaders were informal and selected by the teacher leader survey for the study. As a body, the formal teacher leaders at the site are a group of 40 teachers in grades kindergarten through 12 with at least three years of teaching experience selected for their highly qualified status and ability to lead teams of teachers at the grade level and department level in PLCs.

Formal teacher leaders also are model teachers who can instruct beginning and experienced teachers in instructional best practices. Formal teacher leaders at the charter school system are passionate about the school vision, student learning and achievement, and teaching. At the site, formal teacher leaders participate in activities inside and outside the classroom during the school day and after school. For example, one teacher leader is the grade level team lead and the department team lead. Informal teacher leaders were selected by the teacher leadership survey and exhibited similar criteria to the formal teacher leaders without a formal title or stipend. A formal teacher leader holds a position or title such as team leader or department chair, as seen in a career ladder or hierarchy of power and authority selected by administration (Oppi et al., 2023; Pineda-Báez et al., 2020; Reid et al., 2022). Criteria for participant selection included experience with the phenomenon of teacher leadership at the formal and informal levels (Moustakas, 1994). The participant sample pool was 190, including all teachers employed by the charter school system, with the primary participant sample size being 16 for saturation purposes (Hennink et al., 2019).

Recruitment Plan

The recruitment process for qualitative study is integral to the successful completion of the research study yet remains unpredictable due to the nature of relying primarily on participants willing to interview (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). To reach saturation, 16 teachers participated in the transcendental phenomenology. The participants were selected from the five charter schools in the system at the instructional levels of kindergarten through grade 12, and they held membership in the reading, math, science, social studies, and electives departments. Through the site approval process and with permission from the chief education officer of the organization (see Appendix B), a list of potential participants was obtained from the district

office of the charter school system, including teachers employed by the charter school system, creating a sample pool of 190.

A total of 190 teachers, employed by the charter system, were invited to the research study via email (see Appendix C) and screened with the teacher leadership self-assessment screening survey (See Appendix D) to determine eligibility. The teacher leadership self-assessment screening survey is an adaptation of two specific and valid instruments from Katzenmeyer and Moller (2009) and J. Chen (2022). Both instruments are reliable and cited in the literature as adding to the knowledge base on teacher leadership (J. Chen, 2022). All teachers with the formal title of teacher leader and those without titles were invited to the research study via a recruitment email (see Appendix C), which included the teacher leadership screening survey, informed consent form, and the CEO permission response.

The recruitment email (see Appendix C) included an introduction stating the research study's purpose and the participation criteria. Eligibility for participation in the study included being employed as an elementary, middle, or high school teacher at one of the schools in the charter system and meeting the eligibility requirements determined by the screening survey (see Appendix D) linked in the recruitment email. Additionally, the process for participation, including the data collection methods of individual interview, physical artifacts discussion, and focus group participation, was outlined for the recipient. A total of 190 teachers were invited to participate in the study and 24 candidates responded. Among the respondents, 18 of the 24 candidates qualified as teacher leaders, and 16 participated in the research study.

Candidate eligibility to participate in the study was granted based on teacher leadership screening survey (see Appendix D) scores between 124 and 155. After eligibility was determined, a message to participants was sent informing volunteers of their eligibility or

ineligibility to participate in the research study (see Appendix E). Every participant who agreed to participate in the research study completed a teacher leadership self-assessment screening survey. A screening score between 124 and 155 qualified participants for the study. The screening survey consisted of 31 Likert scale items ranging from never to always, with the lowest score per item being one and the highest score being five. Therefore, the range of 124-155 meant that participants selected often and always predominantly. A score within this range meant the participant self-reported exhibiting teacher leadership behaviors frequently and consistently. Once selected, participants completed interviews, shared and described artifacts, and participated in focus groups. The participants are heterogeneous, having all experienced the phenomenon of teacher leadership (Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 1997).

Patton (2015) suggested that up to 15 participants reach saturation sooner. Therefore, 16 qualifying participants were included in the study. Saturation is the research phase in which the researcher develops categories for data analysis by finding as many examples as possible of the category's incidents, events, or activities until the category is saturated and the category is understood (Patton, 2015). The participant recruitment plan employed purposeful and criterion sampling due to the participants' unique position to inform understanding of the central phenomenon and the requirement that all participants must have experienced the phenomenon, meeting the criterion presented in the teacher leadership self-assessment survey (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Purposeful sampling is a qualitative research concept, meaning the researcher selected individuals and sites due to their ability to purposely inform an understanding of the central phenomenon in the study. Additionally, criterion sampling is a quality assurance protocol by which the researcher selected sites and participants meeting specific criteria (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In this case, the criterion was the designation of teacher leader as determined

by the teacher leadership self-assessment survey.

Researcher's Positionality

Social constructivism is the interpretive framework that best fits my position as a researcher. According to Denzin and Lincoln (1994), social constructivists seek to understand the world in which they live and work. Through the social constructivist framework, meaning is made through the subjective understanding of the experiences and views of participants and informed through social interaction (Naidoo & Mabaso, 2023). Questions within social constructivism are open-ended, broad, and general, allowing participants to construct their meaning primarily through interviews. Another focus of social constructivism is on where participants live and work to forge an understanding of the historical and cultural settings of the participants (Naidoo & Mabaso, 2023), addressing the subjective nature of social constructivism, the personal experience and background of the researcher affect the descriptions of the participant's understanding of the world (Zahavi, 2022).

Interpretive Framework

One's behaviors and thoughts are influenced by personal beliefs, providing a lens and angle through which one views the world. Such lenses and angles support interpretations and biases that can and should be revealed and explained through sharing one's experiences (Smith, 2020). Subsequently, to choose the appropriate interpretative framework, I considered my personal experiences, where I have lived, and the work I have done, including my experiences attending a K-12 school in an impoverished community, as a first-generation college graduate, as a veteran educator, school administrator, mother, and pastor's wife. My life and experiences influence my understanding of the world and interpretation of events, thereby creating subjective meaning from lived experience. Consequently, as it embraces understanding the world in which

we live and work and the influence of background on interpretation, the interpretive framework of social constructivism was the lens used during my research. With its focus on interpreting the participant's construction of meaning and interactions with others, social constructivism pairs well with the goal of transcendental phenomenology, seeking to capture the essence of lived experience (Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 2014). My social constructivist paradigm affected the exploration of teacher leadership experiences and their influence on student achievement through the identification of themes and meaning making.

Philosophical Assumptions

Philosophical assumptions center on values and belief systems within the individual and lend insight to the reader by defining the researcher's view of the world and research approach. Three philosophical assumptions are addressed: ontological, epistemological, and axiological. Ontological assumptions relate to the nature of reality and the characteristics therein (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994), such as the multiple realities and different experiences expressed through phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994). Epistemological assumptions relate to how the researcher aims to get close to the studied participants, striving to minimize the distance between the researcher and the participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Axiological assumptions relate to how the researcher influences the study by making their values known (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994).

Ontological Assumption

Ontological assumptions help the reader understand how the researcher's beliefs guide their actions, and ontological assumptions include what the researcher believes about the nature of reality and its characteristics (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). As stated in God's word, I adhere to one universal reality related to God's truth. John 14:6 says, "Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (King James Bible, 2017a).

Even though individuals have their perception and reality of the world, God's truth is the primary and actual reality. As a Christian, I cannot promote multiple or alternate realities as definitive of truth but only of perception.

One's lived experiences hold great personal value and meaning, and central to phenomenology is the expression of multiple realities represented by the individual lives of the different participants (Moustakas, 1994). As a social constructivist, I highly value how the perceptions of others construct meaning yet hold to one truth, as stated in the Bible. Therefore, it is paramount that I strive to understand the experiences of each participant and make meaning as the participant conveys, free from the influence of my belief.

Epistemological Assumption

Epistemological assumptions are beliefs that inform the researcher's actions, and epistemological assumptions refer to the researcher's use of subjective evidence provided by participants and the researcher's position toward the participants (Blaikie & Priest, 2019). Regarding epistemological assumptions, getting close to those studied and finding answers to real-world problems through diverse approaches (Blaikie & Priest, 2019) is essential to understanding. Galatians 6:2 says, "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ" (King James Bible, 2017b). As a Christian, relationships with others are paramount to fulfilling God's call upon my life, so in research, I find it essential to know first-hand the subjective experience of others (Blaikie & Priest, 2019). One must experience life from another's context to understand a person, which is accomplished only through relationships and closeness. John 13:34a says, "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another…" (King James Bible, 2017c). I strived to know the participants in my study yet remain true to their subjective experiences and personal stories of life and work (Blaikie & Priest, 2019) through

bracketing (Moustakas, 1994) and the implementation of a triangulation of data collection methods and objective data analysis.

Axiological Assumption

Axiological assumptions include the researcher's report of values and biases, known as positionality, potentially shaping the researcher's interpretation of evidence (Blaikie & Priest, 2019). Related to axiological assumptions, I grew up in a low-income family with parents who received their high school diplomas well into adulthood. I am the first college graduate in my family, so I put immense value on education and have worked in education for over twenty years. Therefore, the theme of teacher leadership is near to my heart. Before moving into administration, I was a teacher leader for four years of my 14-year tenure as a classroom teacher. I distinctly remember feeling empowered when my former principal first recognized my leadership capacity and pushed me to lead my grade-level team. I remember the professional growth I experienced by modeling instructional leadership with my students and colleagues. Since I feel strongly about the power of teacher leadership, it would not have been hard not to allow my feelings and opinions to influence my transcendental phenomenology; however, I endeavored to stop my positive bias of teacher leadership from influencing my interpretations of the data by making my values known (Blaikie & Priest, 2019).

Researcher's Role

Qualitative research places the researcher as an instrument in contexts and observations, acting subjectively and applying personal experience to support descriptions (Stake, 2010). Moreover, in phenomenology, the researcher discloses their experience with the phenomenon to bracket themselves out of the study by separating personal experience from the participants' experience (Giorgi, 2020). Transcendental phenomenology requires the researcher to employ

epochè, withholding judgment and excluding the ordinary perception of things, by placing the researcher in a fresh and open position to revisit the phenomena from a transcendental state (Moustakas, 1994). Although bracketing and epochè are rarely perfectly achieved, when the researcher discloses personal experience with the phenomenon, it shows that they embrace epochè or bracketing (Moustakas, 1994). To ensure objective description and the portrayal of the participants' lived experiences, I strived to bracket my experience with teacher leadership and student learning to support pure and unbiased data collection and analysis.

As a former teacher leader of four years, I have positive opinions and feelings associated with the phenomenon because I experienced firsthand the sense of empowerment and degree of professional growth experienced through leadership in the classroom, grade-level team, department, and school. While serving as a teacher leader, my self-agency and instructional capacity increased. Moreover, I entered the teaching profession as a first-generation college graduate who believed in education's power and good teachers' influence. I distinctly remember my senior English teacher's tears as she read and provided feedback on my college scholarship application essay relating my parents' journey to their high school diplomas in their mid-forties, so my love of education, especially teachers, started at an early age. I admit this love represents a potential bias in my research study. Additionally, the research study setting took place at the K-12 charter school system in Southeastern United States, where I worked as an assistant principal for four years from 2019-2023. I know most, if not all, of the participant teacher leaders, so I carefully utilized epochè to reduce bias and assumptions as I conducted the research study.

Procedures

An application for approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Liberty University was submitted (see Appendix A). After approval from the IRB, site permission (see

Appendix B) was gained. Once site permission was gained, the participant recruitment email including informed consent and (see Appendix C) the teacher leadership self-assessment screening survey (see Appendix D) were sent. Data triangulation was achieved by implementing three data collection methods: individual interviews (see Appendix G), sharing and discussion of physical artifacts (see Appendix H), and focus groups (see Appendix I). Data analysis Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phases of thematic analysis and Moustakas' (1994) epochè, transcendental phenomenology reduction, and imaginative variation. After data collection and analysis, the data were reduced and synthesized into a singular body of evidence, resulting in themes answering the research questions.

Data Collection Plan

The transcendental phenomenology employed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phases of thematic analysis and Moustakas' (1994) epochè, transcendental phenomenology reduction, and imaginative variation, exploring the influence of teacher leadership on student learning at the primary and secondary school levels in a K-12 charter school system in the rural Southeastern United States. The primary goal of the data collection plan was to gather data holding experiential details in support of the analysis, including a reflective focus (van Manen, 2014). Before beginning data collection, IRB approval (Appendix A) and informed consent (Appendix F) for site and participant permissions were obtained. Three sources of evidence were gathered through in-depth interviews, physical artifacts, and two focus groups. With three data collection methods, triangulation was achieved, supporting the trustworthiness and promoting credibility of the study (Hatch, 2023; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The data collection methods were conducted in this order: individual interviews, physical artifact discussion, and focus groups. The individual interviews allowed the participants to

familiarize themselves with the topic and jargon of teacher leadership and gain insight into why they were selected for participation in the study (Döringer, 2021). The participants were told they qualified because they scored in the range of teacher leader on the screening survey (see Appendix D). The physical artifact discussion was second because it gave participants control over the direction of the discussion (Edwards & I'Anson, 2020), and the discussion permitted participants the opportunity to support their opinions about teacher leadership with a physical example that was meaningful to them. The focus group was last because it confirmed and extended ideas and themes from the semi-structured and in-depth individual interviews and physical artifact discussions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The focus groups allowed the participants to meet each other and share deeper and more thoughtful answers due to participation in the first two rounds of data collection and a subsequent deeper understanding of the topic. The purposeful and criterion sampling processes informing the data collection process allowed the participants to share their unique and mutual experiences of teacher leadership and how they influence student learning (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

During the data collection process, I wrote journal entries in the audit trail to practice reflexivity separating my personal experiences from participant experiences (Moustakas, 1994; Stahl & King, 2020). The audit trail started with the first entry on December 26, 2023, and continued into July of 2024. Within the audit trail, I detailed my actions while conducting the data collection and my thoughts and opinions about the process, participants, and findings. Upon receiving IRB approval (see Appendix A), the data collection process convened, and I started recruiting participants. All teachers employed by the charter school system were invited to the research study via email (see Appendix C) and screened with the teacher leadership self-assessment screening survey (see Appendix D) to determine eligibility. 190 teachers were invited

to participate in the study and 24 candidates responded. 18 of the 24 respondents qualified as teacher leaders, and 16 participated in the research study.

Each data collection method yielded lengthy and descriptive evidence supporting the research study's questions. After video and audio recording, transcripts were created using OtterAI. The transcripts for all three data collection methods were thoroughly read and revised to match the video evidence and pseudonyms were assigned to participants assuring anonymity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). After cleaning of the transcripts was conducted, the transcripts were emailed to the participants for member checking (Stake, 2010) then uploaded into the qualitative data analysis software, NVivo, and cases for each participant were created. The data were stored on a password protected computer and external hard drive. The paper data were stored in a locked filing cabinet. In the end, each participant had two individual sources of evidence, the individual interview and the physical artifact discussion. Additionally, each participant had evidence included in at least one of the two focus group meetings.

Individual Interviews

The rationale for the interview (see Appendix G) involved the nature of the rich qualitative data it elicited. As a guided and fluid conversation, the interview probed the participants, prompting in-depth and intensive responses, allowing the researcher insight into non-observable issues (Stake, 2010). The data collection process began with individual, in-depth interviews, including 16 primary and secondary school teacher leaders deemed eligible by the teacher leadership self-assessment screening survey (see Appendix D). 14 of the interviews occurred in-person and two occurred online in Microsoft Teams. Including both methods allowed easy participation, recording, back-up recording, and automatic transcription. The in-depth interview was informal and interactive, including open-ended questions supporting the

sharing of the participants' full stories (Moustakas, 1994) regarding their influence on student learning. Moreover, placing the in-depth interview first allowed the researcher to establish trust, making the participants feel welcome and comfortable, supporting ongoing collaboration and meaning making (Moustakas, 1994).

Table 1

Individual Interview Questions

1. Please introduce yourself and describe your teaching experience including years of service, levels, and subjects. CRQ
2. Define what teacher leadership means to you. CRQ
3. Explain how you exhibit teacher leadership in the classroom. CRQ
4. Describe the feelings generated by your role as teacher leader. SQ2
5. How do you perceive your sense of influence as a teacher leader? SQ1
6. What changes do you associate with the experience of teacher leadership? SQ1
7. How has being a teacher leader affected your belief about your capabilities? SQ2
8. In which environments and upon whom do you exhibit teacher leadership behaviors? CRQ
9. What behaviors of teacher leadership are most meaningful to you? CRQ
10. Describe your perception of how teacher leadership influences student learning. CRQ
11. How has teacher leadership affected your belief about controlling events affecting your life? SQ1
12. Describe the nature in which teacher leaders in your school act collectively. SQ3
13. Describe your experience with collective teacher leadership and student learning. SQ3
14. What else would you like to contribute to this study? CRQ

The individual interview question protocol included 14 questions. Interview question one made the participants feel comfortable and created a moment to focus on the experience of teacher leadership (Moustakas, 1994). Question two provided an opportunity for the participant to define teacher leadership. Question three related to the CRQ, facilitating substantive descriptions of the phenomenon of teacher leadership related to the central research question (Moustakas, 1994), and Questions four-five addressed SQ2 and SQ1 within SCT by association with the teacher leader as an agent with feelings related to self-efficacy (Schunk, 2020). Question six explored SQ1 and how teacher leadership influences the participants' sense of self-agency (Schunk, 2020). Question seven addressed SQ2 and the phenomenon of teacher leadership through the lens of SCT self-efficacy and influential acts (Schunk, 2020).

Questions eight-nine supported textural and structural descriptions within the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method and pertain to the central research question (Moustakas, 1994). Question ten addressed the CRQ by probing the teacher leader's sense of influence (Schunk, 2020), and question 11 related to SQ1 by exploring how teacher leadership impacts the participants ability to self-regulate (Schunk, 2020). Questions 12-13 addressed SQ3 with inquiry into the collective nature of teacher leadership (Schunk, 2020). Question 14 wrapped up the individual interview.

Physical Artifact Discussion

The rationale for using physical artifacts (see Appendix H) in the data collection process was that physical artifacts yield in-depth insight into the phenomenon and allow the participant control over the conversation (Edwards & I'Anson, 2020). Artifacts represent a unique data collection method, capturing detailed stories through memory recall (Clandinin et al., 2019). Additionally, the physical artifact represented lived-experience material that, when reflected

upon, yielded information fundamental to the phenomenon (van Manen, 1997). Eleven of the teacher leaders participated in the physical artifact discussion in-person and were video and audio recorded using an I-pad and OtterAI. Five of the teacher leaders participated in the physical artifact discussion online via Microsoft Teams and were audio and video recorded. The participants were asked to bring an in vivo artifact representing their experiences of teacher leadership and their understanding of how students learn under the leadership of teacher leaders.

Table 2

Physical Artifact Discussion Questions

1. What is your physical artifact? CRQ
2. Please describe your physical artifact. CRQ
3. Please share how you got this artifact. CRQ
4. What is it used for and how often? CRQ
5. How important is this artifact to you? CRQ
6. What three words or phrases would you use to describe this artifact? CRQ
7. How might this artifact be a part of you as a teacher leader? CRQ
8. How does the artifact represent your influence as a teacher leader on student learning? CRQ
9. Is there anything else you would like to add about your physical artifact or to contribute to this study? CRQ

The physical artifacts owned by people function as extensions of their minds and identities, supporting emotional and affective meanings unique to the participant's world. Physical artifacts represent a range of meanings based on the owner's value system, eliciting

meaningful conversation for the researcher seeking to understand the relationship between the owner and the artifact. Artifacts have history, purpose, and symbolic significance in physical form embodying the owner's ethos (Saldaña & Omasta, 2021). Implementing physical artifacts in the discussion prompted the participant to bring forth a behavior or memory associated with the phenomenon of teacher leadership (Moustakas, 1994). The physical artifact as a discussion starter probed the participant's value system, beliefs, and experiences associated with teacher leadership.

Saldaña and Omasta (2021) presented four analytic frames for incorporating physical artifacts into qualitative research. The frames include an analysis of how the object belongs, allowing one to discern the relationship between the object and the owner. Additionally, the frames include the symbolic connotations, the processes of the owner, and how the artifact is an extension of the owner. Questions one through five related to the first and second analytic frames exploring the relationship between the owner and the object and the owner's processes related to the use of the artifact. Questions six through eight required the teacher leader to relate the symbolic connotation of the physical artifact within teacher leadership and to express how the artifact represents their influence on student learning, all related to the CRQ. Question nine wrapped up the discussion.

Focus Groups

The rationale for including focus groups (see Appendix I) as a data collection method was the triangulation of data to support credibility (Moon, 2019) and the confirmation and extension of ideas and themes shared through the interviews and physical artifacts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Focus groups allow interaction among interviewees and are most successful with similar and cooperative participants who share a common experience, and one-on-one interviews

do not yield maximum disclosure (J. Robinson, 2020). The questions below were written after the first two data collection methods to represent the themes and patterns revealed in the interviews and artifact discussions to explore the phenomenon more deeply (Moustakas, 1994). The data collection method for the focus groups included the options of two groups with several meeting dates and times for the convenience of the participants. The two focus group meetings, one with nine participants and the other with seven participants, were held in-person in the afternoon after school. The meetings were audio and video recorded using the I-pad and OtterAI. In the first focus group meeting, seven participants met in-person. In the second focus group, seven participants met in-person and one participated online via Microsoft Teams. The groups were formed by convenience and at random. The formation of the groups was random because all the participants were assigned randomly to two different groups by Co-Pilot. Once the two groups were formed, several options of different dates and times were given to both groups. The dates were chosen out of convenience by the participants according to when most of the group could meet.

Table 3

Focus Group Questions

1. Please introduce yourself, share about your teaching experience, and the happiest teaching memory you have. CRQ
2. When did you first realize you were a leader and how did it change you? CRQ
3. What makes a teacher a teacher leader? Consider experience, type, and audience in your explanation. CRQ
4. What is student learning? Please explain. CRQ

5. Explain the ways that different types of teacher leadership are valuable to student learning. SQ1
6. As a teacher leader, how do you navigate challenges related to burnout while simultaneously leading students or colleagues? SQ2
7. How does teacher leadership relate to job satisfaction and teacher retention? Please explain. SQ2
8. How has the degree of collective efficacy among teachers affected school reform efforts such as student achievement and PLCs? SQ3
9. What else would you like to add? CRQ

Focus group Questions one through nine explored the phenomenon of teacher leadership and describe how students learn under the leadership of teacher leadership. Question one placed the participant at ease and allowed them to share about themselves to the group. Question two elicited responses pertaining to the CRQ allowing the researcher to determine how leadership skills were obtained by the participant. Question three referred to CRQ and the researcher's search for a common language and definition of teacher leadership (Nguyen et al., 2020). Question four asked the teacher leaders to define student because the data from the interview and discussions provided references to numerous types of student learning. Question five related to SQ1 and elicited information about self-agency and the dimension of teacher leadership lending the most contributions to the field (Q. Wang et al., 2023). Question six related to the teacher leader's sense of agency (Schunk, 2020) and burnout. Question seven related to SQ2 and job satisfaction and teacher retention, question eight related to SQ3 and collective efficacy (Schunk, 2020). Question nine wrapped up the focus group discussion.

Data Analysis

Due to the nature of transcendental phenomenology, the data analysis process is recursive and iterative, so I divided my data analysis activities into six phases (Braun et al., 2019; Naeem et al., 2023). Phase one included familiarization with relevant terminology (Saldaña, 2013) and the data by listening to the audio, reading the transcripts, and cleaning the transcripts. During the data analysis process, the transcripts were reviewed in this order: interview, physical artifact discussion, and focus group. With each review of the transcripts, codes were revised, added, or merged. Phase two included four rounds of coding to find the essence of the phenomenon. The first round of coding included the creation of *axial codes* made of descriptive phrases and characteristics from all three data sources. The first round of coding also included *descriptive codes* made from nouns and short phrases to describe the experiences of the participants. During this initial round of coding, I created 372 codes. The second round of coding included a review of the *axial* and *descriptive codes* and the changing of many to *in vivo* and *process codes*. The third round of coding, *focused coding*, aligned codes into clusters and categories in preparation for the identification of themes. The fourth round of coding involved merging and reducing the clusters of codes supporting saturation and creating categories representing the essence of the phenomenon.

During phase two the number of codes drastically reduced from 372 to 128. To aid the data analysis process, once the 128 codes were uncovered. Phase three of the data analysis process included reviewing the codes, clusters, and categories and further merging of categories. In phase three the data was transferred from NVivo into Google Spreadsheets for further analysis to uncover sub-themes from the categories of clustered codes. Phase four included defining the categories to form sub-themes, and phase five included reviewing the sub-themes and writing

themes capturing the essence of the phenomenon. Phase six presented the findings (Braun et al., 2019; Naeem et al., 2023). Further, once the sub-themes and themes were identified, the information from the Google spreadsheet, codes, sub-themes, and themes, was entered into NVivo as a new project for ease of presentation in preparation for phase 6.

Data analysis included epochè, transcendental phenomenological reduction, and imaginative variation (Moustakas, 1994). Epochè consists of the entire disclosure of the researcher's experience with the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). I conducted epochè throughout the data analysis process by journaling and bracketing my experiences as a former teacher leader in the digital audit trail (see Appendix J). I answered the interview, discussion, and focus group questions to discourage bias. My position as assistant principal in the charter school system required the continual and persistent practice of epochè to actively set aside my judgements and preconceived ideas supporting a naïve approach to the topic (Moustakas, 1994). Following epochè, transcendental phenomenological reduction occurred during which codes, representing textural descriptions of the essence of the phenomenon of teacher leadership, were derived.

The initial phase of transcendental phenomenological reduction during which codes were created included horizontalization because codes are without limit, new, and reconsidered like the horizon (Moustakas, 1994). Each code represented the textural description of the lived experiences of the participants by telling what they experienced. To begin, I reviewed the interview transcripts in NVivo and identified meaningful statements portraying understanding of the participant's lived experience (Giorgi, 2020). To create a system of hierarchical organization, I identified *a priori* codes using the research study’s questions. I started the coding process with four initial and descriptive codes. With continual reading and analysis of the interview transcripts, additional codes were developed.

The first round of coding consisted of first round *axial codes* with descriptive phrases and characteristics and descriptive codes with nouns and short phrases to describe data. Second round of coding, review of *axial* and *descriptive codes* changing many to *in vivo* and *process codes*. Third round of coding, *focused coding* aligning codes into clusters and organizing via themes. The fourth round of coding produced the creation of sub-themes and themes. Throughout the rounds of coding, horizontalization and phenomenological reduction occurred. Each round of coding produced horizontalization requiring epochè. The third and fourth rounds of coding continued phenomenological reduction through the clustering and categorizing of codes uncovering the essence of teacher leadership by reducing the textural descriptions of the phenomenon implementing imaginative variation (Moustakas, 1994). Through the application of horizontalization and phenomenological reduction, the codes, clusters, and categories were amalgamated into textural and structural descriptions telling what the participants experienced through textural descriptions. Finally, the practice of imaginative variation and the systematic varying of the possible structural meanings produced sub-themes and themes vividly illustrating the essence of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).

Trustworthiness

Due to the level of critique regarding the credibility of qualitative research, Lincoln and Guba (1985) presented methods establishing the trustworthiness of a qualitative study via the assurances provided by credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Just as terms like internal validity, objectivity, and generalizability are analogous to qualitative research, these terms are analogous to qualitative research. The subjectivity of qualitative research places the interpretation of trustworthiness on the reader; therefore, trustworthiness criteria provide

layers of credibility, encouraging the reader to instill trust in the person telling the story, thereby assigning trust to the story (Stahl & King, 2020).

Credibility

Credibility is the assurance of the congruence of the findings with the reality of the study context. The ability to describe how the findings work together to tell the study's reality or truth or convey the story's theme engenders confidence in the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Shenton, 2004; Stahl & King, 2020). Techniques for establishing credibility include (a) triangulation, (b) member-checking, and (c) peer debriefing (Shenton, 2004). The transcendental phenomenology exploring the experiences of teacher leaders related to student learning employed triangulation of evidence (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), member checking (Stake, 2010), and peer debriefing (Shenton, 2004). Triangulation of evidence means the study utilized three diverse sources of evidence to establish credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This study achieved triangulation through the data collection approaches of interviews, physical artifacts, and focus groups. Member checking includes asking the participants to review and assess the evidence, ensuring it reflects the words and thoughts of the participants (Stake, 2010). Participants were given access to transcripts for review, lending credibility to the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For example, copies of the interview, physical artifacts, and focus group interviews. Participants read, revised, and returned the transcripts to ensure credibility. Peer debriefing, like inter-rater reliability, involved others, such as work colleagues not associated with the research but given access to the data to determine its support of the researcher's conclusions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Before data collection began, a member of the researcher's work team fulfilled the role of peer-debriefer, ensuring credibility by reading the transcripts to confirm or refute the researcher's conclusions drawn from the evidence.

Transferability

Transferability is reporting the research study in a manner that allows the reader to apply the findings to other contexts. Like generalizability in quantitative research, transferability allows the reader to apply the lessons and overall findings of the qualitative study to different realities and contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Shenton, 2004; Stahl & King, 2020). Achieving transferability occurs in many ways, including rich and thick descriptions of the site, participants, and the participants' experiences by which the reader learns the contextual information. Information includes detailed descriptions of the circumstances, participants, fieldwork site, methodologies, and data collection procedures (Stahl & King, 2020).

Dependability

Dependability maintains that the outcomes would be the same if the study were conducted a second time with the same context, methods, and participants (Shenton, 2004). Descriptions of the study procedures support replication. Descriptions of the methodologies undertaken to develop the study are supported by the literature and reported with clarity, allowing for replication with any population of teacher leaders. A digital audit trail (see Appendix J) expressing the research dates and actions was used during the data collection to ensure dependability and generalizability (Vignato et al., 2022).

Confirmability

Stahl and King (2020) stated that confirmability involves employing qualitative research to ensure closeness to objective reality. Shenton (2004) noted that confirmability assures that the findings include the participants' experiences and ideas rather than the researcher's opinions. High interest in the topic of teacher leadership motivated the decision to conduct the study, yet precautions to prevent personal motivations from influencing the results occurred. To ensure

confirmability, the transcendental phenomenology included (a) digital audit trail and reflexivity (see Appendix J) and (b) triangulation. The audit trail allowed the reader to trace the research (Shenton, 2004) through straightforward research design and transparent data analysis. Triangulation was achieved through multiple sources of evidence (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) using interviews, physical artifacts, and focus groups, as well as the triangulation of credibility methods via triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing. Reflexivity was practiced through bracketing and journaling in the digital audit trail (see Appendix J) to separate personal and participant experiences (Moustakas, 1994; Stahl & King, 2020).

Ethical Considerations

The ethical considerations (see Appendices A-F and J-K) for the transcendental phenomenology included (a) obtaining IRB approval, (b) obtaining site access, (c) obtaining participant access, (d) consent for teacher leaders, (e) informing participants of the voluntary nature of the study and their right to withdraw from the study at any time, (f) the confidentiality of the site and participants; and (g) bracketing and journaling to combat the positive bias of teacher leadership. The researcher did not receive any personal, financial, or professional gains from conducting this research, and the participants did not receive any financial, professional, or personal gains. Before beginning the study, IRB approval was obtained (Sieber & Tolich, 2013). When obtaining site and participant access, informed consent was sought through a form stating that participation in the study is voluntary and would not place the participant at undue risk. The informed consent included participant permission to withdraw at any time and ensure participant confidentiality through full disclosure of the purpose of the study, the use of pseudonyms, and assurance of anonymity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Access to the site and participants was gained via the organization's gatekeeper or Chief

Educational Officer (CEO). Additionally, the CEO and school principal was contacted and informed of using site pseudonyms, the study's risks and benefits, and the data's security. The teacher leaders were contacted, informed of the study's risks and benefits, and ensured of the use of participant pseudonyms. Also, the teacher leaders and other participants were assured of the security of the study regarding both physical and electronic data stored in a locked office, locked filing cabinet, and password-protected hard drive. Bracketing and journaling ensured protection from the researcher's positive bias regarding teacher leadership. Bracketing and journaling allowed the researcher to share their experiences with the phenomenon, supporting the reader's judgment of whether the researcher applied personal experiences or participant experiences of the phenomenon to the study. Bracketing and journaling allowed the researcher to refrain from allowing personal experience to influence the determination of the participant's experiences with the phenomenon (Giorgi, 2020). Additionally, the use of the data for future studies was shared with the gatekeepers and participants. Moreover, risks and benefits to the participants were discussed, and the possible risks and mitigation factors were evaluated.

Permissions

Institutional Review Board approval was sought before gaining site permission and study participants' consent (Sieber & Tolich, 2013). After IRB approval (see Appendix A), site permission (see Appendix B) was sought by contacting the appropriate gatekeeper, the charter system CEO, and disclosing the nature and purpose of the study. Once informed site permission was obtained, the nature and purpose of the study were shared with potential participants via electronic mail and an in-person follow-up meeting on-site. Throughout the consent process, respect for persons was demonstrated through the application of measures respecting and protecting the privacy of participants and granting permission to withdraw from the study at will

(Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The study did not commence without IRB approval, and the subsequent informed consent permissions for the site and participants were obtained.

Other Participant Protections

Other ethical considerations regarding participant protection include informing participants of the voluntary nature of the study and their right to withdraw at any time (see Appendix C Recruitment Letter). Additionally, participants were ensured of the confidentiality of the site, as well as participants with site and participant pseudonyms (see Appendix F Informed Consent and Appendix B Site Permission). Furthermore, both physical and electronic data were secured. Physical data were secured in a locked office within a locked filing cabinet, and electronic data were filed within password-protected files and computer software programs (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Physical and electronic data will be destroyed after three years, as outlined by the Liberty University IRB guidelines.

Additionally, participation holds no known risks; however, participation in the study potentially holds benefits and drawbacks as participants were identified as teacher leaders by the screening survey (see Appendix D). This identification might influence positive or negative feelings associated with teacher leadership. Mitigating factors include individual consideration of behavior defining teacher leadership and work and life balance resulting in positive or negative feelings related to teacher leadership.

Summary

This chapter represents an in-depth overview of this transcendental phenomenology's applied research methodology, exploring teacher leaders' influence on student learning. The design method of transcendental phenomenology describes the ordinary meaning of a group of heterogeneous participants' lived experiences related to a phenomenon (van Manen, 1997). The

study took place at a K-12 charter school system in rural Southeastern United States and involved K-12 teacher leaders as determined by the self-assessment teacher leader survey. Additionally, this chapter includes relevant information about the research design of transcendental phenomenology, the research questions informed by the theoretical framework of SCT (Schunk, 2020), the data collection plan, data analysis and synthesis plans, and trustworthiness sections.

The data collection methods include interviews, physical artifacts, and focus groups presenting a data triangulation. The analysis methods employed a modified version of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method, including epochè, horizontalization and phenomenological reduction, and imaginative variation (Moustakas, 1994). The ethical considerations of trustworthiness, credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability were addressed through numerous methods, including data triangulation, member-checking, and peer debriefing. Ethical considerations were taken regarding permissions granted, participant safety and welfare, and collection and storage of data.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to explore how teacher leaders perceive their influence on student learning for K-12 teachers at a K-12 charter school system in rural Southeastern United States. Teacher leadership is generally defined as the individual or collective manner by which teachers influence peers, principals, students, and stakeholders to improve instructional practices to increase student achievement (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). The theory framing this study is Bandura's social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1977a, 1986, 1997; Schunk, 2020). This chapter presents the tables and narratives about the participants of the study and the themes and subthemes of the study. Additionally, this chapter includes the answers to the central research question and sub-questions and ends with a detailed summary.

Participants

The study included 16 participants, two males and 14 females, with one to 42 years of teaching experience in grades two through 12. Two participants were elementary teachers, five were high school teachers, two were middle school and high school teachers, five were middle school teachers, and two were teachers on special assignments in middle and high school. Eligibility in the study was granted based on self-assessment screening (see Appendix D) scores. Every participant who agreed to participate in the research study completed a teacher leadership self-assessment screening survey. Screening scores between 124 and 155 qualified participants for the study.

The screening survey (see Appendix D) consisted of 31 Likert scale items ranging from never to always, with the lowest score per item being one and the highest score being five.

Therefore, the range of 124-155 meant that participants were selected often and always predominantly. A score within this range means the participant self-reported exhibiting teacher leadership behaviors often and consistently. The participants responded to the solicitation email and successfully scored within the range of 124-155 on the pre-screening survey, qualifying each as a teacher leader for participation in the study. Table 4 provides an overview of the participants, including years taught, highest degree earned, content area, and grade level. A narrative description of each participant follows.

Table 4

Participants

Teacher Participant	Years Taught	Highest Degree Earned	Content Area	Grade Level
Debra	30 +	Specialist's in Education	Dual-Enrolled Statistics and Pre-Calculus	9-12
Autumn	1	none, professional certification	Health Sciences, Career Technical Education	6-12
Harper	16	Specialist's in Advanced Curriculum and Instruction	Teacher on Special Assignment, Guidance Department	6-12
Jennifer	18	Master's in Elementary Education	English Language Arts	6
Marie	15	Specialist's in Curriculum and Instruction	English	10
Heather	8	Bachelor's of Education	Special Education	6-12
Bobby	3	Master's in Mechanical Engineering	Engineering, Career Technical Education	9-12
Lisa	32	Master's in Elementary Education	Social Studies and Reading	5
Bethany	26	Master's in Secondary Education	Math	8
Stanley	3	Bachelor's in Psychology	Computer Science, Career Technical Education	6-8
Elizabeth	42	Master's in Math Education	Dual-Enrolled Math	9-12
Hayley	1	Bachelor's in Elementary Education	All Subjects	2

Teacher Participant	Years Taught	Highest Degree Earned	Content Area	Grade Level
Pam	20	Bachelor's in Early Childhood Education	English Language Arts	6-8
Courtney	27	Bachelor's of Science	Algebra and Geometry	7-8
Jillian	18	Master's of Curriculum and Instruction	Secondary Math Coach	6-12
Lilly Marie	2	Bachelor's in Psychology	Science	9-12

Debra

Debra is an experienced math teacher with thirty-plus years of experience in education. Three other math teachers participated in the research study for a total of four participants from math. When asked how long she had been teaching, she responded, "It seems about a hundred years." Debra is a specialist in education and desired to earn her doctorate but fell sick while enrolled and never returned to school. She started her career in a private Christian school where she served in several roles, including head of the Special Education Department. She has taught English, reading, and math at the secondary and post-secondary levels. When asked about her favorite teaching memory, Debra shared a story about a time in the hospital when five nurses entered her room, making her quite nervous, when one exclaimed to the others, "This is the reason I am a nurse." One of the nurses was Debra's former student who had failed remedial algebra three times and passed under Debra's teacher leadership in the classroom. When asked what teacher leadership meant to her, Debra stated, "I think a key component of teacher leadership is you want your students to respect you, you have to respect them, as well. I think it has to be a team effort." Debra is an informal teacher leader who is not currently serving as a department chair or grade level team leader.

Autumn

When asked how long she has been teaching, Autumn responded, “This is actually my first official year teaching in a school setting. So, really, right now less than one year teaching middle school, sixth grade through senior’s 12th grade.” Autumn is an informal teacher leader and one of three career technical education teachers in the study who currently teaches health science. Autumn has extensive experience in the medical field as an emergency medical technician, an operating room surgical technologist, a medical assistant, and in tissue banking. When asked about her favorite teaching memory, Autumn expressed, “My happiest moment is probably when the students get excited about something that I'm like, this is what we're doing today. And they're like, ‘Alright!’ They're just really excited about certain things that we do. So, I do love that.” When prompted to define what teacher leadership means to her, Autumn stated, “Teacher leadership? Well, leading a class. Leading your students into something better, bigger, more education.” Autumn is an informal teacher leader who does not serve as department chair or grade-level teacher leader. However, she shared that she was a leader and trainer in the medical field and often offers teaching peers advice about classroom management.

Harper

Harper is an informal teacher leader with 16 years of teaching experience at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. She prides herself on having teaching experience spanning from fifth grade to 12th grade. She has a specialist’s degree in gifted education, which she says is her passion, although most of her teaching career has been in the subject areas of science and social studies. She currently serves as a teacher on special assignment within the guidance department. Harper shared that teacher leadership is “leading others and making them better teachers.” She elaborated on her definition by adding that teacher leadership is “any type of role as far as collaboration, innovation, group studies, professional development, inside the

classroom, outside the classroom, I also think that's modeling to students." Harper's favorite teaching memory is "memories in general, I have been contacted by past students, and I actually got an email last night from a senior requesting that I write her senior letter." Although Harper is not in the classroom this year, she supports her colleagues through ongoing relationships and mentorship. Of all 16 participants, Harper scored the highest on the pre-screening survey gauging the exhibition of teacher leadership characteristics.

Jennifer

Jennifer has been teaching for 18 years at the elementary and middle school levels. She has a master's in elementary education and currently teaches intensive English language arts in grade six in the middle school. Jennifer explained that teacher leadership means "being a teacher who has an interest in doing what's best for the entire section. So, for example, I try to look out not only for what's best for all the students but also what's best for the different departments as a whole."

Jennifer shared that she wants to be the department head she needed when she taught in elementary. During that time, she felt overlooked and left out. Therefore, she is passionate about including everyone and giving everyone a voice. When asked about her favorite teaching memory, Jennifer shared, "A big thing for me is building relationships, so I go to weddings of kids that I've had in the past . . . One of my students came to my dad's funeral like she drove eight hours to come to my dad's funeral in Texas." Jennifer is a formal teacher leader serving as the department chair for English language arts in middle school.

Marie

Marie is a high school English teacher who has taught for 15 years and has a specialist's degree in curriculum and instruction. Marie has experience at the middle school, high school,

and post-secondary levels having worked as an adjunct professor. When asked to define teacher leadership, Marie shared, “Teacher leadership includes not only setting a good example but helping out colleagues and mentoring colleagues.” Marie is soft-spoken and unassuming, admitting that she needs to step-up her leadership contributions to the school. She references attending the school improvement team meetings and not speaking up when the opportunity arises. Marie’s favorite teaching memory is: “. . . When my students decided to do a class Oscars production themselves.” Through the individual interview and physical artifact discussion, Marie promoted student engagement and learning as important, evidenced by the physical artifact she chose to share. The artifact was a spreadsheet containing student-reported information about how to increase engagement in the classroom. Marie is a formal teacher leader serving as the tenth-grade team leader.

Heather

Heather is an informal teacher leader with eight years of teaching experience and a bachelor’s in secondary education. She currently works as a special education teacher but served most of her tenure as an English teacher. When asked to share demographic information, she related how she came to teach as a paraprofessional, and because she naturally possessed the desire and skill to teach, she was recruited by school leadership to get her teaching credentials. When asked to define teacher leadership, Heather said, “So teacher leadership, to me is showing that you are one that can be followed or should be followed. So, you are a good example in some way.” Heather shared that her favorite teaching memory is: “. . . When a student came back and told me that they loved the book we read and that it was their favorite book they've ever read. Like even years later, they came back and said that reading with me was their favorite.” Heather’s physical artifact was a collection of student notes, handwritten cards, and pictures. The

picture was painted by a student who read a book with her and painted a picture representing what she learned from Heather's teaching and reading the book.

Bobby

Bobby is an informal teacher leader currently teaching engineering at the high school level and has done so for three years. Like Autumn, Bobby is a career and technical education teacher who came to education after a career as a civil engineer. He has a master's in mechanical engineering, and he served as a leader in the Navy and a project manager in his 40-year career as a civil engineer. Initially, Bobby was perplexed by the research study on teacher leadership, having never thought of teaching and leadership together. However, he expressed an understanding of the purpose of the study when we discussed followership as integral to both leadership and teaching. When asked what teacher leadership means to him, Bobby said, "Working for the Navy leadership was something we did a lot in there, we would do the different theories of leadership and this, but I found out pretty much is leadership is being at the front."

Later, during the individual interview, Bobby added, "Leadership is leadership. Whether you're teaching or leading troops, or running programs, it's about getting your people to go with you." Because of his experiences, Bobby has extensive opinions and knowledge about leadership in general. Nevertheless, he understands that as a teacher, his students must listen to him and follow him. Bobby's favorite teaching memory is: "When seniors came back. Come see me. Tell me about what they're doing. And when they come in wanting to take my class again, the next class."

Lisa

Lisa has 32 years of teaching experience at the elementary and middle school levels and holds a master's in elementary education. She currently teaches reading and social studies at the

fifth-grade level and serves as a formal teacher leader in the role of grade-level team leader for the fifth-grade team. For her physical artifact discussion, Lisa brought a kitty paw pointer bought for her many years ago by a student. She chose the pointer because she uses it frequently for pointing at maps and as a means of eliciting smiles and laughter from students. Her choice of artifact represents her well because she is a practical and joyful teacher who wants her students to love learning. When asked to define teacher leadership, Lisa said, "To me, being a teacher leader means that I have control and good connections with my classroom. It also means working with colleagues that I can share things with them." Lisa's favorite teaching memory is, "When students improve and make gains, and do well, that makes me incredibly happy. And when my kids . . . come back and tell me that they love history."

Bethany

Bethany has a 26-year tenure and extensive teaching experience, having taught at the elementary, middle, and high school levels, as well as in adult education and post-secondary education. Bethany teaches eighth-grade middle school math and is an informal teacher leader. Bethany believes teacher leadership means "your actions far exceed your words because they [students] see you practicing what you preach." Her favorite teaching memory is getting positive feedback from students about their improved ability to do math and her teacher leadership. She shared, "And one of the kids just says something like, 'Oh my goodness, I've never understood this until, like, now.'" A common sentiment among the five math teachers in the study is teaching students to understand math in a way they never did before entering their classroom and teaching students that making mistakes is okay because it is learning.

Stanley

Stanley is one of three career technical education teachers in the research study, and he teaches computer science at the middle school level. In his former career, he worked as a private security contractor and corporate trainer developing curriculums. Additionally, he has a bachelor's degree in psychology. This is Stanley's third year in education, and he is a formal teacher leader serving as the department head for the middle school elective department. Stanley shared that teacher leadership is "bringing out the best in the students, inspiring them, both intrinsically like they already may have a desire, but an inner desire to do better and to achieve extrinsically." When asked to share his favorite teaching memory, Stanley said, "I would say my favorite memory teaching is every year we have a couple of opportunities for students to get certified in Python and other subjects. And seeing them get certified." Stanley is a humble individual who questions whether he is a teacher leader, and he does not believe he is a teacher leader to the same degree as his peers in the study. When asked specific questions about teacher leadership during the focus group, he shared that he was proud to be a part of the group but did not have any additional information to share.

Elizabeth

Elizabeth is a high school math teacher with 42 years of teaching experience. She holds a master's degree in secondary math and is an informal teacher leader. During her educational tenure she taught adult learners and high school learners and served as a math coach. Elizabeth's favorite teaching memory involves a time in her life when workers in her local town were laid off and chose to return to school. About that time, Elizabeth said, "They just, they loved everything we did. They were so appreciative, and it was just a fun experience just to work with people who really, they were laid off." Elizabeth defined teacher leadership as "teachers working

together on best practices and talking about best practices and encouraging one another and supporting one another." Elizabeth differentiates between teacher leadership in the classroom and with her peers, sharing that her definition relates to teacher leadership with her colleagues. She further explained in her individual interview and focus group that she feels like more of a team player than a teacher leader.

Hayley

Hayley is an informal teacher leader in her first year of teaching second grade. She holds a bachelor's degree in elementary education. Hayley's favorite teaching memory occurred on Valentine's Day with her students, who surprised her with a wreath decorated with comments about what they love about her. Hayley described her memory, "I could tell they were being creative, and I just let them do their thing. And one student brought in a big red heart, and they all wrote a heart on it for me." Hayley believes teacher leadership means, "just showing how much you care with all the people you interact with at your job." As evidenced by her definition of teacher leadership, Hayley, although a new teacher, sees herself as a teacher leader. In the focus group, she shared that she was told in her education courses while in college that she naturally exhibits teacher leadership.

Pam

Pam is an informal teacher leader with 20 years of experience at the elementary and middle school levels. She taught all subjects in elementary, English language arts, family and consumer science, and music. She teaches English language arts to sixth graders and holds a bachelor's degree in early elementary education. To Pam, teacher leadership means "setting a stage for a very positive work environment, I think first and foremost, having vision for being able to, you know, accomplish new things." Pam's favorite teaching memory is: "When I student

taught because I taught with a master teacher." Pam is a creative type, as evidenced by what she shared in the focus group and physical artifact discussion. In the focus group, she shared that her best teaching memory, in addition to teaching with a master teacher, involved a time when she was writing and singing songs with her students, and her physical artifact was a seashells reference book through which she compared seashells and teacher leadership.

Courtney

Courtney is a formal teacher leader in middle school math who teaches algebra and geometry to seventh- and eighth-grade students. Courtney has 28 years of teaching experience in reading and math and holds a Bachelor of Science. Courtney grew up with a desire to be a teacher and has always been one. Courtney defined teacher leadership as, "I just feel like I have a lot of experience that I can share with my colleagues, especially like newer teachers . . ." When asked about her favorite teaching memory, Courtney shared, "I have a bazillion happy teaching memories. I do like when my students come in . . . and tell me the things that they still remember from my class." Courtney is passionate about supporting new teachers, so they do not get overwhelmed and experience burnout. She wants to make teachers happy, so they do not leave the profession.

Jillian

Jillian currently works as a secondary math coach and has 18 years of teaching experience in math at the middle and high school levels. She holds a master's in curriculum and instruction and is passionate about helping students understand math. When asked what teacher leadership means, Jillian replied, "Whenever an adult, or a teacher in the school, tries to lead and mentor and assist other teachers to become better teachers . . ." Jillian also believes that teacher leaders should improve instructional methods and build stronger community and positive

relationships in the school. As a math coach, she acted as a formal teacher leader by supporting new and experienced math teachers in middle and high school. Jillian's favorite teacher memory is: "Having students say I can learn from you. Especially when it comes to math." Like the other five math teachers, Jillian wants students to understand and enjoy learning math.

Lilly Marie

Lilly Marie is an informal teacher leader with two years of experience in pre-school and high school science. During data collection, Lilly Marie repeatedly shared how important it is to create a safe place for students, and she expressed desire for teaching students that it is okay to not be okay. Lilly Marie believes teacher leadership is "being able to support the kids in what they need and support your peers and what they need." She enjoys seeing her students having fun and values instructional activities that allow students to learn and have fun expressing themselves academically and socially. Lilly Marie's favorite teaching memory is, "When we do a Hunger Games lab out on the football field, so, it's really fun to see them get creative and a little competitive."

Results

The study revealed the lived experiences of teacher leaders and how they perceived their influence on student learning. The data collection methods of individual interviews, physical artifacts discussions, and focus groups provided ample evidence to portray the themes and sub-themes expressing the essence of the lived experiences of the participants. Through data analysis, four themes with three sub-themes each emerged. Tables 5 through 8 provide an overview of each thematic finding with the sub-themes. The themes and sub-themes follow:

- Diversity of Collaborative Leadership with the sub-themes of Modeling Behaviors, Outcomes of Collective Action, and the Variety of Teacher Leadership;

- Empowered Professional Growth with the sub-themes of Self-Agency, Developing Professionally, and Self-Efficacy;
- Transformative Learning Connections with the sub-themes of Student Learning Outcomes, Changing Student Minds and Behavior, Connection and Trust;
- Leadership and Validation with the sub-themes of Risks Associated with Teacher Leadership, Challenges of Teacher Leadership, and Rewards of Teacher Leadership.

Table 5
Themes, Sub-Themes, and Codes

Themes	Sub-Themes	Codes
Theme 1 Diversity of Collaborative Leadership	Modeling Behaviors	Modeling for Students & Peers Influencing Peers Being Positive Increasing Tolerance Having Experience
	Outcomes of Collective Action	Improved Student Learning Teaming Healthy Teams, Healthy School Acting Collectively Everyone Unified Everyone has a Voice
		School and Classroom
Themes	Sub-Themes	Codes
	The Variety of Teacher Leadership	Informal and Formal Teacher Leadership Student Recipients of Teacher Leadership
		Peer Recipients of Teacher Leadership

Diversity of Collaborative Leadership

All 16 participants referenced the theme of *diversity of collaborative leadership.* Table 5 provides an overview of theme one. The theme includes a discussion of informal, formal, and collective teacher leadership through modeling behaviors supporting teacher peers and students. The essence of the theme promotes teacher leaders as exhibiting leadership through modeling

and the influence of students and peers via partnership in a collaborative and collective manner. Twelve of the 16 participants referenced the theme from the perspectives of informal teacher leaders, and 4 of the participants referenced the theme from the perspective of formal teacher leaders. All 16 participants referenced collective teacher leadership primarily through grade-level team and department actions. The predominant form of teacher leadership is modeling behaviors for teacher peers and students, with all 16 participants referencing leading through modeling behaviors.

For example, Hayley said, “I, as a first-year teacher, still try to lead my team as much as possible, even though they are guiding me and teaching me as a first year.” Similarly, Stanley said, “I think I'm fairly influential. This is my first year at leadership with working over a special area. So, within my team, I would share resources that I find or that I make.” Furthermore, Autumn said she exhibited teacher leadership on, “Teachers, other teachers, maybe some that are new like me.” While more experienced teachers like Lisa said they exhibit teacher leadership through, “Working with colleagues that I can share things with them, and I am a team leader for fifth grade. So, they depend on me to relay information from admin. And iron out problems.”

In the vein of collaborative leadership and the sharing of information and influencing behavior, Courtney said, “I just feel like I have a lot of experience that I can share with my colleagues, especially newer teachers.” Continuing with the idea of sharing and helping other teachers through the diversity of collaborative leadership, Bethany said, “I haven't been . . . what is it called? What's the eighth-grade lead or team lead or whatever? But I still know how it feels to be helpful and lead others that might need help.” Referencing the theme of diversity of collaborative leadership through modeling behaviors, Harper said, “Teacher leadership, to me is leading others and making them better teachers. So, I feel that's any type of role as far as

collaboration, innovation, group studies, professional development, inside the classroom, outside the classroom, and modeling to students." Elements of the diversity of collaborative leadership appeared across all three data collection sources for most participants, including all 16 individual interviews, 12 of 16 physical artifacts discussions, and both focus groups.

Modeling Behaviors

The sub-theme of modeling behaviors under the theme of *diversity of collaborative leadership* had 30 associated files and 253 references across the individual interview, physical artifact discussion, and focus groups. The category is comprised of five codes: modeling for students and peers, influencing peers, being positive, increasing tolerance, and having experience. The code of modeling for peers and students included 27 files and 93 references. In focus group 4.2, Jennifer said, "I tried to do that [modeling behaviors] in my classroom as well. Hopefully when they're working in their small groups and they're discussing things, they're showing each other that same respect."

Comparably, in focus group 4.8, Jillian said, "Yeah, I lead by example. I was thinking mastery and modeling. Those were my two things that I was thinking." Added to that, in the physical artifact discussion, Debra said, "If you are a leader, you are giving the example of your expectations. You cannot expect your students to do their best if you're not leading the way and doing your best." As well, Bobby, in the physical artifact discussion, said, "I would say how I'm hoping that by me, motivating or inspiring or showing empathy maybe that taught them, you know, in a way, not just leading but letting students kind of show their innate leadership and ability to have empathy." All the quotes shared the essence of leading through the modeling of behaviors for students and peers. Pam, in the individual interview, said, "I think that when other teachers come in and have conversation with you, you're talking about things that are going to

move the organization forward and not backward." Likewise, in summation of both modeling behaviors for students and peers and the *diversity of collaborative leadership*, Heather said in the individual interview: "The fact that I have helped him and been a leader to him shows him that he needs to reciprocate and, in a way, right, be there for me when I need it." Heather recognized that collaborating with her peers encourages reciprocation and future partnerships.

Heather's quote related to the code influencing peers. Influencing peers had 18 associated files and 77 references across all three data collection methods. Regarding *influencing peers*, Lilly Marie said this in the individual interview, "Learning how to support others how they need to be supported, because we, everyone, has a very limited view of, well, this is what I do to help or like, this is what would help me." This quote expressed a sincere desire, like others referenced above, to not only influence peers but lead through influence and modeling behaviors. Finally, the third code, being positive, had 15 associated files and 33 references. Relatedly, Elizabeth, in the individual interview, said, "Students pick up really quickly when they come in the room with your mood, your mood, positive if you have just a negative disposition." Therefore, an integral part of the diversity of collaborative leadership is modeling behaviors, influencing peers, and being positive.

Outcomes of Collective Action

The sub-theme of outcomes of collective action was the second category for the theme of diversity of collaborative leadership with 19 associated files and 246 references across the individual interview, physical artifact discussion, and focus groups. The category is comprised of six codes: improved student learning, teaming, healthy teams, and healthy schools, acting collectively, everyone unified, and everyone having a voice. The code of acting collectively included 19 associated files and 175 references. Between the two focus groups, focus groups 4.2

and 4.8, there were 76 references to acting collectively, including the following. In focus group 4.8 Bobby said, “I think what it is less about what kind of leader you are but what kind of leaders you get around you. I was very fortunate I had come from very outstanding teams. The people that I've worked with every one of them are high achievers.” Additionally, in focus group 4.8, Jennifer said, “So, I feel like we're all leading our team. So, hopefully, I'm providing opportunities for each one of them to step up and say hey, I've got this.” The collective strength and leadership of the team are important components of the diversity of collaborative leadership.

The second code of improved student learning, with 19 associated files and 43 references across all data collection methods, addressed the motivation at the heart of most teacher leaders. Through collective action, the teacher leaders in the study expressed the belief that the outcome of improved student learning can be achieved. In the physical artifact discussion, Courtney said regarding improved learning and the outcome of collective action, “I think because we can talk about it with not just math people. Like I can talk about all my different projects and how we can all use them together as an entire grade level.” Accordingly, Marie, in the individual interview, said regarding the English department PLC, “. . . I think that was the year that we took the spring to focus on vocabulary instruction. Overall, the test scores for the spring progress monitoring test were an improvement. So that was a good [collective] experience.” Moreover, Elizabeth referenced improved student learning because of the collective action of the math department PLC targeting group quizzes. In the individual interview, Elizabeth said, “They [students] really get a lot of . . . different feedback from their friends or their peers than they do from me. I think that they teach each other something that helped them to learn it.”

The third code in the sub-theme of outcomes of collective action was healthy teams and healthy school with 18 associated files and 88 references across the individual interview and

focus groups. Consequently, seven references were from Jennifer who had a great deal to say about teaming. Jennifer said, “We have department meetings every Monday. We don't really meet with other grade levels other than middle school. But we're pretty tight in the middle school, as far as we're meeting weekly.” The positive sentiment of “pretty tight” captured the essence of collective action supporting the outcomes of improved student learning and healthy teams and schools.

The Variety of Teacher Leadership

The sub-theme of the variety of teacher leadership was the third category for the theme of diversity of collaborative leadership, with 18 associated files and 74 references across the individual interviews and focus groups. The category is comprised of the codes of school and classroom, informal and formal teacher leadership, student recipients of teacher leadership, and peer recipients of teacher leadership. Substantially, the code school and classroom with 17 associated files and 22 references is the largest of all the codes included in the sub-themes rightfully defining the school and classroom as the predominant environment of teacher leadership. Marie, in the individual interview, had the greatest number of references to this code because, in addition to the classroom and students, Marie included clubs and extra-curricular activities. Marie said, “Maybe a few other environments, like interactions with students, friends, club events, or, I haven't done this very often, but a couple of times I've gone to my students’ games.”

The code of student recipients of teacher leadership had seven associated files and 10 references, narrowly exceeding that of peer recipients of teacher leadership, with five associated files and seven references. Thus, placing students and peers as nearly equal recipients of teacher leadership. Concerning student recipients of teacher leadership, Lilly Marie, in the individual

interview, said, “I think particularly with the Honors Biology with the ninth and 10th grade because they also come in very unsure and very insecure. Not as much as the 10th graders but the ninth graders especially they don't know how high school works yet.” In relation to peers as recipients of teacher leadership, Autumn, in the individual interview, said, “I told them [peers] what I do. And they're like, well, I'll try that, especially with the classroom management, because I think they've come in before and seen my kids.”

Focus group 4.8 shared the most feedback related to formal and informal teacher leadership. Lisa, describing how members of her team take leadership roles, said, “She takes the lead in that. And it's very helpful, and it's so appreciated. She's not an official title, but man, is she a leader.” This statement encapsulated the meaning of informal teacher leader and the variety of teacher leadership. Just the same, Courtney said of a peer without the formal title of teacher leader, “Like ------, used to be on the team. That woman is an organizational genius. And so, she still helps us sell the eighth grade T-shirts, and organize, get it together.” Additionally, Debra, in consideration of the different ways her team members exhibit leadership, said, “ ---- is our organizational guru, and how having her makes it [the math department] very structured. And I think every teacher, or hopefully, every teacher, has a strength.” This quote embodies the essence of theme one, the *diversity of collaborative leadership,* and the sub-themes of modeling behaviors, outcomes of collective action, and the variety of teacher leadership by expressing a sentiment attached to each facet.

Table 6

Themes, Sub-Themes, and Codes

Themes	Sub-Themes	Codes

Theme 2		
Empowered Professional Growth	Self-Agency	Autonomy Careful Planning Being Innovative Being in Control Ways to Decrease Burnout Being Organized Flexibility Implementing Routine Communicating Expectations
	Self-Efficacy	Feeling Good Increasing Confidence Self-Fulfilling I am Able, Capable I Can Do More than I Thought
	Developing Professionally	Improving my skills Stepping Up Helping Teachers Grow Changes Associated with Teacher Leadership Greater Self Discipline Better Teacher Deeper Understanding of Content

Empowered for Professional Growth

All 16 participants referenced the theme of *empowered for professional growth*. Table 6 provides an overview of the second theme. The theme includes a discussion of the sub-themes of self-agency, self-efficacy, and developing professionally. The essence of the theme portrays teacher leaders as having the autonomy and initiative to exhibit skills supporting personal and professional well-being resulting in feelings of capability and self-confidence leading to greater professional development. Elements of the theme appeared across all three data collection methods in both focus groups, 16 individual interviews, and 14 physical artifact discussions. Focus group 4.8 and Bethany's individual interview had the most referenced files for the theme with 77 between the two. In focus group 4.8, participants said the following. Lisa said, regarding careful planning and innovation, "When we get together with the team, and we are creating

curriculum direction, and things that we're going to do with the class, and then everyone implements. I'm learning new things from the younger teachers that are new and great and innovative."

Pertaining to flexibility and innovation, Courtney said, "You gotta keep up with the times. Be flexible and roll with the punches." For self-efficacy, Autumn, Debra, and focus group 4.2 had the most to say, with 62 references between them. Regarding feelings of happiness and empowerment associated with teacher leadership, Autumn said, "I'm just so proud of these students, especially if you have a student that is struggling, and they do something really well, and they understand this concept. It's just it's a really good feeling."

About self-agency and being in control of students in the classroom, Debra said, "I think it has to be a team effort. But like, there are times when you just have to pull the teacher card and say, you know, this is how we're going to do things." Heather and Bethany had 28 references to developing professionally in their individual interviews, and 10 participants referenced developing professionally in the physical artifact discussion. About developing others professionally, Bethany, in the physical artifact discussion, said, "If I can somehow tie in the use of toolbox and strategies and resources, it's a visible, tangible reminder of, okay, well listen to her, maybe she's got something like, maybe she's got a connection." Moreover, in the physical artifact discussion concerning being empowered for professional growth, Hayley referenced a situation whereby her student applied skills to master an academic and social area. Hayley said, "She learned that week where she had gotten the skills to communicate with her friends. So, it's important because I felt like this was an area I had learned how to teach someone to master or to feel comfortable doing." In this quote, Hayley first celebrated the student's success, then she

celebrated her teaching skills. Because of the self-agency, professional growth, and self-efficacy involved, this sentiment captures the essence of the theme *empowered for professional growth.*

Self-Agency

The sub-theme of self-agency was the first category for the theme of *empowered for professional growth* with 23 associated files and 195 references across the individual interview, physical artifact discussion, and focus groups. The category is comprised of the following codes: autonomy, careful planning, being innovative, being in control, ways to decrease burnout, being organized, flexibility, implementing routine, and communicating expectations. The code of teacher leadership behaviors was the largest, with 16 associated files and 59 references. The most referenced behaviors represented in the code were careful planning and flexibility, with 21 associated files and 34 references. Referring to careful planning and flexibility, Harper, in the physical artifact discussion about her paper calendar, said, “It's all in pencil, though, that's very important for me; I can't write anything in ink in here because I have to be flexible.”

Additionally, regarding careful planning and teacher leadership behaviors in the sub-theme of self-agency, Elizabeth, in the individual interview, said about answering questions and returning graded papers, “I'll research it, I'm looking into that. And just, you know, making sure that their assignments are graded and handed back on time, I can't stand for them to wait.” Moreover, Jennifer, in the individual interview referring to teacher leadership behaviors exhibiting self-agency, said, “And so, people have come in to see how I'm creating the curriculum that I'm using in the stations. They've come in to just see how I manage the stations.” Like Harper and Elizabeth, Jennifer exhibited another recurring code in the category of self-agency, being in control.

The code of being in control had 13 associated files and 22 references. In the individual interview, Lisa had the most references to being in control. Lisa said, “To me, having control of my classroom, where all kids can learn is very important. And I think the kids realize the first couple days of school.” Similarly, Debra referenced being in control in both the individual interview and physical artifact discussion. In the physical artifact discussion, Debra said, “This is the expectation. This is what I'm doing. This is what You're doing and together, we're going to get from A to B.” Relatedly, Bobby, in the individual interview, said, “Before I wasn't too worried about things I did during the week before but since I've been teaching, I'm making sure that I go to bed early.” Bobby’s quote captured the essence of *empowered for professional growth* via behavior modifications made to support teacher leadership in the classroom through self-agency.

Self-Efficacy

The sub-theme of self-efficacy was the second category for the theme of *empowered for professional growth,* with 27 associated files and 149 references across all data collection methods. All 16 individual interviews, both focus groups, and nine out of 16 physical artifact discussions refer to the sub-theme of self-efficacy. The category is comprised of the codes of feeling good, increasing confidence, self-fulfilling, I am able, capable, and I can do more than I thought. Substantially, the most referenced code, feeling good, had 23 associated files and 55 references. In the physical artifact discussion, Jennifer made five references to *feeling good.* Jennifer said, “Because I have to be an encourager every day. So I feel like the best place that I get my encouragement is from God.” Furthermore, Jennifer said, “And so this just helps me to stay positive and there's definitely alike I can get through anything because of my Bible, because of my faith, because of my love for God.” Concerning feeling good, Stanley said, “I call it the

Wall of Honor where little momentos students give to me are put up on the on the board. They may not take it too serious, but I mean, it means a lot for me." Like Jennifer and Stanley, the physical artifact for Jillian represents feeling good. Concerning the physical artifact discussion, Jillian said, "It motivates me to be better and better. It reminds me that I'm good. And it's heartwarming." All three participants express encouragement, faith, goodness, and heartfelt emotion for the physical artifact supporting self-efficacy and empowering professional growth.

The second code for the sub-theme of self-efficacy was self-fulfilling, with 16 associated files and 29 references. Debra said the most about self-fulfilling with seven references in the individual interview. Debra said, "I feel very pleased and satisfied. I feel like this is what I'm supposed to be doing. And, it actually is verification that I am doing what I'm supposed to be doing." Similarly, Heather, in the physical artifact discussion, said, "This is a good reminder as to no, I do love my job, and it does make an impact. And there's a really good reason why I do what I do." Lilly Marie expressed self-fulfilling from the perspective of pride experienced after realizing she can do more than she thought initially. Lilly Marie said, "And so I can feel very proud in the fact that I've done a lot more in the past few years than I thought I could because I came in terrified." All three participants expressed the sentiment of belief in their capabilities, the essence of the sub-theme of self-efficacy.

The third code in the sub-theme of self-efficacy was I am able, capable, with 16 associated files and 28 references. Capturing the significance of the code, Marie, in the individual interview, said, "When I can help someone or set a good example, it's just very encouraging. So, it makes you feel like you are capable of being a leader." Concerning self-efficacy and being capable, Pam said, "I think it is all about believing. It's all about, you know, seeing your vision come to fruition." The idea of believing is at the heart of self-efficacy and the

code of I am able, capable. The sub-theme of self-efficacy represents the core of *empowered professional growth.*

Developing Professionally

The sub-theme of developing professionally was the third category for the theme of *empowered for professional growth,* with 27 associated files and 134 references across all data collection methods. Fifteen of 16 individual interviews, both focus groups, and 10 out of 16 physical artifact discussions refer to the sub-theme of developing professionally. The category is comprised of the codes of improving my skills, stepping up, helping teachers grow, changes associated with teacher leadership, greater self-discipline, and better teacher. In focus group 4.2, Heather said, "It [participation in the research study] made me realize all the different times when I'm walking up next to a co-worker and they're like, 'Hey, wait a minute. Can I pick your brain?'" Relatedly, Lilly Marie, in focus group 4.2 said, "My first-year teaching, my mentor teacher kept asking me advice about how to run her classroom, which kind of took me aback and this seems reversed." Both quotes, with the ideas of stepping up, improving my skills, and helping teachers grow, represent the theme, empowered for professional growth, through the sub-theme of developing professionally.

The most referenced code in the sub-theme of developing professionally, stepping up had 16 associated files and 55 references. In the individual interview, Bethany said: "I want to be a part of it [math leadership team]. You know, to see that everybody's on the same page to see vertical alignment, that's the biggest thing." Similarly, in the individual interview, Marie said, "Teacher leadership includes not only setting a good example but helping out colleagues and mentoring colleagues." Moreover, about stepping up and leading, Harper, in the individual interview, said, "I really tried to give back. It's more of someone's given stuff to me, so I try to

give those same feelings back to someone else, whether it's the kids or other adults." All three quotes represent the core of developing professionally with the integration of self-agency and self-efficacy.

Improving my skills is the second code in the sub-theme of developing professionally, with 18 associated files and 41 references. In the individual interview, Marie shared how improving her skills relates to teacher leadership and the sub-theme of developing professionally. Marie said, "That would mean doing research practices, making decisions based on data that you get from students and the assessments and observations you're trying to help them improve their learning." Likewise, Courtney, with 12 references to improving my skills across the individual interview and physical artifact discussion, said, "I don't go up to the board without working a problem three times already." Furthermore, in the physical artifact discussion, regarding proof of a student's learning application, Hayley said, "By getting this paper back and seeing the growth from the other flashback Fridays, it was sort of like it I wasn't making it up." The physical artifact represented Hayley's professional development in a tangible way, supporting self-agency and self-efficacy while *empowering professional growth*.

Table 7

Themes, Sub-Themes, and Codes

Themes	Sub-Themes	Codes

Theme 3 Transformative Learning Connections	Connection and Trust	Building Rapport and Feeling Trust Comfort of Students They Tell Me Notes from Students, Colleagues, and Parents Students Come Back to See Me
	Student Learning Outcomes	Student Academic Achievement Lesson Design & Goals Social Emotional Learning Academic Success Reaching Their Goals Applying What They Know
	Changing Student Minds and Behaviors	Increased Student Confidence Changing Students' Minds and Behavior Bringing out the Best in Students

Transformative Learning Connections

All 16 participants referenced the theme of *transformative learning connections* across all data collection methods, including the individual interview, physical artifact discussion, and focus groups. Table 7 provides an overview of theme three. The theme includes the sub-themes of student learning outcomes, changing student minds and behaviors, and connection and trust. The essence of the theme portrays relationships between teacher leaders and students as transformative to learning. On a deeper level, teacher leadership leverages connecting and trusting relationships to transform student learning, mindsets, and behaviors. Relating to transforming student learning to lifelong learning, Harper, in the individual interview, said, “So leadership skills, we work on organization, we work on skills that are making them good leaders in life. So not necessarily just academics.” Moreover, concerning transforming student behavior to persist even in failure, Bobby, in the physical artifact discussion, said, “I had a couple that didn't pass it [CTE examination] the first time either. And they're still wanting to take the class and are still wanting to try.” Regarding transforming student minds relating to math success,

Elizabeth, describing a note from a struggling student who passed her class with a C in the physical artifact discussion, said, “She’s just saying that she never thought that she could do it. And that she realized that she could do it if she stuck with it. And she was not afraid to take another math class.”

The most referenced sub-theme within transformative learning connections was connection and trust, with 201 references exceeding that of other sub-themes. About building connection and trust, Autumn, in the individual interview, said, “I like to get to know them a little bit. I like to know their interests, and I like them to know that I'm interested in what makes them happy.” Equally about trusting student relationships, Pam, in the individual interview, said, “You know, that they're looking to you, and that they feel like they can trust you. They know that you you're there, and you're going to help.” Like Elizabeth’s quote related to changing student’s minds and Autumn’s and Pam’s goals of connecting with students through trusting relationships, Jillian, in the physical artifact discussion, said, “A student wrote me a really long letter about how she was horrible at math. And she wants to take the time to write this for me. And she's always struggled with math, but I made it fun.”

Student learning outcomes is another important sub-theme and aspect of the theme *transformative learning connections*. Relatedly, Heather said, in the physical artifact discussion, “There are some [notes] that say, you are the only one that made me like reading, or you are the one that made me understand reading.” Likewise, regarding identifying the influence of teacher leadership on student learning outcomes, in the individual interview, Hayley said, “I do just from the growth that I've seen in maturity, or in their personal emotional growth, but also their academic growth.” Additionally, concerning examples of proof of influence on student learning, in the individual interview, Stanley said, “The results of, like, tests, certifications, feedback from

them in real time." Heather, Hayley, and Stanley shared academic proof of student learning outcomes supporting an integral facet of the essence of the theme of transformative learning connections. Transformative learning connections capitalize on building connections and trust between teachers and students, thus harnessing the influence of teacher leadership, resulting in changed minds, behavior, and learning outcomes for students.

Connection and Trust

The sub-theme of connection and trust was the first category for the theme of *transformative learning connections*, with 32 associated files and 201 references across all data collection methods. Every individual interview, both focus groups, and 15 out of 16 physical artifact discussions referred to the sub-theme of connection and trust. The category is comprised of the codes of building rapport and feeling trust, comfort of students, they tell me, notes from students, colleagues, and parents, and students come back to see me. The connections and trusting relationships between teacher leaders and students resides at the core of this sub-theme.

Concerning connecting with students, Bethany, in the individual interview, said, "I'm not going to get students to love math. But I can get them to enjoy my class, like, I can be their favorite class." Focusing on building trusting relationships, Stanley, in the individual interview, said, "If you can kind of steer students in a positive direction, I think that makes a much better impact." Regarding showing empathy and recognizing students as people in an effort to build relationships, Lilly Marie, in the physical artifact discussion, said, "You know, you have to be involved in their lives [students']. They have to know that you care about them as a person first as opposed to a body in the classroom." All three participants expressed a desire to connect with students in a trustworthy manner supporting the code building rapport and feeling trust, with 29 associated files and 105 references.

With this code, the participants shared stories about building relationships and trust with students to encourage successful teacher leadership supporting transformative learning. When describing how the physical artifact represents teacher leadership, Marie, in the physical artifact discussion, said, “I just think it [the physical artifact] will be one of those things that show the students that I care about their learning, and I care about them as individuals.” Expanding upon the idea of wanting students to know they are cared for, Lisa added the elements of fun and comfort in the physical artifact discussion. She said, “But it's one of many, many things I do to try to get everybody comfortable and laughing and enjoying their learning. Right? It's such a little tiny thing, but it means a lot.” The importance of comfort emerged as the second code, comfort of students, with 16 associated files and 45 references. Making students feel comfortable while building trusting relationships lays the foundation for the next emergent code, they tell me. They tell me was the third code in the sub-theme of connection and trust, with 14 associated files and 23 references. Exemplifying the essence of the code, Harper said in the physical artifacts interview, “When they come back to you, and they tell you, hey, this really helps me or I finally got that job, or I finally, did this, or I made this grade, it's because of you.”

Student Learning Outcomes

Student learning outcomes is the second sub-theme for the theme of *transformative learning connections,* with 30 associated files and 146 references across all data collection methods. Every individual interview, both focus groups, and 11 out of 16 physical artifact discussions referred to the sub-theme of student learning outcomes. The category is comprised of the codes of student academic achievement, lesson design and goals, social emotional learning, academic success, and reaching their goals, and applying what they know. Student learning outcomes is central to this sub-theme with 14 associated files and 73 references, so the majority

of the codes in this sub-theme express the nuances of learning. Between the two focus groups, 49 references were made to student learning.

About the multiple facets of learning, in focus group 4.2, Hayley said, “I think there's multiple aspects of student learning. I know at ----, and in my student teaching it was you can see the data, so star testing, formative assessments, all those things, but also learning like social emotional learning.” Broadening the topic of student learning to include goal setting and lifelong learning, Elizabeth said, “Also, for students to have progress in goals that either you set for them or that they learn to set for themselves because we want to encourage them to become lifelong learners.” Delving further and making student learning personal, Lilly Marie said, “Because one kid’s growth is my grades went from the F to the C's, and for another kid it’s A's every semester.” In focus group 4.8 similar ideas were discussed, Jillian inserted the idea of application and said, “It's like showing mastery. Showing what they can do.” Whereas, Stanley expanded learning application beyond the classroom to the career field. He said, “Just application of the concepts, so they can enhance their skills, to be ready for the future, whether they go into that career, or just have some specialized knowledge opened in the future.”

The second code in this category was student academic achievement, with 25 associated files and 44 references. Similar to the nuance of goal setting, about student academic achievement, in the individual interview, Pam said, “Seeing changes in their, with their individual educational goals. You're seeing progress.” Adding standardized testing achievement to the discussion about student academic achievement, Bethany, in the physical artifact discussion, said, “It might not be the grade on the report card, but the state testing snapshot of you were doing this when you got here and look at you now.” In the physical artifact discussion about student academic achievement, Autumn said, “The students are learning a lot, and I've had

them when they're studying for a test or for a competition or they're going over skills they know to come to me and I can help them." This sentiment places the teacher leader at the center of the discussion about student academic achievement, leading to an important facet of transformative learning outcomes, lesson design and goals.

The third code in the sub-theme of student learning outcomes was lesson design and goals, with 13 associate files and 29 references. Regarding transforming student learning outcomes through lesson design and goals, Courtney accurately pinpointed the essence of the code when she said, "I also think you should never wing things. I changed my plans today because we didn't finish the lesson because they needed more practice." Courtney knew her students well enough to determine that the lesson plan needed to be changed to meet student learning goals. The sub-theme of student learning outcomes explores the multi-faceted concept of student learning including social emotional learning, setting and meeting goals, and becoming a lifelong learner. Moreover, student learning outcomes encompasses student learning and achievement orchestrated through lesson design and goals pre-established by connections and trust supporting transformative student learning through changing student minds and behavior.

Changing Student Minds and Behavior

The sub-theme of changing student minds and behavior was the third category for the theme of transformative learning connections, with 19 associated files and 56 references across all data collection methods. Eleven of 16 individual interviews, both focus groups, and five of 16 physical artifact discussions referred to the sub-theme of changing student minds and behavior. The category is comprised of the codes increased student confidence, changing students' minds and behavior, and bringing out the best in students. Bringing out the best in students holds the key to how teacher leadership transforms student learning. A key to which Debra, in the physical

artifact discussion, spoke directly, “They [students] are constantly improving good, better, best, never let it rest til’ your good is better and your better is best.” Courtney, in the individual interview, continued the thought with, “I am the one who showed them that they can do math.” Debra expressed the persistence of the teacher leader in not giving up on student learning, and Courney expressed the central role of the teacher leader in changing students’ minds and behavior.

The second code in the sub-theme of changing student minds and behavior was increased student confidence, with 14 associated files and 35 references. Elizabeth spoke about student confidence in a unique manner by sharing how teacher leadership allowed her to have the authority to step back and let the students learn by themselves. She said, “I've caught myself wanting to tell them how to do everything, and making myself back up and letting them either do it themselves, or letting someone else in the classroom work with them.” This quote conveys the actions of the teacher leader in support of increased student confidence. Regarding increased student confidence in social settings, Hayley said, “Because the student wasn't able to work in a small group very well, it affected how others learned because they really can learn from her being a teacher, and she can learn from others.” Both Elizabeth and Hayley capitalized on the position of the teacher leader in supporting increased student confidence by stepping back and allowing the student to step forward. Connections and trust and student learning outcomes will not result in transformative learning outcomes without changing students’ minds and behavior. Increased student confidence captures the essence of *transformative learning outcomes* by placing the student at the center of learning.

Table 8
Themes, Sub-Themes, and Codes

Themes	Sub-Themes	Codes

Theme 4 Leadership and Validation	Rewards of Teacher Leadership	Motivating and Challenging Keeps Me Going on Hard Days Proof of Influence Confirms Increases Job Satisfaction
	Risks Associated with Teacher Leadership	Extra Work and High Stress More Responsibility Need More Teacher Leaders More Work and Effort with Colleagues
	Challenges of Teacher Leadership	Self-Doubt and Frustration Hesitancy to Lead Colleagues Not a Boss Hoping I'm Influencing

Leadership and Validation

All 16 participants referenced the theme of *leadership and validation*. Table 8 provides an overview of theme four. The theme includes the sub-themes of rewards of teacher leadership, risks associated with teacher leadership, and challenges of teacher leadership. The essence of the theme portrays teacher leadership as resulting in greater responsibility, higher stress, and hesitation before leading peers because teacher leaders do not want to appear bossy. Teacher leaders hope they influence student learning because holding the position of influencing student learning affirms why they teach. Elements of the theme appeared across all three data collection methods, including 15 of 16 individual interviews, all physical artifact discussions, and both focus groups.

Rewards of teacher leadership, the first sub-theme, captured the essence of the theme of leadership and validation. Harper addressed the major reward of teaching when, in the focus group, she said, "I'm never going to be a millionaire being a teacher, but I knew what I wanted to do was be with kids and watch them be successful." In the physical artifact discussion, Bobby shared, "I have evidence that I made a difference, that I made a connection." For Bobby, the physical artifact, a signed yearbook, was tangible evidence of his influence, affirming his choice to be a teacher leader. Likewise, Jillian's physical artifact confirmed influence and validation of

teaching. Jillian said: “It [notes from students] reminds me that I'm making an impact on kids, that I'm affecting their lives and making change.” With the desire to influence students, all three participants captured the essence of the theme of leadership and validation. Whereas other participants expressed the risks associated with teacher leadership.

The extra work and high stress associated with teacher leadership put teacher leaders at risk. In the individual interview, Stanley addressed the risks when he shared that teacher leadership created “more responsibility to personal accountability.” Lisa, in the individual interview, expressed another risk of teacher leadership, more work and effort with colleagues, when she said, “I think it's a little bit more stressful for me with colleagues, only because I'm hard on myself.” The sub-theme of the risks of teacher leadership is the second category in the theme of leadership and validation. Heather expressed the primary challenge of teacher leadership, the egalitarian norm that makes teacher leadership difficult. Heather, in the focus group, said, “The best teams I've worked a part in have been with leaders that have treated me as an equal and not so much as a person that's less than or a peon right.” Jennifer elaborated on the idea by adding that she is not the boss, another code in the theme of leadership and validation. Jennifer confirmed another challenge of teacher leadership when she said, “I am not the boss. I don't tell them [the department] what to do. We all talk together. So, I feel like we're all leading our team.”

Another challenge in the theme of *leadership and validation* is expressed by the code hoping I’m influencing, to which Autumn said, in the individual interview, “I'm hoping I'm influencing students. That's a big reason I'm here is to do that. I would love to reach all of them.” The rewards, risks, and challenges associated with teacher leadership portray the essence of the theme of leadership and validation.

Rewards of Teacher Leadership

The sub-theme of rewards of teacher leadership had 29 associated files and 168 references across all data collection methods. Eleven of 16 individual interviews, focus groups, and all physical artifact discussions refer to the sub-theme of rewards of teacher leadership. The category is comprised of the codes of motivating and challenging, keeps me going on hard days, proof of influence confirms, and increases job satisfaction. The prevalent code in the sub-theme of rewards of teacher leadership was proof of influence confirms. In the physical artifact discussion, Elizabeth captured the essence of the sub-theme when she shared how the mementos she received throughout the years from students confirmed her career in teacher leadership. Elizabeth said, “Sometimes it's a struggle to feel like I'm making a difference. And you just get kind of weighted down with it. So, I use them for encouragement for me. And to remind me what I'm here for.” Conveying proof influence, Lilly Marie, in the physical artifact discussion, said, “He truly was my kid of I did something right.” Courtney, in the physical artifact discussion, explored teacher leadership with peers. She shared how her physical artifact, a unit she created, influenced her peers and motivated cross-curricular activities. She said, “The eighth-grade science teacher will use it to talk about infectious diseases, and the language arts teachers can use it to write stories about the week. The history teacher uses it to talk about the plague.”

The secondary code in the sub-theme of the rewards of teacher leadership was increases job satisfaction. About exhibiting leadership in the classroom and school, Marie, in the individual interview, said, “When we have some voice in making decisions about the classroom and the school, it positively affects my job satisfaction.” Concerning the chief reward of teacher leadership, happy experiences with students, Jillian, in the focus group, said, “It goes back to those happy experiences. I feel like that's what just keeps you going. There's always 1000 happy

times for the ones that are like the burnout moments." Regarding the use of data to confirm proof of influence, Hayley, in the individual interview, said, "I'm having the confidence that what I'm doing is leading to their success because I'm constantly looking at data." The codes of proof of influence and increase job satisfaction convey the meaning of the sub-theme rewards of teacher leadership and the essence of the theme of *leadership and validation*.

Challenges of Teacher Leadership

The sub-theme of *challenges* of teacher *leadership* was the second category for the theme of leadership and validation, with 20 associated files and 75 references across all data collection methods. Thirteen of 16 individual interviews, both focus groups, and 5 out of 16 physical artifact discussions refer to the sub-theme of challenges of teacher leadership. The category comprises the codes: self-doubt and frustration, hesitancy to lead colleagues, not a boss, and hoping I'm influencing. The most referenced code in the sub-theme of challenges of teacher leadership was hoping I'm influencing. When asked if he sees his influence every day, Stanley, in the individual interview, said: "I would say so. But, there's some days I'm not feeling, like, most days, so I always try to go in, but if I'm having bad days, I just do the best I can." Stanley's quote voiced the central meaning of the code of hoping I'm influencing and one of the major challenges of teacher leadership. In the physical artifact discussion, Lilly Marie elaborated upon this sentiment. She said, "You don't know your impact until later. It's delayed. So even though you can't see the results, right now, you don't know how you're impacting students." Lilly Marie's quote represents the hope of teacher leaders in waiting for the proof of influence on students. Further, Pam's quote in the individual interview communicated the hope that leads to validation situated at the core of the essence of the theme of leadership and validation. Pam said,

“Probably just that sense that you really are making some kind of a difference. That the job, this career that I entered into many years ago still has value.”

A second significant code in the sub-theme of challenges of teacher leadership was hesitancy to lead. A major challenge of teacher leadership is the requirement to lead teachers for which many teacher leaders feel ill-equipped and intimidated. To that end, Bobby, in the individual interview, said, “I'm a little hesitant in some things. When I’m in a coaches meeting, I don't mind asking the questions that I think everybody needs to ask or maybe afraid to. When I'm in a group of teachers, not so much.” Similarly, and despite being a veteran teacher, Debra said in the individual interview, “I don't give advice to other teachers unless I'm asked because I don't want them to take it as a criticism.”

Moreover, Marie, in the individual interview, shared, “Self-confidence is an issue. I guess that's where I need to be more assertive or seek out opportunities to help my colleagues.” Because of these challenges to teacher leadership, Bethany spoke about how she used her physical artifact as a means of entering her colleague’s classrooms. Bethany, in the physical artifact discussion, said, “A lot of people don't like new things, they don't like change. They don't want to hear it.” Debra, Bethany, and Marie shared their hesitancy to lead, supporting the sub-theme of challenges of teacher leadership and the essence of the theme of *leadership and validation.*

Risks of Teacher Leadership

The sub-theme of risks of teacher leadership was the third category for the theme of *leadership and validation,* with 19 associated files and 83 references across all data collection methods. Thirteen of 16 individual interviews, both focus groups, and four of 16 physical artifact discussions refer to the sub-theme of risks of teacher leadership. The category comprises the

codes of extra work and high stress, more responsibility, more teacher leaders, and more work and effort with colleagues. The primary code in the sub-theme of risks of teacher leadership was extra work and high stress. Bethany, in the physical artifact discussion, said, “I kind of assumed that teachers before me were doing that. And I realized that maybe that wasn't happening in all cases.” In this quote, Bethany expressed, as a teacher leader, the realization that she was doing more than other teachers. Concerning both extra work and high stress and the need for more teacher leaders, another code in the sub-theme of risks of teacher leadership, Harper, in the individual interview, said, “I feel that a lot of people feel that once you start being in that leadership role, a lot of things get assigned to you. And less people want to do that role.”

Another notable code in the sub-theme of risks of teacher leadership was need more teacher leaders. Debra, in the individual interview, expressed why she does not lead her peers, she said, “I'll just let somebody else tell everybody else. Because that's not a good spot that I want to be in. And I really just tried not to give unsolicited advice.” Exploring another dimension of the sub-theme of risks of teacher leadership, Pam shared the need for more teacher leadership training to equip more teachers for leadership. In the individual interview, Pam said, “I think we need more training sessions we do just in general or on teacher leaders and teacher leadership.” Furthermore, in the individual interview, Jillian shared, “I don't think there are enough of them to get together and help each other and lead others and create a positive impact.” Jillian’s quote expressed the risk of not having enough teacher leaders, and the reward of the positive impact of teacher leaders. Extra work and high stress, with the need for more teachers, articulates the meaning of the sub-theme of risks of teacher leadership and the theme of *leadership and validation.*

Outlier Data and Findings

The study explored the lived experiences of teacher leaders and how they perceived their influence on student learning. Unexpected findings and themes that did not align with specific research questions are presented in this section. The outlier finding warranting the attention of the reader was the underlying sentiment, “I’m not a leader.” While the status of teacher leader was determined for every participant through the screening survey (see Appendix D), every participant did not view themselves as a leader. Out of the 16 participants, 11 were informal teacher leaders. An informal teacher leader is a teacher without an official leadership title who exerts influence on their peers and school community through self-initiative (Oppi et al., 2023; Pineda-Báez et al., 2020). The outlier, Bobby, was one of the 11 informal teacher leaders in the study. Bobby consistently expressed the sentiment of not being a teacher leader.

Outlier Findings

One participant in the study, Bobby, was an informal teacher leader whose qualification as a teacher leader was determined by the screening survey (see Appendix D). While Bobby qualified as a teacher leader and participated in the research study, he failed to fully recognize himself as a teacher leader. In his former career, Bobby had extensive experience and knowledge of leadership. Throughout the data collection methods, Bobby consistently expressed ideas about leadership garnered from his former career, and he struggled to let his experience and knowledge of leadership crossover to his classroom and position as a teacher leader. Early in the individual interview, Bobby said about the study, “I'm still not sure about the study. But it's funny because since we talked, I had three separate conversations about leadership and nothing to do nothing that I brought up.” Concerning exhibiting leadership in the classroom, Bobby said, “I hope sometimes, I don't know if I'm really leading because, again, to be a leader, you got to have people following you.” When asked where he exhibited teacher leadership, Bobby replied,

"Well, the classroom, I hope." In his answers, Bobby consistently relied upon his leadership experiences from his former career. He said, "This is again, many years of management training not just leadership but management training." When asked to elaborate on his experience with teacher leadership, Bobby said, "I don't know. Leadership is leadership." He also said, "I don't know about teacher leaders but just leaders." Bobby's screening score qualified him as a teacher leader and participant in the study. Still, his discourse on teacher leadership reflected the sentiment of not being a teacher leader and reverted to the knowledge and experiences gained from his former career.

Research Question Responses

Qualification for participation in the study required candidates to earn a score of 124-155 on the screening survey (see Appendix D). A score in that range meant the participant often and always exhibited the characteristics of teacher leadership, so the participants in the study were all teacher leaders. The study required all 16 teacher leaders to engage in three rounds of data collection, including an individual interview, physical artifacts discussion, and focus group. The individual interview elicited the most information due to its length and the broad range of questions, each with a strong correlation to the central research questions and three sub-questions. The physical artifact discussion provided targeted answers to the central research question because the majority of participants chose artifacts that were evidence of their influence on student learning. The discussion also provided evidence for sub-question two because of the artifacts' association with self-efficacy. Finally, the focus group provided insight into the relationships between the participants while exploring topics such as burnout, teacher retention, and job satisfaction related to the central research questions and sub-questions. All three data collection methods provided insight into the phenomenon of the experiences of teacher leaders.

Table 9
Alignment Between Themes and Research Questions

Themes	Sub-Themes	Research Question
Theme 1 Diversity of Collaborative Leadership		CRQ
	Modeling Behaviors	CRQ
	Outcomes of Collective Action	SQ3
	Variety of Teacher Leadership	CRQ, SQ3
Theme 2 Empowered Professional Growth		SQ1
	Self-Agency	
	Self-Efficacy	SQ1
	Developing Professionally	SQ2
		SQ1, SQ2
Theme 3 Transformative Learning Connections	Connection and Trust	CRQ
	Student Learning Outcomes	CRQ
	Changing Student Minds and Behavior	CRQ
		CRQ
Theme 4 Leadership and Validation		CRQ
	Rewards of Teacher Leadership	
	Risks Associated with Teacher Leadership	SQ2
	Challenges of Teacher Leadership	CRQ
		CRQ

Central Research Question

How do teacher leaders perceive their influence on student learning?

Table 9 provides an overview of the alignment between themes and research questions. Teacher leaders are validated by their position as leaders, which confirms their influence on student learning through transformative learning connections. The primary method of influence

by teacher leaders on student learning is through teacher and student relationships that create connections and build trust. Relating to the significance of making connections and building trusting relationships producing influence on student learning, Lisa, in the individual interview, said, “I take it very seriously. I know what I say to children has a tremendous impact. Because they look to me, they look up to me. They love me, and I love them.”

The secondary method of influence by teacher leaders on student learning occurred through student academic achievement. In the individual interview, Debra shared her experience with reteaching to ensure every student achieved understanding before moving on. Debra said, “I never leave a topic. If I still have a fourth of the class not getting it, I'm not gonna leave that topic. I will come back, and we will keep filtering it back in.” The tertiary method of influence by teacher leaders on student learning was through lesson design and goals. Concerning implementing data-driven instruction and designing relevant assessments, Jillian, in the individual interview, said, “By collecting data, creating assessments that I feel like are valid, and then using that data to drive instruction rather than just my feelings or my thoughts.”

Sub-Question One

How do teacher leaders perceive themselves as agents controlling events affecting learning outcomes?

Table 9 provides an overview of the alignment between themes and research questions. Teacher leaders perceive themselves as agents controlling events through empowered professional growth resulting from self-agency, self-efficacy, and professional development. The changes and behaviors of teacher leaders promote self-agency, supporting self-efficacy arising from feelings of self-fulfillment. In turn, teacher leaders feel motivated to engage in activities, producing professional growth. In the individual interview, Bethany shared her personal

experience with leadership and empowered professional growth. She said, “I want to go to workshops. I want to go to the yearly math conferences and meetings. I want to make sure that I've gotten the information to help to pass it on.” In this quote, Bethany captured the essence of empowered professional growth by expressing the behavior and attitude of teacher leadership.

Regarding self-agency and the behaviors necessary to equip her peers to finish tasks at work rather than taking work home, Courtney, in the individual interview, said, “I think one of my jobs as the teacher leader is to show other teachers how to not have to do everything at their house.” Addressing self-efficacy and her feelings about student success resulting from her position as a teacher leader in the classroom, Autumn, in the individual interview, said, “[I’m] So proud of these students. It makes me feel good, especially when they get it. Really, really proud of them and more self-fulfilled.” All three quotes connect the actions and behaviors of teacher leaders directly to classroom learning outcomes, comprehensively providing the answer to sub-question one.

Sub-Question Two

How do teacher leaders describe their experiences with self-efficacy?

Table 9 provides an overview of the alignment between themes and research questions. Teacher leadership empowers teachers to realize leadership and instructional success motivating professional development and feelings of reward and satisfaction. In this quote from the individual interview, Elizabeth directly answered sub-question two. She said, “Well, over the years, I have developed a lot of confidence. I know that one of my Daddy's favorite expressions is the one that does it looks something like me. So, I have that attitude that I can do it.” Adding to this quote, when addressing teacher leadership and feelings of self-efficacy, Elizabeth, in the individual interview and physical artifact discussion, used strongly descriptive phrases such as

“makes me laugh,” “makes me feel wonderful,” “makes me feel good,” “that’s gratifying to me,” “just very encouraging to me,” and “I have made a difference in someone’s life.” Likewise, Heather expressed the way teacher leadership enabled her to experience self-efficacy. In the focus group, Heather said, “I feel more fulfilled sometimes when I help others. I feel like, wow, what I'm doing actually matters. And I was able to help that person even with just five seconds of me speaking or clicking a button.”

Sub-Question Three

What experiences do teacher leaders have with collective efficacy and student learning?

Table 9 provides an overview of the alignment between themes and research questions. Teacher leaders have experience with collective efficacy and student learning through common vision and their teams, for example, their subject area departments and grade level teams. The focus groups directly addressed sub-question three. Lilly Marie said, “The first thing that comes to mind is the high expectations, high achievement across like for science . . . making sure that your quality of work is the same across the board and that we've set that expectation in every class.” Likewise, Courtney shared, “Our whole school buys into high expectations, high achievement, and our kids prove it all the time, how prepared they are to go to college.” Lilly Marie and Courtney shared the school’s vision statement and how it is implemented in the science department and school, supporting student learning and performance outcomes reflecting experience with collective efficacy. Regarding collective efficacy within the grade level team and student learning, Lisa shared, “We came up with a plan to try to catch kids up. And we taught with intensity. When we took our FSA, our ELA scores had jumped by 11%. It was that collective we can do this.” Relating to experience within departments with collective efficacy and student learning, Marie said, “In our department, with the first progress monitor test,

vocabulary was low. We decided to use different vocabulary strategies. So, we implemented it right away, and we saw an increase in the vocabulary scores in the second test."

Summary

Chapter 4 presents the results of the study, a transcendental phenomenology exploring how teacher leaders perceive their influence on student learning. Sixteen candidates qualified to participate via the screening survey (see Appendix D), and three methods of data collection were employed: individual interviews, physical artifact discussions, and focus groups. The data collected was detailed and rich, reflecting the essence of the phenomenon and providing answers to the research questions. The themes presented by the data were diversity of collaborative leadership, empowered professional growth, transformative learning connections, and leadership and validation. The most significant finding was that teacher leaders perceive their influence on student learning through transformative learning connections. The participants overwhelmingly expressed connections and building trust with students as the avenue through which they influence student learning. Notably, teacher leaders feel validated by leadership and experience both self-agency and self-efficacy, supporting professional growth and well-being, resulting in self-fulfillment and greater influence upon student learning in the classroom and via interactions with colleagues.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to explore how teacher leaders perceive their influence on student learning for K-12 teachers at a K-12 charter school system in rural Southeastern United States. Teacher leadership is generally defined as the individual or collective manner by which teachers influence peers, principals, students, and stakeholders to improve instructional practices to increase student achievement (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). The theory framing this study is Bandura's social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1977a, 1986, 1997; Schunk, 2020). This chapter provides a summary of thematic findings and critical discussion of the study's discoveries through data analyses and corroboration with extant literature. Further, this section provides implications for policy and practice as well as empirical and theoretical implications. The limitations and delimitations of the study are included with recommendations for future research.

Discussion

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to explore how teacher leaders perceive their influence on student learning for K-12 teachers at a K-12 charter school system in rural Southeastern United States. Teacher leadership is generally defined as the individual or collective manner by which teachers influence peers, principals, students, and stakeholders to improve instructional practices to increase student achievement (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). The theory framing this study is Bandura's social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1977a, 1986, 1997; Schunk, 2020). The existing literature in teacher leadership research lacks theory and empiricism, meriting additional study into how students learn under the leadership of teacher leaders (Nguyen et al., 2020; Schott et al., 2020; Shen et al., 2020). Further, the research

study was framed by Bandura's (1977a, 1986, 1997) social cognitive theory providing a solution to the paucity of theories in the field (Nerlino, 2020; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). This phenomenological study examined the lived experiences of 16 teacher leaders through three data collection methods including the individual interview, physical artifact discussion, and focus group. The teacher leaders provided in vivo evidence answering four research questions and revealing four themes: (a) Diversity of Collaborative Leadership; (b) Empowered for Professional Growth; (c) Transformative Learning Connections; (d) Leadership and Validation. Each theme provides rich details describing how teacher leaders perceive their influence on student learning, thereby expanding the field of teacher leadership research.

Summary of Thematic Findings

Through the data analysis process, codes were developed and unified into four themes and 12 sub-themes representing the participants' perspectives. The themes and sub-themes are (a) Diversity of Collaborative Leadership with the sub-themes of Modeling Behavior, Outcomes of Collective Action, and The Variety of Teacher Leadership; (b) Empowered for Professional Growth with the sub-themes of Self-Agency, Self-Efficacy, and Developing Professionally; (c)Transformative Learning Connections with the sub-themes of Connection and Trust, Student Learning Outcomes, and Changing Students Minds and Behavior; (d) Leadership and Validation with the sub-themes of Rewards of Teaching, Challenges of Teacher Leadership, and Risks of Teacher Leadership. The themes and sub-themes provide a comprehensive and detailed view of the experiences and perceptions of teacher leaders. The themes and sub-themes address how teacher leaders primarily influence student learning through trusting relationships with students, producing desired student outcomes, and changing student minds and behavior, lending credence to the application of Bandura's SCT (Bandura, 1977a, 1986, 1997). Further corroboration of

SCT is found in the themes and sub-themes of self-agency, self-efficacy, modeling behaviors, and the outcomes of collective action. Finally, the themes and sub-themes inform the critical discussion in which the study's findings are compared with current literature.

Critical Discussion

The research study revealed four themes and 12 sub-themes describing the lived experiences of teacher leaders and how they perceive their influence on student learning. The themes and sub-themes supported three areas of critical discussion: (a) Creating School Cultures Where Teachers Lead Together, (b) Finding Solutions to the Challenges of Teacher Leadership, and (c) Actualizing the Influence of Teacher Leadership. The areas of critical discussion promote the perspectives of teacher leaders and the ideas central to success originally meant for teacher leadership.

Creating Schools Where Teachers Lead Together

The themes of *diversity of collaborative leadership* and *empowered for professional growth* informed the first critical discussion, Creating Schools Where Teachers Lead Together. Teacher leadership as a common school and classroom practice rather than an organizational and hierarchical structure of distributed leadership, the most common form of teacher leadership in schools, stands as a viable solution to school reform efforts (Pan & Chen, 2021; Schott et al., 2020). Extant literature promotes distributed leadership as the preferred means of implementing teacher leadership targeting school reform efforts (Harris et al., 2022), yet few schools correctly implement distributed leadership (Harris et al., 2022). A cursory overview of the leadership hierarchy at the study site revealed the appearance of distributed leadership because of the practice of teacher leadership within the grade level teams and subject area departments across grades K-12. However, when asked to describe how teacher leaders act collectively, the

participants shared stories about their colleagues and their grade level teams and subject area departments rather than experiences with administration. This includes the experiences shared by both the formal teacher leaders and informal teacher leader participants.

Of the 16 participants in the research study, only five were formal teacher leaders. The other 11 were informal teacher leaders who, like the formal teacher leaders, qualified for the study by earning the required score on the screening survey (see Appendix D), deeming them teacher leaders and eligible for participation in the study. Throughout the data collection process, many participants mentioned how they never viewed themselves as leaders, and they repeatedly shared they did not want the responsibility of formal teacher leaders. Nevertheless, because of their designation as teacher leaders in the study, their opinions about being teacher leaders shifted as they heard themselves sharing experiences proving their leadership with students and peers. The primary experience supporting a school culture where teachers lead together was teaming. The participants repeatedly shared teacher leadership experiences within their grade level and department teams. Several referenced formal team action, such as participation in the annual professional goal plan, their school's version of PLCs, emphasizing improving instructional practices.

Existing literature promotes the PLC as a school reform solution and an overall positive implementation for improving instructional capacity, practicing teacher leadership, and perpetuating collegiality (Nguyen et al., 2020). The research study findings corroborated the literature regarding the positive impact of PLCs that are informal and authentic collaborative communities (Buchanan et al., 2023). One participant referred to the schoolwide practice of not allowing islands, to which the grade-level and department teams provided a solution. Although many of the PLC experiences shared by the participants included descriptions of the formal

professional goal plan, the hierarchy of the PLC was informal due to the trusting relationships and shared authority on the team. The participants spoke of their team leaders and department chairs as equals who trusted them as professionals and colleagues to participate in their strengths when necessary. Further, the formal teacher leaders in the study referred to their teammates as equals and leaders. As shared in the literature in the field, practices such as these build trust and legitimacy through teacher leadership that is both formal and informal (Berg & Zoellick, 2019; Gordon et al., 2021).

Finding Solutions to the Challenges of Teacher Leadership

The theme of *leadership and validation* informed the second critical discussion, Finding Solutions to the Challenges of Teacher Leadership. The literature reported the overall practice of teacher leadership to be positive, as did the research study, yet teacher leadership faces many challenges. The literature revealed the first obstacle to optimizing teacher leadership as the myriads of definitions, meanings, and dimensions of teacher leadership (Berg & Zoellick, 2019; Pan et al., 2023; Sawalhi & Chaaban, 2022). To that end, the research study revealed the same obstacle. Each participant gave a different definition when asked to define what teacher leadership meant to them. The definitions ranged from respecting others to leading the class, showing you can be followed, doing what is best for the entire section, and making teachers better. Further, when asked what type of teacher leadership was best for students, the participants each responded differently including methods of instruction such as direct-instruction, collaborative learning, and peer-teaching as types of teacher leadership rather than choosing between informal and formal teacher leadership. The second time the question was asked, I added the qualifiers, formal and informal teacher leadership, and the discussion again went to instructional methods, revealing a misunderstanding of teacher leadership and its dimensions.

Other challenges of teacher leadership substantiated by the research study were the ideas of not wanting to appear bossy and hesitating in leading colleagues. The related literature addressed these challenges by exploring the concepts of legitimacy (Conan Simpson, 2021) and egalitarianism (Nerlino, 2020). The ideas of not wanting to appear bossy and hesitating to lead colleagues relate to legitimacy because teacher leadership holds the values assigned to it by the school community (Conan Simpson, 2021), and egalitarianism is a long-held tradition amongst teachers (Nerlino, 2020). The following comments by participants regarding leading peers expressed negative feelings related to legitimacy and egalitarianism. Comments such as "not coming in arrogant," "treated as equals," "not as a person who's less than," "not as a peon," "not expecting people to kiss the ring," and "feeling like there are haters."

Unequivocally, the participants in the study, especially the formal teacher leaders, expressed that they were not the boss and were not bossing their colleagues. Meanwhile, the informal teacher leaders expressed how their best team experiences occurred on teams with shared authority in which everyone was treated equally. Most of these comments are related to the teacher leadership of teachers rather than the teacher leadership of students. However, a few participants referred to not controlling their classrooms like a boss promoting the idea of things being their way only.

Extra work and high stress are additional challenges of teacher leadership. The participants had mixed expressions when relating this challenge. Overall, their perspectives remained positive because the end results of improved student learning and teacher well-being made the extra work and high stress of teacher leadership worth it. This result correlates with the positive findings of teacher leadership reported in existing literature (Fernández & López, 2023; King & Holland, 2022). One participant said their goal was to support teacher retention by

helping teachers learn not to do their work at home and not burn out, while another said they participate in extra duties and roles because they want to improve themselves for their students and teammates. Additional statements addressed creating and posting instructional units for free to help teachers save planning time, and another said they take time to help others because it pays off when they need help in return. All these behaviors require extra work and potentially cause high stress, yet the teacher leaders expressed satisfaction knowing they were helping others. Many stated that the rewards of teacher leadership keep them going on hard days and motivate and challenge them. When asked how they navigate challenges related to burnout while simultaneously leading students or colleagues, most participants expressed an understanding of how to decrease feelings of burnout through self-regulation techniques and self-care.

Actualizing the Influence of Teacher Leadership

The theme of *transformative learning* informed the critical discussion, Actualizing the Influence of Teacher Leadership. The data collection methods in the study required the participants to address their influence on student learning. In the individual interview, the participants were asked how they perceived their influence as a teacher leader. In the focus groups, the participants were asked to define student learning. For the physical artifact discussion, teachers were asked to bring a physical artifact representing teacher leadership. During the discussion, the participants were asked to explain how the artifact represented their influence as a teacher leader on student learning. All the questions elicited rich conversation, but the physical artifact discussion provided the most descriptive stories of the participants' lived experiences of teacher leadership, especially regarding student learning. Every participant related a story about teacher leadership and student learning connected to their physical artifact.

Two participants chose artifacts given to them by their parents, three participants chose

artifacts created by them to improve instruction, five participants chose artifacts used for teaching or to inspire teaching, and six participants chose artifacts created by students, peers, and parents. The most profound stories were the ones about artifacts received from students. One participant, when addressing the power of the physical artifact, said that should they fail to receive notes from students in the future, they would stop and re-evaluate their teaching practices, knowing it meant they were doing something wrong. Relatedly, another participant shared that they store their artifacts' folder full of notes from students in a file cabinet next to their annual tax returns, denoting the documents' importance. Another participant said they had artifacts in their folder representing 42 years of teaching, and two others said no matter how many times they moved classrooms, they always took their artifact with them and displayed it on the classroom wall. To that end, three participants displayed their artifacts in their classroom in a wall-of-honor manner.

Stories like these indicate the significance of the relationship between teacher leaders and students and the influence of teacher leaders on student learning. Extant literature reported teacher leadership as valuable through human and social capital (Nguyen et al., 2020) and relationships and networking (Muijs & Harris, 2003) mostly related to teacher leadership of peers. However, the same holds true for the relationships between teacher leaders and students. The value of relationships between teacher leaders and students is shown by the degree of influence teacher leaders exhibit on student learning, producing improved academic achievement. Moreover, the importance of feedback for teacher leaders and the validation that such feedback conveys perpetuates relationship-building between teacher leaders and students.

Implications for Policy or Practice

As a means of school reform in the 1980s, one of the many goals of teacher leadership

was to professionalize teaching by activating the classroom teacher as a leader (Smylie et al., 2002; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Nevertheless, currently, every teacher is not being activated to lead and the need for school reforms persists. To that end, the research study produced multiple implications for policy and practice, including leadership training in teacher preparation programs to thwart teacher attrition, teacher leadership development, and increased opportunity for collaboration between teachers.

Implications for Policy

The findings of the research study may have implications for policy at the national and state levels for the inclusion of teacher leadership training into teacher preparation courses. None of the participants, neither the formal nor informal teacher leaders, in the study, apart from the three career technical education teachers with leadership experience from their former careers, were trained for leadership. Of the CTE participants, one was a first-year teacher, and the other two were third-year teachers. Further, only one of the three CTE teacher leader participants were formal teacher leaders, yet they qualified as teacher leaders with the screening survey (see Appendix D). Given the study's sub-themes of self-efficacy, self-agency, and professional development, training pre-service teachers as teacher leaders while enrolled in teacher leadership programs may have positive effects on teacher retention. Additionally, with the recent promotion of teacher mentorship programs at the state level as a means of developing alternative certification teacher candidates, leadership training at the district level for teacher mentors may produce positive outcomes for teacher recruitment and retention.

Implications for Practice

The findings of the research study may have implications for practice at the school level. While teacher leadership produces positive outcomes for the individual teacher leader such as

increased self-efficacy, feelings of validation, self-agency, and motivation, leadership may produce positive effects on every teacher. Further, teacher leadership influences student learning through transformative learning connections, so making every teacher a teacher leader may have a positive influence on student learning.

However, there are several implications for instituting this change. First, the school would need to create the practice of teacher leadership through the activation of formal teacher leadership roles over grade levels and departments. This practice includes defining the roles and responsibilities of formal teacher leaders and creating a compensation system for the role of formal teacher leaders. For most schools, this is a common practice. However, implementing practices, including ongoing professional learning for teachers on teacher leadership and its desired outcomes, namely school reform and increased student achievement, would be a new addition for schools. Second, the roles of informal and formal teacher leaders would need to be activated and assigned across the campus, granting all teachers the title of teacher leader.

Once the participants in the research study learned they qualified for the study because their score on the screening survey (see Appendix D) deemed them teacher leaders, their perspectives were positively impacted. Simply naming every teacher an informal teacher leader may have a profoundly positive outcome for the individual and school. Further, given that most participants did not know about formal and informal teacher leadership, operationalizing formal and informal teacher leadership may have positive effects on student learning and teacher retention. Nevertheless, ongoing professional learning and development of teacher leaders is necessary as few are equipped to lead outside of their classroom (King & Holland, 2022; P. Liu, 2021; Yalçın & Çoban, 2023). Once the roles and responsibilities of formal and informal teacher leaders are established and all teachers receive ongoing professional learning on what it means to

be a teacher leader, the implementation of PLC training should occur. Moreover, recurring times for the PLC to meet should be implemented during the school day, allowing teacher collaboration and collective action.

Empirical and Theoretical Implications

The study expanded the current body of literature through its theoretical and empirical implications. The study's themes confirmed and extended existing literature in the field by addressing the experiences of teacher leaders and their perceptions of how they influence student learning. The instance of divergence occurred when the dimension of teacher leadership exhibited the most influence on student learning, namely, transformative relationships rather than instructional and curricular choices and implementation (Schott et al., 2020). The theoretical framework providing the lens through which to view this study was Bandura's social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1977a, 1986, 1997). The study's themes and sub-themes confirmed and extended the major components of Bandura's SCT, including learning in a social environment, vicarious and enactive learning, self-regulation, self-efficacy, modeling processes, motivational processes, and social influence.

Empirical Implications

The theme of *diversity of collaborative leadership* confirmed the existing literature addressing the positive antecedents of teacher leadership. Empirically, the study's findings confirmed that the practice of distributed leadership through which authority is shared between teacher leaders and school administration, removing centralized authority, was a positive antecedent to successful teacher leadership (DeMarco & Gutmore, 2021; Harris et al., 2022). The formal teacher leaders in the study shared positive experiences of leading their teams through required formal practices such as the professional growth plan and informal seasons of teacher-

motivated instruction. Similarly, the informal teacher leaders shared feelings of validation through collaboration with peers involving practices such as work-life balance and daily instructional decisions. The sub-theme of the variety of teacher leadership further corroborated the importance of distributing leadership between teacher leaders and school administration (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). The participants shared stories of uninhibited leadership both formally and informally within and outside of the classroom and with students and peers. While most participants preferred leading students because it was comfortable, they all expressed openness and willingness to help peers.

As evidenced by the sub-theme of modeling behaviors, the practice of distributed leadership as an antecedent to teacher leadership encouraged increased teacher empowerment and overall organizational and individual improvement (Shen et al., 2020). The participants shared stories about modeling instructional practices for peers and knowing they influenced their peers because they witnessed them using the modeled practices in their classrooms. Further, the participants shared stories of modeling behaviors for students in the classroom, such as growth mindset and productive struggle, and how they positively influenced learning outcomes.

Modeling behaviors exhibited through teacher leadership support the school's collaborative culture, leading to overall school improvement (Oppi et al., 2023). The sub-theme of outcomes of collective action empirically addressed the practice of distributed leadership through teacher leadership by highlighting the importance of collaborative work (Lumby, 2019). The study's findings regarding the outcomes of improved student learning, giving everyone a voice, and unifying everyone confirmed existing studies in the field of teacher leadership (Mifsud, 2023). The participants shared experiences teaching cross-curricular projects involving multiple departments and collaboration between multiple teachers within a grade-level team

addressing student behavior.

The theme of *empowered for professional growth* confirmed existing literature regarding the positive outcomes of teacher leadership. The sub-themes of self-agency, self-efficacy, and developing professionally expressed the positive outcomes of teacher leadership and are corroborated by the literature on teacher leadership. Continuing with the sub-theme of outcomes of collective action and bridging with the theme of *empowered for professional growth,* collective efficacy is a positive outcome of teacher leadership confirmed by extant literature (Donohoo et al., 2020; Goddard et al., 2021). The teacher leaders in the study shared the importance of healthy teams leading to healthy schools and improved student learning. One participant shared an experience with collective efficacy when the grade-level team successfully met the daunting task of bridging a learning gap produced by a month-long closure of the school specifying the collective action of the team as the reason for their success. The literature expressed collective efficacy as strongly related to improved student achievement and patterns of participation for teachers (Goddard et al., 2021; Y. Liu et al., 2022). Further, the theme of *empowered for professional growth* aligned with the literature due to its correlation with self-efficacy.

Self-efficacy is a person's individual and future beliefs (Khan et al., 2024) about holding the ability level to effect change and create desired outcomes (Bandura, 1977a). Through self-agency and regulatory behaviors such as being organized, being innovative, being in control, planning carefully, exhibiting follow-through, and being flexible, participants in the study created desired outcomes regarding student learning. The teacher leaders in the research study expressed changing the curriculum, not “winging” things, and changing daily instructional plans as teacher leadership behaviors supporting attaining desired outcomes. Asking questions,

providing background material, and being intentional with data-driven instruction were additional teacher behaviors confirming existing literature and exemplifying elements of self-agency supporting self-efficacy. The literature stated that efficacious teachers visualize outcomes when facing challenges and are more active in teacher leadership (Kılınç et al., 2021). The themes and sub-themes of empowered professional growth, self-agency and self-efficacy empirically confirm and extend the field of teacher leadership research.

For self-efficacy, teacher leaders in the study expressed increased confidence, feeling good, and being capable, which are positive outcomes of teacher leadership, as confirmed by the literature. The literature stated that efficacious teachers make innovative and collaborative instructional decisions, positively motivating students through instructional practices and impacting student achievement (Goddard et al., 2021; Yoon & Goddard, 2023). Further, according to the literature and confirmed by the research study through the data analysis codes of decreasing burnout and autonomy, efficacious teachers experience resilience when faced with burnout, improving job satisfaction (Yoon & Goddard, 2023). The sub-theme of developing professionally with the data analysis code of stepping up further corroborated existing literature, stating that efficacious teachers are more active in teacher leadership (Kılınç et al., 2021). The participants shared experiences of asking how they can help, supporting people around them, and sharing with everybody.

Empirically, the theme of *transformative learning connections* was observed in the literature and directly addressed gaps in the literature regarding how students learn under the leadership of teacher leaders (Schott et al., 2020; Shen et al., 2020). That teacher leadership is a primary and critical factor related to the development of student learning and success is well known within the field (Nguyen et al., 2020). However, this study pursued understanding how

teacher leaders perceive their influence on student learning. Currently, how teacher leadership contributes to student learning remains empirically unclear (Schott et al., 2020; Shen et al., 2020). Therefore, the study's theme of *transformative learning connections* provides empirical evidence supporting how teacher leaders contribute to student learning. Teacher leaders perceived their influence on student learning through connecting and trusting relationships between teachers and students more readily than pedagogical decisions related to curriculum and instruction (Shen et al., 2020).

The 16 participants in the study shared that they perceive their influence on student learning through relationships with students. The participants shared stories about building rapport and trusting relationships with students, making them feel comfortable in the classroom. In turn, the participants shared how students changed their minds and behaviors related to learning. The participants shared how they love when students come into their classrooms to learn and have fun and when they find ways to break the wall that separates teachers and students. Further, participants shared that students would come to them for advice and help with non-academic subjects and that former students returned to visit and give unsolicited feedback.

While the importance of teacher-student relationships is not new to student learning, promoting the relationship between teachers and students first, before leadership and pedagogical expertise and implementation, is novel. Additionally, placing the relationship between teacher and student as integral to teacher leadership because of its contribution to student learning rather than limiting the effects of such relationships to best practices (Y. Liu et al., 2021) is unique to the field of teacher leadership where trusting relationships often inform teacher self-efficacy, PLC research, and leadership of teachers rather than students (Grimm, 2023; Gümüş et al., 2022; Hoogsteen, 2020).

The study's final theme of *leadership and validation* addressed empirical concerns related to the need for a common language within the field of teacher leadership, the prolific definitions and dimensions of teacher leadership, and the duality and legitimacy of teacher leadership. The research study's findings corroborated the myriads of definitions of teacher leadership (Nguyen et al., 2020; Pan et al., 2023; Schott et al., 2020; Wenner & Campbell, 2017) because each participant provided a different definition of teacher leadership. Further, the research study confirmed the prolific dimensions of teacher leadership reported in existing literature, including activities such as making learning fun for students, creating classroom communities, building trusting relationships with stakeholders, improving lesson design and meeting goals, and helping others.

These findings confirm existing literature reporting teacher leadership as occurring in the classroom next door and with every teacher (Bezzina & Bufalino, 2019; Harris & Jones, 2022). Moreover, the research study confirmed the existing literature related to the duality and legitimacy of teacher leadership. The duality of teacher leadership was presented through the competing sub-themes of rewards, risks, and challenges of teacher leadership. The participants shared the negative experiences of being overwhelmed, frustrated, and overworked alongside the positive experiences of being confirmed, validated, honored, and humbled. For the negative experiences, they shared learning to say no and setting parameters confirming the literature regarding stress, burnout, and work-home interference for the teacher leader (Schott et al., 2020). The theme of *leadership and validation* confirms the existing literature through the experiences of the participants related to the dual nature of teacher leadership (Nerlino, 2020).

Finally, the research study addressed concerns over the lack of empirical studies in the field of teacher leadership research (Nguyen et al., 2020; Schott et al., 2020; Shen et al., 2020; Q.

Wang et al., 2023). The research study reported credible and trustworthy findings informing teacher leadership research through applying a theoretical framework, robust methodological practices, sound research practices, and empirical results (McGinity et al., 2022). Although qualitative studies within the field of teacher leadership research are predominate (Q. Wang et al., 2023), the choice of the methodology of a qualitative study and, more importantly, transcendental phenomenology awarded the teacher leaders a voice and position from which to speak with authority granting the researcher access to the perspectives and lived experiences of the participants (Moustakas, 1994). Transcendental phenomenology, rather than a case study, allowed the researcher to study the teacher leader as a person rather than teacher leadership as a practice. Since the study's research questions required descriptive narratives about the perceptions of teacher leaders' influence on student learning, the methodology informed the findings.

Theoretical Implications

The theoretical implications for the research study are drawn from the theoretical framework of Bandura's (1977a, 1986, 1997) social cognitive theory (SCT). The study's themes and sub-themes confirmed and extended the major components of Bandura's SCT including learning in a social environment, vicarious and enactive learning, self-regulation, self-efficacy, modeling processes, motivational processes, and social influence. The research study explored the experiences of teacher leaders and how they perceived their influence on student learning. The findings of the study corroborate the theoretical implications of social influence and the internal and external components of social reinforcement (Xie et al., 2019) integral to the classroom and student learning and modeling leadership behaviors for peers. Unlike Bandura's social learning theory, promoting vicarious learning through observation alone (Bandura,

1977b), Bandura's SCT promotes enactive and vicarious learning by doing and observing. This difference makes SCT more applicable to the research study because the classroom is a social environment in which teacher leaders and students learn through their own personal actions and by observing the actions of others.

The research study's themes of *empowered for professional growth* and *transformative learning connections* confirmed the findings of SCT. In the research study, Heather and Pam both mentioned learning to be a teacher leader from observing other teacher leaders. Bethany and Courtney shared that they learned how to help colleagues through their own experiences with work-life balance. These examples and the following from the study confirm the findings of SCT, addressing how learning occurs within social environments through the reciprocal interactions among people and behaviors, including self-regulation (Bandura, 1986; Schunk, 2020). Debra shared stories about learning how to build a classroom community by implementing strategies and observing outcomes in student behavior. Jillian, when speaking about doubting herself when leading colleagues, shared how she believes it will get easier the more she does it, thus exemplifying learning by doing. Bobby shared that he is not the same person he was before becoming a teacher because his behaviors have changed. He shared that he starts preparing for the next school day the night before by exhibiting self-regulatory decisions such as not drinking on a school night. Therefore, the research study's themes confirmed the theoretical findings regarding self-agency and learning as a social act that is both vicarious and enactive.

Another major tenet of SCT, confirmed by the research study, is the individual's desire to exert personal influence on motivational processes over life events by exhibiting a sense of agency through cognitive and self-regulative capabilities (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020). The

theme and sub-theme, *empowered for professional growth* and self-agency, directly address theoretical findings. The study reported the teacher leaders' desire to exert personal influence on students and peers. The teacher leaders achieved this via self-regulative capabilities such as exhibiting teacher leadership behaviors like having autonomy, being innovative, flexible, organized, and in-control, planning carefully, and implementing routine. Lilly Marie exemplified autonomy by telling herself she did not have to do everything, but she did have to do something. Autumn shared that she exhibits control of her classroom by observing and engaging with students. Courtney shared that teacher leadership behaviors allow her to maximize her personal planning time and student learning time, and Harper shared that she leads by example by sticking to her routine. Self-agency, as revealed in the research study, allowed teacher leaders to initiate and sustain activities supporting the achievement of goals for themselves and for their students, further confirming the theoretical findings (Schunk et al., 2014).

Within SCT, the research study confirmed the teacher's placement as a role model for colleagues and students, creating additional paths of influence and learning (P. Chen et al., 2022). Several of the study's themes confirmed the teacher as a role model for colleagues and students, including *diversity of collaborative leadership*, *empowered for professional growth*, and *transformative learning connections*. Through modeling behaviors, the participants expressed the ability to motivate students and peers. Debra shared that she leads by example by setting expectations for students, Bobby shared that he leads students from the front, Jennifer shared that she models positivity and encouragement for her peers, and Lisa shared that she exhibits increased tolerance when dealing with peers and frustrating issues. Additionally, the theme and sub-theme of empowered for professional growth and developing professionally confirmed modeling behaviors when participants shared stories about stepping up and helping

teachers grow. Moreover, within the theme of *transformative learning connections*, participants repeatedly shared stories of modeling specific learning behaviors for students, such as applying learning to real-life, not giving up, setting and achieving goals, being okay with getting the answer wrong, and being a life-long learner. Therefore, the research study's themes corroborated the tenets of SCT, including reciprocal interactions such as self-agency, modeling processes, and motivational processes (Schunk, 2020).

The research study's findings confirmed the SCT tenets of self-efficacy and collective efficacy (Schunk, 2020). Self-efficacy is a teacher's belief in their ability to form relationships with students, initiating paths of influence (De Coninck et al., 2020). Collective efficacy is the group's shared belief regarding their ability to achieve a desired end regardless of obstacles (Bandura, 1997). The theme of *empowered for professional growth* and the sub-theme of self-efficacy directly addressed self-efficacy within SCT. Autumn shared that teacher leadership made her feel empowered, self-fulfilled, confident, and good. Bethany said teacher leadership made her feel important, and Stanley said teacher leadership made him feel joyful and empowered.

The research study further corroborates SCT through evidence regarding student and teacher relationships. Current literature has shown that teachers with higher self-efficacy form closer relationships with less conflict with students (Yin et al., 2022), as evidenced by the theme of *transformative learning connections* and the sub-theme of connection and trust. The theme of *diversity of collaborative leadership* and the sub-theme of outcomes of collective action explained collective efficacy within SCT. Lisa referred to collective efficacy when she described her team of five other women who are leaders in their own realms. Marie shared her experiences on the school's vision team and collectively problem-solving for school improvement. Pam said

it makes her feel good when everyone is on the same page, and Jillian mentioned feeling empowered and all working toward a common goal.

Finally, because existing literature remains largely atheoretical, with few studies extending the research base (Berg & Zoellick, 2019; Nerlino, 2020; York-Barr & Duke, 2004), the research study applied Bandura's SCT with the goal of making empirical and theoretical contributions by extending the existing educational leadership research (McGinity et al., 2022; Pan et al., 2023), and addressing gaps in the literature by reporting the contributions of teacher leadership to student achievement (Q. Wang et al., 2023) and exploring how teacher leaders perceive their influence on how students learn under the leadership of teacher leaders.

Limitations and Delimitations

The research study included limitations and delimitations. Limitations are potential weaknesses of the study that could not be controlled by the researcher. Delimitations are purposeful decisions the researcher made to limit or define the boundaries of the study. Limitations of the study included the research study site, the sample size, the data collection methods, the researcher's role as assistant principal, and the demographics of the participants. The delimitations of the study included the self-report nature of the screening survey, the inclusion of informal and formal teacher leaders, the decision to include two focus groups and the choice of transcendental phenomenology rather than a case study. The following sections detail the limitations and delimitations of the research study.

Limitations

The research study included limitations, potential weaknesses of the study that could not be controlled. The research study site of one K-12 incorporation with five schools potentially limits the study's generalizability. The practice of teacher leadership within the five schools at

the site closely matched that described in the literature, especially regarding distributed leadership (Spillane, 2005). Moreover, the study of one site allowed the researcher to garner rich and thick descriptions (Moustakas, 1994) supporting generalizability. Another limitation was the sample size of 16. Every teacher, 190 total, at the K-12 charter school system was invited to participate in the study, and only 24 candidates responded. Eighteen of the 24 responders qualified as teacher leaders, but only 16 participated in the research study. However, the study did exceed the number of participants suggested by the literature to reach saturation (Patton, 2015). Data were collected in person for most instances, but some were collected via Teams, potentially limiting the quality of the evidence. Another limitation of the study was the researcher's role as assistant principal in one of the five schools at the site. The decision to conduct a transcendental phenomenology addressed this limitation by requiring bracketing and epoché by the researcher. Further, because of the researcher's role as assistant principal, a section of the informed consent addressed considerations and protections for participants. Finally, a limitation of the study was every participant was white, only two were men, and only two were elementary teachers. Nevertheless, both males and females participated, and representatives from elementary, middle, and high school participated.

Delimitations

The research study included delimitations and purposeful decisions the researcher made to limit or define the boundaries of the study. The self-report nature of the screening survey (see Appendix D) limited the number of participants by requiring a score of 124-155. Of the 24 respondents, six did not score high enough for participation, and one of the non-qualifying candidates was a formal teacher. Another delimitation of the study was the decision to include informal and formal teacher leaders. Because the pool of formal teacher leaders was significantly

smaller than that of 190 potential participants, the decision to include both formal and informal teacher leaders increased the number of participants. The decision to include two focus groups is a delimitation of the study. Due to the participant pool of 16, the two focus groups were divided as follows. One group had 9 participants, and the other group had 7 participants. Nonetheless, conducting two focus groups elicited rich descriptions favored by phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994). Another delimitation of the study was the choice to conduct a transcendental phenomenology rather than a case study. Because the central question of the research study addressed the lived experiences of teacher leaders through exploration of their perceptions, transcendental phenomenology was the best method.

Recommendations for Future Research

In consideration of the study's methodology and findings, large-scale quantitative studies should occur whereby the behaviors of teachers in grades K-12 are studied to determine further contributions by teacher leaders to student learning. Qualitative studies lead in the field of teacher leadership research (Q. Wang et al., 2023), so quantifying the findings of this study would offer further findings expanding the field. This research study found subjective evidence that teacher leaders perceive their influence on student learning through transformative connections created through connection and trust that influence student learning outcomes and change student minds and behavior, so quantifying the findings would lend credence to the subjective findings of the study. At the same time, additional small-scale qualitative studies into teacher leadership at the elementary, middle, and high school levels should be conducted to garner information about teacher leadership dimensions across the range of schools supporting the idea that every teacher is a teacher leader (Bezzina & Bufalino, 2019; Fairman & Mackenzie, 2015; Harris & Jones, 2022). Conducting research from the perspective of every teacher as a

teacher leader would provide evidence answering the burgeoning definitions and dimensions of teacher leadership that stymy the field (Pan et al., 2023). While the field is inundated with definitions and dimensions, it is a natural by-product of teacher leadership due to the myriads of activities performed by teacher leaders, making finite definitions unlikely and unnecessary. Therefore, additional qualitative studies into the behaviors and actions of teacher leaders at different school levels would expand the field of teacher leadership research.

The concept of teacher leadership has been in existence since the 1900s (Smylie et al., 2002), and the field of research is great, yet the research rarely extends the practice of teacher leadership due to the absence of teacher leadership theory (Nerlino, 2020; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Instead of looking to other theories to frame and extend teacher leadership, teacher leadership theory should be grounded. Currently, no definitive work exists on teacher leadership theory (Wenner & Campbell, 2017). Therefore, the goal of future research should be to make substantive theoretical contributions to the field of teacher leadership by extending the existing educational leadership research (McGinity et al., 2022; Pan et al., 2023). The seminal work by York-Barr and Duke (2004) proposed a conceptual framework supporting a theory of action for teacher leadership. Yet, few studies have extended the conceptual framework (Nguyen et al., 2020). Future studies, both qualitative and quantitative, need to be conducted to extend the conceptual framework and ground teacher leadership theory (Wenner & Campbell, 2017; York-Barr & Duke, 2004).

The data collection method of physical artifact discussion produced rich, descriptive narratives regarding the importance of mementos and feedback for teachers. Future research into the importance and place of mementos and feedback from stakeholders for teachers should be conducted. Currently, little research on physical artifacts exists, and the literature on feedback

cycles mostly involves feedback from teachers to students. The findings of this study proved that teachers highly value feedback in the form of physical artifacts, such as handwritten and hand-drawn notes and pictures from students, peers, and colleagues, making future research in this area valuable. Additionally, of the 16 participants in the study, three were within their first three years of teaching career technology education and without formal teacher training. All three shared evidence of former leadership experience and training in their careers pre-teaching. Research into how those candidates qualified as teacher leaders should be conducted to determine the value and impact of leadership training for all teachers.

Conclusion

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to explore how teacher leaders perceive their influence on student learning for K-12 teachers at a K-12 charter school system in rural Southeastern United States. Teacher leadership was generally defined as the individual or collective manner by which teachers influence peers, principals, students, and stakeholders to improve instructional practices to increase student achievement (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). The theory framing this study is Bandura's social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1977a, 1986, 1997; Schunk, 2020). The research method of transcendental phenomenology allowed the researcher a direct view of the lived experiences of the participants. Every participant in the study was a teacher leader, whether formal or informal. The teacher leaders in the study provided detailed narratives through individual interviews, physical artifact discussions, and focus groups. The descriptions provided evidence answering four research questions and supporting the study's theoretical framework. The study found the essence of the phenomenon of how teacher leaders perceive their influence on study learning to be through transformative learning connections produced by connections and trust impacting student

learning and changing student minds and behaviors. It is widely reported in the literature that teacher leadership is valuable to the individual teacher experiencing teacher leadership, the student and classroom, and the school (Pan et al., 2023; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). The tears shed during the physical artifact discussion when detailing specific and moving stories about the givers of the artifacts and the emotions evidenced on the faces of the participants during the individual interviews when sharing how they exhibit leadership tell the true story of the value of teacher leadership. The research study provided evidence that teacher leaders are passionate, driven, and present in the lives of students and in the workings of school. The position of teacher leader should be developed and deployed to every teacher in the school because every teacher can be a teacher leader, and schools need more leaders.

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Appendices

Appendix A: IRB Approval Letter

Good morning [redacted],

I hope you are doing well!

The IRB has completed its review of your research application, and you will receive your approval notification shortly. Some minor edits were identified on the attached documents, and we wanted to make you aware of the edits, but you do not need to return the documents to the IRB. Feel free to contact the IRB if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

[redacted]
Research Coordinator
Office of Research Ethics

(434) 592-5530

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Appendix B: Site Permission

Hello Mr. [redacted] (Chief Educational Officer),

I am currently working as an assistant principal in your organization and am working on my dissertation through Liberty University. Formerly, I was a classroom teacher and instructional coach in your organization. Currently, I am working on my doctorate in Curriculum and Instruction. The purpose of my study is to describe how teacher leaders perceive their influence on student learning at primary and secondary schools in rural Southeastern United States

I would like to use several voluntary participants from your organization in my research study. This study will in no way harm any of the participants, nor will it harm the organization. The study is designed to further explore the experiences of teacher leaders in an anonymous manner. If you have any further questions, I would be happy to answer them. I am emailing to ask if I can use this organization of five schools to find potential participants for this teacher leadership research.

I thank you for your consideration. Please let me know if I can use voluntary participants from your organization in my research study.

Sincerely,

[redacted]
Liberty University Doctoral Candidate

Dear [redacted],

After careful review of your research proposal entitled, "An Exploration of How Teacher Leaders Perceive Their Influence on Student Learning: A Transcendental Phenomenology of the Experiences of Teacher Leaders," I have decided to grant you permission to conduct your study at the five schools within [redacted] Incorporation including [redacted], [redacted], [redacted], [redacted], and [redacted].

Check the follow boxes as applicable:

- ✓ I grant permission for [redacted] to contact K-12 teachers at [redacted] to invite them to participate in her research study.
- ✓ I am requesting a copy of the results upon study completion and/or publication.

Sincerely,

[redacted]
Chief Educational Officer
[redacted]

Appendix C: Recruitment E-mail

Dear Recipient:

As a doctoral student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study will be to describe how teacher leaders perceive their influence on student learning at primary and secondary schools in rural Southeastern United States. I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

Participants must be elementary, middle, or high school teachers and meet eligibility requirements determined by the screening tool linked below.

Participants, if willing, will be asked to participate in a Microsoft Teams individual interview concerning their experiences as a teacher leader. Interviews will last approximately an hour. Additionally, participants will be asked to participate in a discussion session including the sharing and discussion of a physical artifact representing teacher leadership. The sharing and discussion of physical artifacts will last approximately one hour and take place in Microsoft Teams. Finally, participants will participate in a virtual focus group with other participants identified as teacher leaders by the self-assessment screening survey. This session will last approximately an hour and occur in Microsoft Teams.

Upon completing the individual interviews, physical artifacts, and focus group, participants will have an opportunity to participate in member checking, where they will review the transcription to ensure its accuracy. Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential.

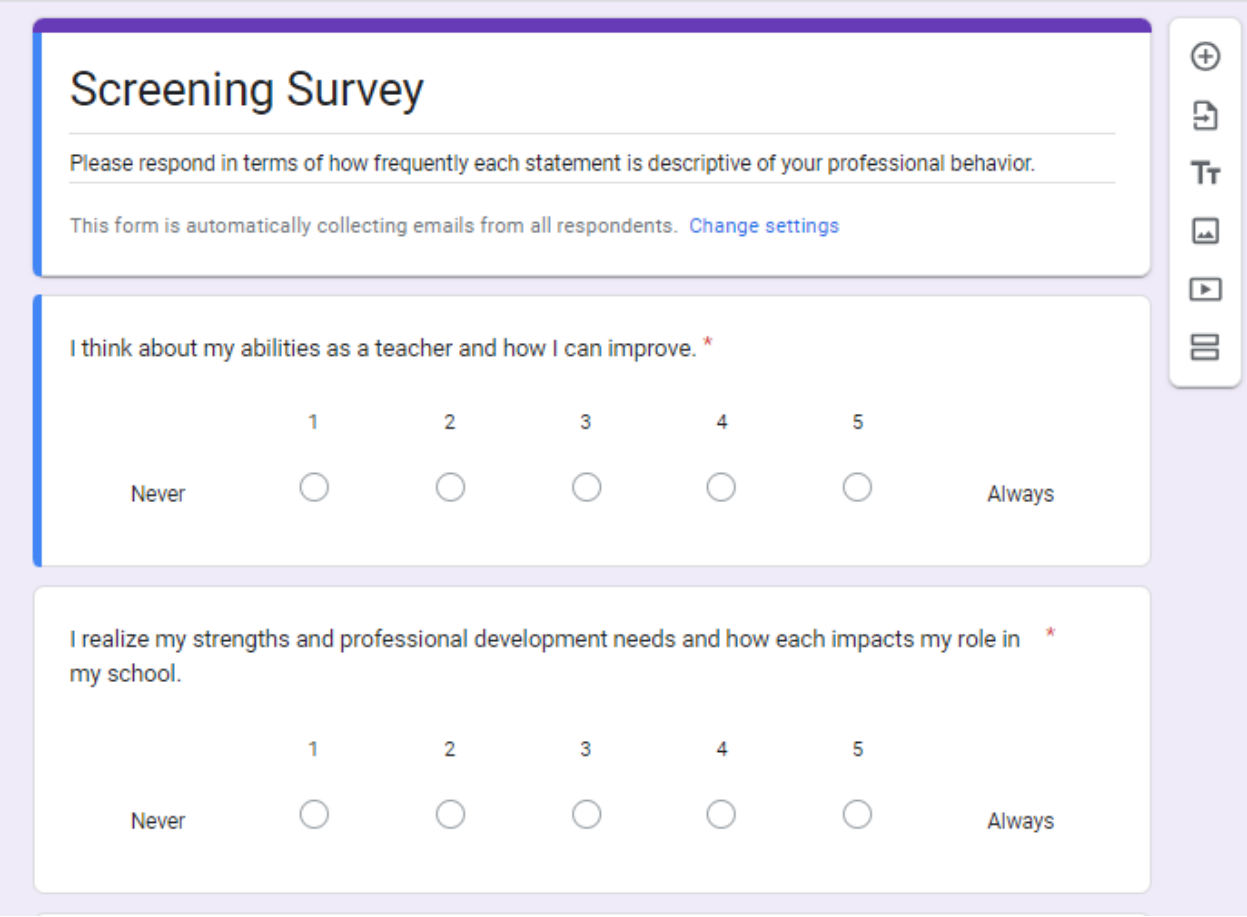
To participate, please click here and complete the screening survey. It will not take any longer than 15 minutes to complete and should be completed within seven days of receiving this letter.

A consent document is attached to this email and will be given to you one week before your individual interview/focus group. The consent document contains additional information about my research. If you choose to participate, you will need to sign the consent document and return it to me at least three days before the time of the interview/focus group.

Sincerely,

[redacted]

Appendix D: Screening Tool



Screening Survey

Please respond in terms of how frequently each statement is descriptive of your professional behavior.

This form is automatically collecting emails from all respondents. Change settings

I think about my abilities as a teacher and how I can improve. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Never	○	○	○	○	○	Always

I realize my strengths and professional development needs and how each impacts my role in my school. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Never	○	○	○	○	○	Always

I know what I believe about teaching and learning and communicate it through my actions and conversations. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Never	○	○	○	○	○	Always

I welcome feedback on how I might improve at work. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Never	○	○	○	○	○	Always

I critique colleagues' performance and provide feedback for teaching improvement. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Never	○	○	○	○	○	Always

I lead colleagues in practicing new skills and instructional strategies. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Never	○	○	○	○	○	Always

I create professional growth opportunities for colleagues. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Never	○	○	○	○	○	Always

I lead colleagues in accomplishing tasks. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Never	○	○	○	○	○	Always

I acknowledge colleagues' exceptional performance and provide positive feedback. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Never	○	○	○	○	○	Always

I involve colleagues when making decisions about team/dept. change relating to school goals. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Never	○	○	○	○	○	Always

I encourage colleagues to work toward the accomplishment of the school vision and mission. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Never	○	○	○	○	○	Always

I understand the importance of school culture to improving student outcomes. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Never	○	○	○	○	○	Always

I actively pursue the improvement of school culture. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Never	○	○	○	○	○	Always

I promote a positive environment in the classroom. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Never	○	○	○	○	○	Always

I am willing to spend my time and effort building a team to improve my school. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Never	○	○	○	○	○	Always

I provide suggestions to my supervisor for setting school goals and making instructional improvements. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Never	○	○	○	○	○	Always

I act as a bridge between my colleagues and supervisors. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Never	○	○	○	○	○	Always

I am involved in school decision-making. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Never	○	○	○	○	○	Always

I encourage colleagues to monitor student progress. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Never	○	○	○	○	○	Always

I encourage colleagues to use classroom data for improvement. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Never	○	○	○	○	○	Always

I set academic goals for students through collaboration with my team/dept. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Never	○	○	○	○	○	Always

I use research-based instructional practices. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Never	○	○	○	○	○	Always

I persist to ensure the success of all students. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Never	○	○	○	○	○	Always

I have a reputation for being a highly effective teacher. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Never	○	○	○	○	○	Always

I am approachable and open to sharing with colleagues. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Never	○	○	○	○	○	Always

I make efforts to gather all important information before making decisions or taking action. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Never	○	○	○	○	○	Always

I set personal goals and monitor my attainment progress. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Never	○	○	○	○	○	Always

I exhibit self-confidence when stressed or in difficult situations. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Never	○	○	○	○	○	Always

I work well with my team and school at large. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Never	○	○	○	○	○	Always

I take initiative and exhibit passion to follow through until goals are met. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Never	○	○	○	○	○	Always

I prioritize making time for important tasks. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Never	○	○	○	○	○	Always

I create a satisfactory balance between my personal and professional lives. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Never	○	○	○	○	○	Always

Please enter your first and last name (if selected for the research study all identifying information will be removed) *

Short answer text

Please select the grade level(s) you teach. *

- [ ] Kindergarten
- [ ] First
- [ ] Second
- [ ] Third
- [ ] Fourth
- [ ] Fifth
- [ ] Sixth
- [ ] Seventh
- [ ] Eigth
- [ ] 9-12

Please select the subject area(s) that you teach. *

- [ ] All subject areas; elementary classroom
- [ ] Reading in an elementary classroom
- [ ] Math in an elementary classroom
- [ ] Electives in elementary school
- [ ] Elective in middle school
- [ ] Elective in high school
- [ ] Reading in middle school
- [ ] Reading in high school
- [ ] Math in middle school
- [ ] Math in high school
- [ ] History in middle school
- [ ] History in high school

- [ ] History in high school
- [ ] Science in middle school
- [ ] Science in high school

I receive a stipend as a formal teacher leader due to my title as either grade level team leader or department chair. *

- ( ) Yes
- ( ) No

Appendix E: Message to Participants

Dear Participant:

Congratulations! You have been selected to participate in my research study. Selection was based on willingness to participate, and eligibility was determined by the screening tool.

Thank you for completing the participant screening survey and indicating your interest. The Consent Form is attached to this message. The consent document contains additional information about my research.

Participation is confidential; therefore, the Consent Form is voluntary. All participants will be assigned a pseudonym to ensure their confidentiality. However, if you elect to complete the consent form, you will type your name and the date on the form and return it to me at least three days before the day of your interview.

Thank you for your participation in this research study.

Sincerely,

[redacted]

Thank You Message

Dear Willing Participant:

Thank you for being willing to participate in my research study. However, you did not meet the eligibility, as determined by the screening tool and have not been selected to participate. Thank you again for being willing to participate.

Sincerely,

[redacted]

Appendix F: Informed Consent

Title of the Project
AN EXPLORATION OF HOW TEACHER LEADERS PERCEIVE THEIR INFLUENCE ON STUDENT LEARNING: A TRANSCENDENTAL PHENOMENOLOGY OF THE EXPERIENCES OF TEACHER LEADERS

Principal Investigator
[redacted], a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study
You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be an elementary, middle school, or high school teacher and meet the eligibility criteria outlined by the screening tool. Taking part in this research project is voluntary. Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

What is the study about and why is it being done?
The purpose of the study is to examine how teacher leaders perceive their influence on student learning at primary and secondary schools in rural Southeastern United States.

What will happen if you take part in this study?
If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:
Participate in a one-on-one interview with the researcher. The interview will be audio recorded and conducted virtually. This will take approximately an hour.

Participate in the individual sharing and discussion of a physical artifact. You will be asked a series of questions that will guide your responses. This will take approximately an hour.

Participate in a focus group with other schoolteachers and the researcher. The focus group session will be audio recorded and conducted virtually. This will take approximately an hour.

Participate in the process called member checking to evaluate the transcripts of your interview, your sharing and discussion of the physical artifact, and your portion of the focus group session. This will allow you to determine whether the researcher has accurately described the data that you contributed to the study. This will take approximately 15 minutes.

How could you or others benefit from this study?
Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study. However, you may benefit from participating in a collaborative conversation focus group with other school teachers.

Benefits to society include the following: 1) encouragement for teacher leaders, 2) exposure to others to your lived experiences as a teacher leader affecting student learning.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

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

How will personal information be protected?
The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential using pseudonyms.
- Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.
- Individual interviews, the individual sharing and discussion of physical artifacts, and the focus group will be recorded and transcribed.
- Recordings will be stored on a password-locked computer for three years and then erased.
- Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.
- Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group settings. While discouraged, other members of the focus group may share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.

How will you be compensated for being part of the study?
Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

Is study participation voluntary?
Participation in this study is voluntary for teachers within the Charter Schools of Bay Haven Charter Academy Incorporated. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?
If you choose to withdraw from the study, please inform the researcher at the email address included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?
The researcher conducting this study is [redacted] You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact her at [redacted].
You may also contact the researcher's dissertation chair, Dr. [redacted], [redacted] @liberty.edu.

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?
If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Consent

By signing this document, you agree to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records.

The researcher will keep a copy of the study records. If you have any questions about the study, after you sign this document, you can contact the researcher using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

____Y/N The researcher has my permission to audio-record and video-record me as part of my participation in this study.

Printed Subject Name & Signature

Appendix G: Individual Interview Questions

Table 1

Individual Interview Questions

1. Please introduce yourself and describe your teaching experience including years of service, levels, and subjects. CRQ
2. Define what teacher leadership means to you. CRQ
3. Explain how you exhibit teacher leadership in the classroom. CRQ
4. Describe the feelings generated by your role as teacher leader. SQ2
5. How do you perceive your sense of influence as a teacher leader? SQ1
6. What changes do you associate with the experience of teacher leadership? SQ1
7. How has being a teacher leader affected your belief about your capabilities? SQ2
8. In which environments and upon whom do you exhibit teacher leadership behaviors? CRQ
9. What behaviors of teacher leadership are most meaningful to you? CRQ
10. Describe your perception of how teacher leadership influences student learning. CRQ
11. How has teacher leadership affected your belief about controlling events affecting your life? SQ1
12. Describe the nature in which teacher leaders in your school act collectively. SQ3
13. Describe your experience with collective teacher leadership and student learning. SQ3
14. What else would you like to contribute to this study? CRQ

Appendix H: Physical Artifact Discussion

Table 2

Physical Artifact Discussion Questions

1. What is your physical artifact?
2. Please describe your physical artifact.
3. Please share how you got this artifact. CRQ
4. What is it used for and how often? CRQ
5. How important is this artifact to you? CRQ
6. What three words or phrases would you use to describe this artifact? CRQ
7. How might this artifact be a part of you as a teacher leader? CRQ
8. How does the artifact represent your influence as a teacher leader on student learning? CRQ
9. Is there anything else you would like to add about your physical artifact or to contribute to this study? CRQ

Appendix I: Focus Group Questions

Table 3

Focus Group Questions

1. Please introduce yourself, share about your teaching experience, and the happiest teaching memory you have. CRQ
2. When did you first realize you were a leader and how did it change you? CRQ
3. What makes a teacher a teacher leader? Consider experience, type, and audience in your explanation. CRQ
4. What is student learning? Please explain. CRQ
5. Explain the ways that different types of teacher leadership are valuable to student learning. SQ1
6. As a teacher leader, how do you navigate challenges related to burnout while simultaneously leading students or colleagues? SQ2
7. How does teacher leadership relate to job satisfaction and teacher retention? Please explain. SQ2
8. How has the degree of collective efficacy among teachers affected school reform efforts such as student achievement and PLCs? SQ3
9. What else would you like to add? CRQ

Appendix J: Digital Audit Trail

12/26/23	The audit trail serves as epoché the method of reflexivity through journaling and bracketing, and confirmability through the outline of the research process
12/26/23	Submitted IRB application.
1/28/24	IRB approval received.
1/29/24	I gained site permission from the Chief Educational Officer (CEO) of the five charter schools in the southeastern United States. The permission response was signed by the CEO.
1/30/24	I texted the Chief Information Officer (CIO) for email addresses of all teachers at the site. They provided the email addresses for each site at this time. Because these addresses included personnel who are not teachers, the CIO offered to create and share a file with the names and addresses of all 190 teachers. They did so via Google Drive spreadsheets.
1/31/24	The CIO shared a file with the names and addresses of all 190 teacher contacts at the sites.
1/31/24	I sent the recruitment email with the screening survey and informed consent to 190 teachers at the five charter schools in the Southeastern United States via my Liberty student email account. I attached the CEO permission response and the Informed Consent form. The subject line read Voluntary Teacher Participation Request: CEO Approved. Dear Recipient: As a doctoral student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study will be to describe how teacher leaders perceive their influence on student learning at primary and secondary schools in rural Southeastern United States. I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study. Participants must be an elementary, middle, or high school teacher at Bay Haven Charter Academy Incorporated and meet eligibility requirements determined by the screening tool linked below. Participants, if willing, will be asked to participate in an audio and video recorded Microsoft Teams individual interview concerning their experiences as a teacher leader. Interviews will last approximately an hour. Additionally, participants will be asked to participate in an audio and video recorded discussion session including the sharing and discussion of a physical artifact representing teacher leadership. The sharing and discussion of physical artifacts will last approximately one hour and take place in Microsoft Teams. Finally, participants will participate in an audio and video recorded virtual focus group with other participants identified as

	teacher leaders by the self-assessment screening survey. This session will last approximately an hour and occur in Microsoft Teams. Upon completing the individual interviews, physical artifacts, and focus group, participants will have an opportunity to participate in member checking where they will review the transcription to ensure its accuracy. Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential. To participate, please click here and complete the screening survey. It will not take any longer than 15 minutes to complete and should be completed within seven days of receiving this letter. If you meet my participant criteria, I will contact you within one week of completion of the screening survey to gain consent and schedule your individual interview. Attached to this email was the screening survey and consent form.
1/31/24-2/7/24	I received 20 responses but not all qualified according to the screening requirements, so I sent another request to participants. Dear Recipient: As a doctoral student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study will be to describe how teacher leaders perceive their influence on student learning at primary and secondary schools in rural Southeastern United States. I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study. Participants must be an elementary, middle, or high school teacher at Bay Haven Charter Academy Incorporated and meet eligibility requirements determined by the screening tool linked below. Participants, if willing, will be asked to participate in an audio and video recorded Microsoft Teams individual interview concerning their experiences as a teacher leader. Interviews will last approximately an hour. Additionally, participants will be asked to participate in an audio and video recorded discussion session including the sharing and discussion of a physical artifact representing teacher leadership. The sharing and discussion of physical artifacts will last approximately one hour and take place in Microsoft Teams. Finally, participants will participate in an audio and video recorded virtual focus group with other participants identified as teacher leaders by the self-assessment screening survey. This session will last approximately an hour and occur in Microsoft Teams.

	Upon completing the individual interviews, physical artifacts, and focus group, participants will have an opportunity to participate in member checking where they will review the transcription to ensure its accuracy. Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential. To participate, please click here and complete the screening survey. It will not take any longer than 15 minutes to complete and should be completed within seven days of receiving this letter. If you meet my participant criteria, I will contact you within one week of completion of the screening survey to gain consent and schedule your individual interview. Attached to the email was the screening survey and the consent form.
2/8/24	Re-sent the pre-screening survey from my Liberty student email account with the subject line *Re: Need for Additional Participants Especially Elementary: Thank you!*
2/8/2024-2/12/24	I received additional responses. Of the 24 responses, six did not qualify. Several non-qualifiers were experienced teachers, and one was a formal teacher leader at the site. Initially, I had 18 participants who agreed to participate via informed consent. However, two did not follow through for various reasons, leaving 16 participants.
2/10/24	I sent emails from my Liberty student email account to 18 qualifying participants. The email subject line read *Re: Welcome to the Research Study: Please sign & return*. I had one additional participant who qualified and agreed to participate with whom I met in-person to get the signed informed consent form. Dear Participant: Congratulations! You have been selected to participate in my research study. Selection was based on willingness to participate, and eligibility was determined by the screening tool. Thank you for completing the participant screening survey and indicating your interest. The Consent Form is attached to this message. The consent document contains additional information about my research. Participation is confidential; therefore, the Consent Form is voluntary. All participants will be assigned a pseudonym to ensure their confidentiality. However, if you elect to complete the consent form, you will write your full name and signature with the date on the form and return it to me at least three days before the day of your interview. You may submit the completed form to me in-person or send a scanned copy via email.

	Thank you for your participation in this research study. Attached to the email was the consent form.
2/10/24 and 2/18/24	I sent follow-up emails to participants who did not qualify. The subject line read *Thank you for your willingness to participate*. Dear Willing Participant: Thank you for being willing to participate in my research study. However, you did not meet the eligibility requirements as determined by the screening tool and have not been selected to participate. Thank you again for your interest and willingness to participate.
2/10/24	I sent a request to book an interview and physical artifacts discussion to 18 participants. I used the Outlook Bookings program to do this. The email subject line read *Book An Interview and Physical Artifacts Meeting*. In this email, I reminded participants to return their informed consent to me before the first in-person meeting. Many of the participants signed, scanned, and returned the informed consent form to me via email. However, some returned it to me in-person, and I went to several with a copy which they signed in-person. Hello, Please click both links and schedule an interview and physical artifacts discussion meeting. If you are not an outlook user, you will choose continue as a guest and be prompted to verify your email address before completing the booking. Overall, if you do not see a time that works for you, please email me with your preferred time. The time slots provided are after-work and weekend hours; however, if you would like to use time during the school day, please let me know when. Link: Book time with [redacted]: Individual Interview • This link will expire on: May 10, 2024 Link: Book time with [redacted]: Physical Artifacts Discussion • This link will expire on: May 10, 2024 Additionally, please submit your informed consent form before the first meeting. You may return the form to me in-person or via email.

	Thank you again for participating in my research study. I could not succeed without you.
2/11/24-2/25/24	I sent confirmation messages for the interview and physical artifact discussions. I conducted the interviews and discussions in-person and on Teams. A few participants missed their initial interview or discussion, so I sent follow-up meeting requests for re-booking.
2/12/24	My answers to the interview questions. 1. I am a former English teacher, 6th grade team lead, and HS dept. chair. 2. Teacher leadership is leading students and peers for instructional improvement and increased student achievement. 3. I exhibit TL in the classroom by making sure my students are following: procedures, understanding, passion, and excitement. 4. TL makes me feel more professional and empowered. 5. I perceive my sense of influence through relationships with colleagues, involvement in the SIT and RLT teams, and through a highly effective classroom. 6. Becoming a formal TL taught me to lead not only in my classroom but with my peers. Also, I TL helps me be an instructional leader. 7. TL lets me see that I can help students and colleagues, and that I have a voice in school-wide decisions. 8. I am a TL in the classroom with students and in the school with peers. 9. Instructional leadership is the TL behavior that is most important to me. 10. TL influences student learning through instructional leadership. When I was a TL, I implemented data-driven instruction and improved student achievement scores. 11. Because I am a TL in the classroom, I control student behaviors. I have more time for learning. 12. TLs act collectively on the school improvement team and by implementing schoolwide initiatives. 13. As a 6th grade team lead, we implemented school wide initiatives and saw improvements in student learning. We did text coding, personal learning plans, etc. 14. Nothing.
2/13/24-3/12/24	All participants were interviewed and met either in-person or online. I planned two weeks for the individual interview through 2/27/24 and two weeks for the physical artifact discussion through 3/12/24. All participant names are anonymous and pseudonyms have been used.
2/13/24	I interviewed Debra in-person in their classroom after school. The interview was 41:53. Overall, I feel good about the interview but know I

	spoke too much and made too many faces affirming "good" answers. Debra gave me feedback to send questions beforehand and allow more wait time. I commented too much during this interview. Because it was my first interview, I emphasized meanings and gave too many confirmations beginning with the first question about teacher leadership. I confirmed that I was asking about teacher leadership with students in the classroom rather than allowing the participant to draw their own conclusion. I constantly made sounds of agreement and said "right." I also repeated Debra's words back to them allowing them to agree or not agree with the statement. This potentially inserted bias about teacher leadership because I do not recall being especially careful in the summary. Additionally, I reworded questions. For example, I reworded the second question from describing the feelings generated by teacher leadership to describing how being a teacher leader in the classroom makes you feel. For question 5, I led Debra to the answer by suggesting examples of situations where teacher leadership makes changes. I led Debra to the answer for question 7 by offering suggestions. Since this is a semi-structured interview, I asked Debra what they do when students are not working hard or being part of the community. I know Debra and have worked with them in several capacities including peer and assistant principal. While I respect Debra and know they are a teacher leader, I am bracketing my bias.
2/15/24	I interviewed Autumn in their classroom after school. The interview was 20:48. As a beginning CTE teacher, new to the field of education, they had some difficulty answering some questions. They said the word burnout regarding one's ability to control events affecting your life. Autumn is a new teacher with less than a year of experience. They are also new to the teaching profession coming from the healthcare field. Their qualification as a teacher leader surprised me and led me to question their position in their former career. From questioning, I learned that they were a leader in their former career and trained others. With question 3, I asked Autumn follow-up questions to get a better understanding of the meaning they were expressing. In the beginning of the interview, I gave more wait time without adding comments or leading the participant to the answer. I used the participant's answers to earlier questions to ask later questions. For example, I said something along the lines of with your answer to number two in mind, how do you exhibit influence on students? I finally asked, how do you know you are influencing students? After, the participant was able to answer. For question 5, I offered several clarifications and unintentionally led Autumn to their answer. Similarly, Autumn struggled to answer the question about how teacher leadership influences student learning, so I reminded them of earlier answers such as classroom management and meeting students one-on-one to clarify the

	question. Autumn said this was a hard question and did not provide a clear answer, so I moved on to the next question.
2/16/24	I interviewed Harper in my office during the school day. The interview was 33:46. Harper is not currently teaching a classroom, so they have no students assigned to them. However, they are an experienced teacher with 16 years of experience. Harper said I do not know several times and wanted to give me the right answers. It was hard to not lead them to answers. I have known Harper for almost 2 years, and they currently work in my hallway. Because I view this individual as a highly effective teacher and natural teacher leader, I am bracketing my opinions to find objectivity enabling fair descriptions. Harper had difficulty answering the questions about changes that come with teacher leadership, so I offered clarifying questions. I tried not to lead the participant to an answer but found it difficult due to their need for clarification. Harper wanted to give me the right answer and seemed worried their answers were not adequate. Harper wanted me to give examples, so it was hard to lead the participant, and it was hard to remain objective. I was able to explore the difference between teacher leadership with students and peers in this interview. Nevertheless, because Harper wanted to give the right answer, it was hard not to lead them to the answer I wanted to hear. Additionally, the last answer provided insight into how other schools use teacher leaders and offered a potential I would like to see in my schools. I am finding it hard not to insert myself into the interview. Because I was a teacher leader, I understand what it is like and how I would answer these questions. I am going to be careful not to lead the participants to answers.
2/16/24	I interviewed Jennifer in their classroom after school. The interview was 37:33. Jennifer wants to give the right answer and takes teacher leadership seriously. Jennifer is a formal teacher leader at the site. I have known Jennifer for about four years. It is hard not to agree with everything they say and just enter a conversation about teacher leadership. This is at least the second interview in which Jennifer equated teacher leadership with bossing, and this is the at least the second participant to refer to modeling behaviors for students to implement. I am seeking certain information, and it is hard not to lead the participant to provide it. Because I was able to distinguish between teacher leadership of students and teachers in the last interview, I incorporated questions about each in this interview. Jennifer was able to discuss both teacher leadership of students and teachers. I asked direct questions about both types of teacher leadership. Should I have waited for Jennifer to bring it up? With the first three interviews, the participants talked around both areas, so I decided to explore both beginning in this interview. As a former teacher leader, I led in my classroom and with other teachers. I am bracketing my experiences

	to get a fresh take on the experiences of my participants. With the question about changes associated with teacher leadership, I decided to add qualifiers, with students, the school, yourself, education, etc., lending context to the question.
2/17/24	I interviewed Marie at a local bookstore. It was difficult to hear her due to the sounds in the café. Harper repeated the questions and was unable to provide answers to a few follow-up questions. I have known this participant for at least two years. Additionally, they taught one of my sons. The venue in which I interviewed Marie made it hard to hear their answers. Also, Marie repeated the questions before answering and spoke quietly. At one point, Marie was unable to answer when asked about how they knew they exhibited influence on colleagues. Based on their answers, this candidate is more of a teacher leader in the classroom. I feel I did less clarifying and leading with Marie in this interview. However, the question about changes experienced due to teacher leadership seems to be too broad requiring clarification for understanding.
2/20/24	I interviewed Heather in my office during the school day. The interview was 33:01. Currently, Heather does not have a classroom or students. Heather is prideful about their accomplishments in the face challenges, and they attribute their leadership skills to their nature. Heather says others are there for them, so they will be there for others. Heather took 13 minutes to answer the demographic question. In their answer, I learned that they started as a para in a Title I school and were moved to a teacher because of their ability to teach struggling students. They insist that they do not know what they did not make students successful; however, they mention what the prior teacher was doing and how it was just grammar all day and how the prior teacher diminished the capability of the students based on their designation of ELL. Heather did not limit the capability of the students based on their demographics; they challenged the students with additional coursework. This is the third candidate to mention the word “boss” when telling what teacher leadership means to them. The three candidates were careful to delineate the difference between teacher leadership and “bossing” others. In their opinions, teacher leadership is not bossing students in the classroom but showing that “you can be followed” or that you are setting a good example. Other participants used the word community or modeling good behavior. With the question about changes associated with being a teacher leader, this participant touched on how they can lead the department when the department head is too busy with other leadership duties. Additionally, Heather mentioned how they help people from all over the school and by doing that, they “sprinkled” the behavior of helping others throughout the

	school. According to Heather, this behavior supports leadership in everyone and allows everyone to express leadership in their own way through their own expertise. Heather is one of few who I felt spoke openly about the stress levels associated with teacher leadership. They mentioned how it can be unmanageable. I wonder if my position as assistant principal has influenced the answers that other participants have given? Much of the research points to teacher leaders being over-stressed and burned-out; yet few participants have said that. In fact, some say teacher leadership de-stresses them. I feel that I missed a few opportunities for follow-up questions but will insert them into the focus group meeting. Also, Heather mentioned that they know they influence students because I have told them so. At the beginning of the school year, a student shared that Heather was their safe place teacher, and I shared it with the participant. I believe teachers should know when they influence students. I hope this does not skew anything.
2/20/24	I interviewed Bobby after school in their classroom. The interview was 35:38. Bobby is passionate about teaching and learning and chokes up with emotion at least three times during the interview. They are highly concerned about influencing students and letting students down. Bobby was a leader in their former career and had the opportunity to study leadership. They feel that leadership is from the front and denotes a willingness to do things so that others will follow. Bobby told me they were not a teacher or teacher leader and did not really know how to teach. Nevertheless, they said teacher leaders try to get students to follow and gave attaining industry certification as an example. This is the first participant to mention followership. Additionally, Bobby looks at teacher leadership through the lens of leadership. They stated that leadership is leadership. When explaining how it feels when students get it and follow them, this participant choked up saying it makes everything worth it when students follow their leadership. Bobby said they were sad when students did not follow and blamed it on their teaching rather than the student's lack. When speaking about the changes associated with teacher leadership, Bobby choked up after sharing that they were more confident in their ability to teach but also still bothered by the ones who never followed or got it. Bobby mentioned making changes in curriculum because of teacher leadership and student followership. Interestingly, Bobby said they were working harder and an engineering teacher than they did an actual mechanical engineer. Bobby distinguishes between helping each other as a team effort and collective teacher leadership, noting that covering classes for testing is not collective teacher leadership but just helping. At the end of the interview, Bobby shared their motivation for higher education and being a teacher. Bobby values education because his father valued it.
2/22/24	I interviewed Lisa after school in Teams. The interview was 44:15. Lisa is a matter of fact and values organization and well-behaved children. Nevertheless, they do confess to loving their students and understanding

	what that means regarding their influence. Lisa is a formal teacher leader at the site. Like Harper and Heather, Lisa spoke about teacher leadership and something natural and an extension of who they are and what they know to do. Lisa said that teacher leadership in the classroom is just something they do naturally and an extension of them. In relation to teacher leadership with colleagues, Lisa mentioned being hard on their self and wanting to do a very good job much like participant 6. Lisa is the first one to mention love as a reason they are very aware of and perceive the influence they have on a teacher leader. Lisa is also the first elementary teacher leader, so their answer might be related to the difference between secondary and primary classrooms and the relationships between elementary teachers and students versus secondary teachers and students. Nevertheless, Lisa takes their influence very seriously and says they love the students too. Interestingly, Lisa shared that they do not have influence with their team. Although they are the team leader and are looked at when things need accomplishing, they do not feel like they influence their team. This is the first participant for whom I added the clarification of changes around you or within you for the question about what changes are associated with teacher leadership. Later they say that in the school at large others look to them for advice, techniques, and ways to handle things but still no influence on colleagues. Lisa wants to be one of them that peers look up to a little but not a brat or holier than thou type of leader. This sentiment has a place in the literature when referencing egalitarianism. Additionally, Lisa mentioned bringing legitimacy and genuineness to teacher leadership in their answer to how teacher leadership influences student learning. They connect legitimacy and genuineness to trust and getting students to take learning risks. With Lisa, I made a mistake with the self-agency question. They wanted to answer with information about how teacher leadership crosses over into their home life, and I unintentionally redirected their answer resulting in misunderstanding for Lisa. I pulled the answer from them, but they might have remained silent or unable to answer had I not clarified and interrupted so much.
2/23/24	I interviewed Bethany after school in my office. The interview was 41:50. It was difficult to get an interview time that worked for both of us, and I feared I would lose them as a participant. Bethany is not a formal teacher leader but confesses that peers come to her for leadership. Bethany said that teacher leadership is actions because students see you practicing what you preach. Although they did not use the word model. That is the meaning they portrayed with their answer. Several participants have mentioned modelling as part of teacher leadership. Whether it is through good examples or good behavior, the idea of teacher leadership as modeling certain behaviors is a recurring theme. Like others, Harper, Heather, and Lisa, Bethany said it is just what they do, it is their

	experience in answer to how they lead their students. Bethany was unable to tell how they get students to like their class even though they dislike math. Bethany distinguished between loud people and leaders and asserted that not all loud people are leaders. Also, Bethany gave concrete examples of how they know they influence student learning because students come back and give them feedback. Like others, Bethany struggled with the question about self-agency. However, I am not sure that I did not instill doubt about this question because of my lead-in to it.
2/25/24	I interviewed Stanley on the weekend at a local bookstore. They were humble about teacher leadership but shared that teacher leadership brings out the best in them. Stanley is one of three Career Technical Education (CTE) teachers who qualified for the study. Autumn and Bobby are the other two. Stanley has only been teaching for three years and is a formal teacher leader at the site. For the changes associated with teacher leadership, Stanley, like Bobby, mentioned personal accountability. Stanley goes on to say that because of their role as a formal teacher leader and third year of teaching, they feel more self-disciplined and experience a greater sense of meaning and life value versus their feelings in their former corporate career. Stanley is a CTE teacher like participants Bobby and Autumn. Unlike Bobby, they do not choke up, but I can tell they have a deep desire to continue teaching and leading for their students and life goals. Like other participants, Stanley gives team meetings and the sharing of tasks, duties, and responsibilities as examples of collective teacher leadership. Honestly, I realize I am an objective observer, but I wish I could get the answer I am looking for. Nevertheless, the data will tell the tale about collective teacher leadership and its influence on student leadership.
2/26/24	I interviewed Elizabeth after school in their classroom. The interview was 25:25. Elizabeth teared up when speaking about growth mindset and students feeling defeated by mistakes. They said the most meaningful behavior of teacher leadership is guiding the learning and facilitating. It is very hard to refrain from sharing my opinion in interviews with people I know. With question 2, I said that I thought it could be both regarding whether teacher leadership is in the classroom or with peers. I realized I should not have said that and corrected with what do you think it is. Elizabeth feels that teacher leadership occurs more with their peers rather than students. However, they shared that they exhibit teacher leadership in the classroom by conveying the idea of lifelong learning. This idea is like the ideas of modeling, setting good examples, and building community mentioned by other participants. Elizabeth went into how important it is to let students make mistakes and not feel defeated, and they teared-up when expressing this line of thought. Like Bobby, this participant does not think of themselves as a leader but only feels like they are cooperative. I did better with not inserting my ideas or opinions and with not interrupting

	with clarifying questions. When Elizabeth said they did not know, I did not give them ideas about how to answer. This is difficult for me because I know this participant and am familiar with their instruction. Making students feel comfortable with math is near to Elizabeth's heart. Also, Elizabeth equates their level of teacher leadership with years of experience instead of leadership capabilities. Because Elizabeth insisted they were not a teacher leader, but only exhibited teacher leadership in the classroom, I felt compelled to ask if, in their opinion, there is a difference between good teaching and teacher leadership. With this conversation, Elizabeth delved into how good teaching is teacher leadership in the classroom, and that there is a popular argument against the teacher being in the leader or authority in lieu of allowing the students to lead. This point brings back to mind the question of whether teacher leadership is the teacher exacting authority?
2/26/24	I interviewed Hayley after school on Teams. The interview was 20:16. Hayley is a brand new teacher with this being their first year. Additionally, Hayley is one of two elementary participants. Lisa is the other. Although Hayley is a new teacher, they mention leading their teammates with innovative ideas. Hayley is a first-year teacher having just graduated in the Spring of 2023. Although new, Hayley mentions trying to lead their team by sharing innovative ideas, and they believe teacher leadership has to do with passion in the classroom and school. Hayley shared about how they exhibit teacher leadership within their team and classroom, and how they seek feedback from students to guide their instruction. Again, Hayley mentioned the way they speak and act influences how their students think and act like earlier participants. Hayley spoke at length about procedures and routines enabling them to feel a sense of control that affects their job satisfaction. They went so far as to say that their level of self-agency allows them to feel love for their job. Additionally, Hayley feels that the level of collective teacher leadership in first grade amongst the team of teachers positively impacted student learning in second grade. Hayley and one other have only worked for this school year, whereas at least two other participants have worked for about 40-42 years, and all of them scored high enough on the self-screening survey to be included in the research study as teacher leaders. This data opens my mind about what it means to be a teacher leader. I am getting better at not inserting my opinion or leading the participant to answers.
2/27/24	I interviewed Pam during their planning period during the school day. The interview was 20:04. I find it easier to say less with each interview. Pam equates teacher leadership with experience but says experience does not make all teachers leaders. With Pam, I realized that every participant has given a slightly different definition of teacher leadership. Although the definitions have similarity,

	none have been the same. Hayley mentioned passion in the classroom as teacher leadership whereas Pam mentions stepping out and taking risks as part of teacher leadership. Like others, Pam mentions organization as a way they exhibit teacher leadership in the classroom. Like Stanley, this participant correlates changes due to teacher leadership with value for the job and making a difference. Pam also corroborates the idea of other participants by relating how teacher leadership makes one perform in a responsible manner and work harder because others are looking. Some of Pam's answers led me to ask if experience makes one a teacher leader and if all experienced teachers are teacher leaders to which they answered no. I find it interesting that participants, at least Pam and Elizabeth, with more years of experience in many instances have equated experience with leadership and am trying to get responses that explore the two concepts of teacher leadership and experienced teachers to better understand the similarities and differences. Pam also references having your ducks in a row, the very same phrase used by Lisa. Pam's additions to how teacher leadership affects self-agency shed light on the positive results of teacher leadership referenced in the literature. They said that the skills learned through leadership empower teacher leaders. Additionally, when asked if they have additional contributions to this study, Pam said more training on teacher leadership for those not going into administration is needed.
2/27/24	I interviewed Courtney in their classroom during their planning period during the school day. The interview was 25:48. Courtney was nervous about being on the screen. Courtney is a formal teacher leader at the site and cares about helping other teachers work more efficiently. Courtney is nervous about being on the camera and is fidgeting and flushing while answering questions. In this interview the idea of teacher leadership and teacher experience comes up again. However, Courtney says that teacher leadership is related to years of experience and gives the numbers of 7 and 8 as the years of experience necessary to leadership. Moreover, Courtney elaborates with their opinions about how new teachers cannot be teacher leaders because of their inexperience and the circumstance of experienced teachers not being willing to listen to a new teacher as leader. Like Elizabeth, a fellow math teacher, this participant says that when the students make a mistake, they work it out together supporting growth and flexibility. They expressed that creating a learning environment where students are comfortable making mistakes is important to them and part of teacher leadership in the classroom. Although Courtney does not say that teacher leadership supports teacher retention, they do say that by helping people they are expressing how badly they want new teachers to stay. For question 6 about changes associated with teacher leadership, Courtney says they are more confident in their abilities and adds, like several other participants, that this is who they are and what they know to do. Courtney says they feel weird talking about themselves. Again, question 10 was hard for me to convey without giving too much

	information and leading the participant to the answer I was looking to receive. I went too far when I said the answer to number 10 relates to the previous answer regarding the flexibility created by planning for each lesson. This possibly led the participant to give the answer I wanted instead of thinking of it on their own. However, Courntey was able to bridge self-agency at school with impact on their home life. They stated that the self-agency created by teacher leadership positively impacts their homelife.
2/27/24	I interviewed Jillian in my office during the school day. Jillian is a math interventionist and does not have students. They work in the capacity of a teacher leader assisting, mentoring, and modeling acceptable behaviors to new and struggling teachers. In this new position, formerly a classroom teacher, Jillian expresses the importance of teacher leadership. Jillian asked for a copy of the questions beforehand. Jillian is a math instructional coach, so they work as a formal teacher leader mentoring new and struggling teachers to make improvements to instruction. Their answers shed light on working as a formal teacher leader without a teaching assignment or student responsibility. They are one of three instructional coaches hired for intervention. It is interesting to hear their answers and think about the possibilities created by having instructional coaches. Jillian stresses that relationships and mentoring are the most meaningful behaviors of teacher leadership, and they mention modeling appropriate behaviors as meaningful. They said that mentoring and modeling are more meaningful than training and professional development. They also said more collaboration and collective action with teacher leaders across the school would benefit student learning and possibly structure and school culture. With the last question regarding additional contributions, this candidate quoted something they read about how school culture and structure can impede improvement efforts, and they went on to say that was happening at their school. I will work hard to bracket my bias and opinions when analyzing this data because it is so much like what I believe and feel regarding teacher leadership. Additional thoughts on Jillian include the fact that they asked for the questions ahead of time and wrote down their responses. I sensed proof of this in their answers.
2/27/24	I interviewed Lilly Marie in their classroom after school. The interview was 23:38. Lilly Marie is a second-year teacher with no formal teacher leadership experience. However, they understand the importance of modeling acceptable behaviors to students and peers. As a new teacher with little experience their qualification as teacher leader challenges and confirms my belief that experienced teachers are more often teacher leaders but new teachers can be teacher leaders as well. Lilly Marie is in their second year of teaching. Their definition of teacher leadership included both students and peers, and they mentioned modeling

	as a way of exhibiting teacher leadership in the classroom. Interestingly, they mentioned that teacher leaders at their school act collectively by making their classrooms and the school a safe place where students and colleagues feel safe and supported. I found myself asking the question about if there is collective teacher leadership at their school three times. This clearly shows I was not satisfied with the answers I received. I must not lead the participant. However, it is hard not to do so when I can think of examples of collective teacher leadership in their school. Nevertheless, if the participant does not recognize collective teacher leadership, perhaps it is not happening. Lilly Marie is the last individual interview. The first physical artifact discussion is scheduled for 2/29/24 wit Lisa.
2/28/24	My answers to the physical artifact questions. 1. My physical artifact is a wooden lectern my daddy made for me from a cedar in my childhood yard. 2. I use the lectern in my classroom for student presentations. 3. The artifact is important to me because my daddy made it for my classroom from a childhood tree. 4. Sentimental, unique, and useful. 5. It is part of me as a TL because it designates the position from which I lead, the front of the classroom. 6. I allow students to use it during their presentations. It represents me being in control in my classroom. I facilitate learning. 7. No.
2/29/24 4/22/24	I met with Lisa to discuss their physical artifact on Teams after school. The meeting lasted 14:24. I had to refer to Lisa's answers to the individual interview to elicit answers to a couple of questions. I met with Lisa to discuss her physical artifact, a kitty paw pointer, on Teams. They chose this artifact because it brings smiles to faces and relates to Lisa's desire to make everyone happy and encourage school attendance. To support Lisa's answer to question seven regarding how the artifact is part of them as a teacher leader, I referred to the interview notes where I learned that Lisa wants to make everyone happy. Lisa says the kitty paw pointer makes everyone smile and brings humor to her classroom. Although Lisa is passionate about students exhibiting proper behavior, they want the classroom to be a fun place. Like Marie's engagement inventory and Courtney's created unit, Lisa says her kitty paw pointer brings humor and engagement to the students. Her students are fifth graders who find a kitty paw pointer funny. Lisa wants to make students smile and make learning fun. I created a new code under teacher leadership, making learning fun, because I believe Courtney and

	Marie both spoke to this as well. On the second round of coding, I will look for more evidence for making learning fun.
3/1/24	I met Harper during the school day to discuss their physical artifact, a paper calendar. Harper currently works as the secondary testing coordinator in their school, so their choice of artifact is not surprising-a paper planner calendar. They desire perfection, so the calendar is in pencil. They speak about modeling certain behaviors for students and how the calendar does that by targeting organization and neatness. Prior to this meeting, Harper texted me asking advice on what to bring as their artifact. They mentioned one sentimental and one instructional. It was hard for me not to give my opinion, but I did not. They chose the instructional artifact.
4/22/24	Harper's artifact speaks to her personal qualities. Daily they appear well-organized in her dress and grooming habits as well as work tasks. I am not surprised they chose a portable calendar with penciled in dates rather than penned in dates. They discussed modeling organization for her students and instilling the quality in them believing it would lead to academic success. They referenced past experiences with academically successful students who were organized. Harper believes organization and flexibility to be necessary for leadership. Harper even mentions that leaders must be organized.
3/1/24	I met with Heather in my office after school to discuss their physical artifact, several artifacts created by students and one from a co-worker. Heather brought three artifacts to the meeting: a student created painting, a card from a student, and a letter from their department chair when being nominated for teacher of the year. Heather is passionate about their artifact relating a story about the painting and how the student who made it was not enrolled in their class and only read the novel and completed the culminating assignment, the painting, because they wanted to work with Heather. Heather hangs the student painting in every classroom they have. Although Heather does not currently have a classroom, they have the painting in their desk drawer for easy access during hard moments. The physical artifacts are a source of inspiration for Heather. However, Heather mentioned that she is having a rough time this year.
4/22/24	Like others, Heather mentions using the artifacts on hard days and knowing the artifacts are proof of their impact on students and even colleagues. Heather keeps the three they brought to the discussion close by for reference as needed. While sharing Heather mentions an additional artifact that she did not bring to the discussion. During Covid, Heather had a virtual student upon whom they made an impact causing the student to come to school to meet them before the summer. The student created a pirate painting for Heather because they called them the "Queen Boss."

3/2/24 4/22/24	I met with Marie in the afternoon on Saturday via Teams. Their physical artifact was a paper copy of a Google spreadsheet created to survey students about engagement strategies. Like Harper, Marie's artifact is instructional showing their concern for student engagements. Marie shared that the creation of the artifact was their own idea and spurred by low scores on the progress monitoring test and a desire to increase student achievement through heightened engagement. The paper spreadsheet is marked in pen and appears to be used frequently. When asked about three words to describe the artifact, Marie has a hard time expressing themselves. It was hard for me not to give Marie ideas and lead them to the answer I wanted. However, I have much improved since the individual interviews. Marie's physical artifact is like Courtney's in that she created it. The motivation behind the artifact was to increase student engagement; whereas Courtney created hers to increase both student learning and student engagement. Marie believes her willingness to create the artifact and change student engagement shows teacher leadership qualities. Marie is willing to do more to meet student needs. Marie referred to increased scores on the progress monitoring assessment because of increased attention to student engagement.
3/5/24 4/22/24	I met Lilly Marie after school in their classroom. Their physical artifact was a St. Patrick's Day headband. Lilly Marie relates a detailed story about their artifact and how it symbolizes a former pre-kindergarten student and their success in class. Lilly Marie says the student is her "one kid" making the hard times and job of teaching worth it. They look at this artifact and remember the influence they had on the student with joy. I asked several follow-up questions to ensure understanding of what Lilly Marie was relating to. For example, I asked what you mean by "it." Lilly Marie believes student wellbeing is important and integral to student success and her own measurement of success in the classroom. In the individual interview and in the discussion, Lilly Marie mentions that proof of influence is delayed. This belief is due in part to the fact that Lilly Marie teaches Biology, and the end-of-course exam takes place at the end, and it takes three weeks for the scores to come back. Lilly Marie's artifact tells a story of the impact she made on one student's emotional growth and well-being. To them, that is confirmation of doing the right thing and a motivator to keep at it. This sentiment has been shared by most of the participants.

3/6/24	I met with Stanley in their classroom during their planning period. Their physical artifact was a post-it note with a handwritten note from an anonymous student. Stanley does not believe they are a leader and exudes humility. They seem a little down today and admit that today is a day they needed to read their physical artifact. Their artifact is a post-it note that says, "*The way I see it is that if you want the rainbow, you have to put up with the rain."* Stanley also has a wall of honor where they place artifacts like the one presented in today's session. They hold the artifacts on the wall in high esteem and mention that artifacts help them get through hard days and are something accessed frequently. I am finding the idea of the physical artifact helping the teacher get through rough days to be repetitive. What does that mean?
4/22/24	Like others, Stanley uses the artifact as confirmation of influence on students. They do not say what type of influence, but they reference the words used to describe the artifact and how they desire to emulate those characteristics with their students, motivation, empathy, and inspiration. Stanley believes all these qualities are innate to leaders. When referring to leaders, Stanley does not use the first-person because they do not believe, not really, that they are a teacher leader. Stanley was having a rough day on the day of our discussion because Stanley says referencing the artifact was a timely reminder.
3/6/24	I met Elizabeth in their classroom after school. Like Heather, their artifact was student created artifacts including handwritten notes and cards. Elizabeth cries while reading their artifacts aloud, referencing a particular student who struggled to get a C but attributes their success to Elizabeth's belief in them. Elizabeth cares deeply about creating a safe environment in the classroom in which students feel comfortable failing. Elizabeth accesses the physical artifact when they start questioning the point of continuing as an educator. The artifacts provide assurance that there is a point to teaching. Elizabeth mentions how students who repeatedly fail break their heart. Like others, Elizabeth also talks about the physical artifact helping them remain in education.
4/21/24	Elizabeth is very emotional about her artifacts. They are in their 42nd year and considering retirement. Later in the focus group, Elizabeth refers to themselves as someone near burnout. They have a calming and peaceful presence at odds with the face of burnout. Nevertheless, the number of times they reference their artifacts as proof of influence, as if it is doubted, lends insight into how they feel about teaching. It saddens me that at this late stage in their career they have so much doubt regarding their abilities. I compare Elizabeth with Debra and see similar experiences, both math, both thirty plus years, but different in their emotional state and

	consideration of their long career. By right, I believe them to be excellent teachers, however I will let the evidence speak for itself.
3/7/24 4/22/24	I met with Jillian in my office during the school day. Their physical artifact, like Heather's and Elizabeth's, included artifacts from students. Jillian reads from numerous artifacts and cries reflecting on how much they love their students and how passionate they are about students learning math and feeling safe doing so. Elizabeth shares an artifact in which the student explains how they struggled but ended up excelling because of Jillian's support. Jillian says they access the folder of artifacts when questioning whether they should keep teaching. The folder proves they should. Jillian cries repeatedly during the discussion and feels uncomfortable about it. The meeting was shorter because of Jillian's discomfort with crying. However, Jillian makes an interesting point that all teachers should have an artifact folder like this to reflect on the influence made on students. Jillian expresses a desire for all teachers to be the teacher students writing the notes and letters thought them to be. Jillian stresses the importance of the artifacts as reminders of having positive influence on students and motivators to keep going. She also says that all teachers should have artifacts like these to reflect on their practice. She says the artifacts make her want to be the teacher described therein. Jillian, an experienced teacher, and Autumn, a first-year teacher, share this sentiment regarding the physical artifact. Both believe the artifacts are evidence of influence on student learning and an important type of feedback unlike other forms of feedback. Hayley mentioned a similar idea with the Flashback Friday assignment and its relationship with social emotional learning.
3/7/24 4/21/24	I met with Debra in their classroom after school. Their artifact was a handmade quilt from their parents given on their first teaching assignment thirty plus years ago. Debra's artifact is a handmade quilt from their mother who is 89 years old. It has been a decoration in every classroom throughout Debra's 30 plus years of teaching. When Debra's mother made the quilt, Debra's dad shared the importance behind the words, "Good, better, best…never let it rest…'til your good is better, and your better is best." Debra says this saying has inspired them throughout the years and references a story about a failing student and how hard they teach. Debra cries when recalling their father's words of wisdom and mother's kind action. Debra's parents gave the hanging quilt to decorate her first classroom over thirty years ago. Debra's father was a teacher who shared sage advice, and their mother was a stay-at-home mother. Debra shared how the quilt was

	extra special because their mom was not a quilter. I am not coding all the information shared by Debra, but I want to remember it is there in case I want to access it later. Debra mentioned, when asked if there was anything else they wanted to add to the study, that they read several learning theory books and applied them to her classroom. They mentioned the significant other and additional ideas of Vygotsky. This information tells me Debra is intentional with choices.
3/8/24 4/21/24	I met with Autumn in their classroom after school. Like Heather, Elizabeth, and Jillian, Autumn's artifact was a note from a student. Like Stanley, Autumn is a Career Technical Education teacher who also has a wall with physical artifacts displayed. They read a letter from a student and a couple of handwritten post-it notes from other students. Although Autumn is a beginning teacher with few artifacts, they state that they hope to never stop receiving artifacts like these because if they do, they are no longer making the impact on the students like they are now and should always. Autumn holds feedback from students in high regard. Listening to Autumn talk as a first-year teacher about the importance of physical artifacts makes me sad that I no longer have mine. Throughout my moves and promotions, I have not been careful about keeping mementos from students.
3/7/24 4/22/24	I met Pam on Teams during the school day. Pam shared several artifacts including the Holy Bible, a note-taking journal, and a seashell reference book. Pam was eager to participate and spoke with passion about the word of God being the center of her life. However, Pam transitioned to the seashell reference book comparing seashells in a symbolic manner to the beauty, uniqueness, and care involved in educating students. This session might be an outlier once all data is collected. It does seem to be a weaker example, yet I cannot predict what the data will say and must be careful not to steer things as I want them to go. On reviewing Pam's discussion for a second time, I am finding it harder to code. It is so different from the other discussions that is does not fit into many of the codes. If I create additional codes, they will not answer the research questions because she talks of seashells and their internal design but does not relate it to teacher leadership or influence on student learning. Therefore, I did not code the last quarter of the discussion because I do not believe it fits with the existing data. This frustrates me, and I am not certain it is the right thing to do; however, this memo will keep me accountable to the process. Comparing Pam's discussion to others, I find hers most like Bethany's but less applicable to the topic.
3/11/24	I met Bobby in their classroom after school. Their physical artifact was a yearbook with student notes and signatures. Bobby continually surprises me as they answer with tears in their eyes. Bobby cares a great deal for

4/21/24	their students and wants the support of their well-being and achievement. Like others, Bobby says the artifact is proof that a connection was made between themselves and the students. When talking about this connection, Bobby choked up. Bobby, like others, said that the artifact gets them through bad days. Tears slip out of Bobby's eyes as they talk. For question 6, I interrupted with the next question and will never know how Bobby might have elaborated if I would have provided additional wait time. Surprisingly, Bobby admitted they had never read any of the comments written by students in the yearbook. I encouraged Bobby to read a few, but they never complied. Bobby remains unsure of their teacher leadership status and continues to share general information about leadership rather than teacher leadership or leadership in the classroom. These sentiments could lead to problems with data analysis because they do not really fit with the other leadership comments. Additionally, Bobby fails to link their artifact to teacher leadership. Which is okay but reveals my bias in reference to the use of physical artifacts as evidence for student learning. Instead of referencing the artifact, Bobby shares how about influencing a student when they take the next class in the engineering pathway. I cannot overlook this when writing chapter 5.
3/12/24 4/21/24	I met Courtney in their classroom during their planning period. Their physical artifact was a lesson plan they created. They also incorporated a card from students. Courtney shared that the unit "The Very Bad Day" is the first unit they prepared entirely by themselves. It is an engaging and relevant lesson about exponential functions in the context of a zombie apocalypse. It is hard for me not to access information I know about Courtney that is not part of the teacher leadership data that I am collecting; nevertheless, I recall that Courtney did share that they are part of a national STEM group. Courtney prides themselves on the creation of this unit and how it is an example of where they are professionally and with math expertise. With the unit, Courtney also mentioned a special group of students that she taught for 6^{th}, 7^{th}, and 8^{th} grades. Courtney was their only middle school math teacher, and they were the first group to learn about exponential functions using the unit created by Courtney. This group of students gifted her with a card and a series of "threes" to represent the three years they received math instruction from Courtney. Courtney's artifact represents the ability to influence student learning through curriculum and confidence as a teacher leader. In the individual interview and this discussion, Courtney mentions the importance of experience and how they have progressed due to experience. This thought leads me to consider whether new teachers can be teacher leaders. Two new teachers qualified as teacher leaders according to the pre-screening

	survey. However, one is a career technical teacher how served as a leader in their career field, and the second is a new teacher who often references their student teaching experience. Additionally, like Marie and Hayley, Courtney says the experience of creating an instructional unit increased her confidence proving her ability to be an instructional leader.
3/12/24 4/22/24	I met with Jennifer in their classroom during their planning period. Their physical artifact was the Holy Bible. Jennifer wants to be a good team leader for their team and students. However, they really pride themselves on working to create a community atmosphere in their team and in the middle school at large. Jennifer references the Bible and verses that they use to be a stronger leader. Jennifer has experience at the elementary and middle school levels and often refers to their years as an elementary teacher and the feeling of not being included in the team as motivation for being sincere about setting a good example for students and colleagues. Like others, Jennifer mentioned using the Holy Bible or motivation during rough weeks. Jennifer uses the Holy Bible to encourage both students and peers through their behavior as they strive to be a Christian in all they do. Jennifer leads by example and uses the Bible as a source of inspiration when facing tough times on their team and in their classroom. They want to use the Bible in class more often but is unsure of how to do so. Through the Bible, they influence student learning by modeling acceptable behavior to students and colleagues.
3/12/24 4/22/24	I met Hayley in the evening after school on Teams. Hayley and Lisa are the only two participants who completed both the individual interview and physical artifacts discussion on Teams. I will not see them in-person until the focus group meeting. Hayley presented the "Flashback Friday" handout they referenced in their individual interview. They tell how the artifact shows student learning because on it the student tells about making friends. Hayley shares how the student was sad about not making friends and being lonely. Also, Hayley tells how the student performed better in small groups because of making new friends. Hayley says the artifact helps them stay in touch with their parents as well as. Overall, Hayley is a passionate and innovative new teacher who cares for her students. Hayley understands that for maximum academic learning, social learning must occur. Multiple participants from the individual interviews said the same referencing trust, student comfort in the classroom, and life-long learning. Hayley is a unique first year teacher, this characteristic is one that qualified her for the study, in that she recognizes her weaknesses and sets goals to

	achieve them. She references the Flashback Friday handout and feedback received as proof of her success in setting goals to support and nurture social and emotional growth in her students. She set this goal for herself and recognized that the military student needed it as well. Hayley believes the feedback on the handout is proof of her influence on the student's learning. Like Courtney's self-created unit, the successful use of Flashback Friday instilled confidence in Hayley. Both Courtney and Hayley reference the use of instructional tools, handouts and units, in building their confidence. Both made instructional decisions they felt were best for the students and were validated by student feedback, performance, and understanding. I believe this quality to be a hallmark of teacher leadership, but how do I capture it? It is more than meeting the needs of students or improving your instructional skill. It is intimate knowledge of students, their needs, and your own skills. Hayley mentioned how important it is to try new things, so I was able to code the artifact discussion into interview codes. This was a worry that I had. I was unsure of whether I should create all new codes for the physical artifact discussion, and I have. However, much of the evidence works with existing research studies codes created during the first round of individual interview coding.
3/13/24 4/21/24	I met with Bethany during the school day on Teams. Their physical artifact was a literal toolbox they used to discuss teacher leadership symbolically. Bethany shared how the toolbox aides her colleagues and allows her to support other teachers with mundane yet necessary assistance with classroom set-up and décor. Symbolically, Bethany shares how the toolbox allows her to mentor teachers with instructional advice and mentor students with learning techniques. Bethany never goes without the toolbox both literal and symbolic. In reviewing Bethany's transcript, I found it hard to find tangible evidence due to the nature of their artifact. They presented a toolbox but discussed it as a means of holding tools and symbolically as holding teaching tools for student learning. Although I understood her meaning, it might be hard to find actual evidence supporting the research questions.
3/14/24-3/24/24	I went to [redacted] as a parent chaperone and the teachers had Spring break, so no further meetings were conducted. At this point, all individual interviews and physical artifact discussions have been held.
3/18/24	I uploaded all videos to One Drive, Google Drive, and Files. I also met with my dissertation chair and discussed transcription services, settling on OtterAI.
3/19/24	I transcribed the interviews and physical artifact discussions.
3/20-3/23/24	I reviewed the individual interview videos and cleaned the transcripts removing identifying information and correcting the transcription if it differed from the video. I reviewed and cleaned the videos and transcripts

	of three of the physical artifact discussions. I have 13 remaining discussion transcripts to clean.
3/24/24	After watching the NVivo tutorials and YouTube tutorials, I coded the first individual interview transcript in NVivo. I created a demographic spreadsheet to upload to NVivo.
3/25/24	I discussed the new focus group questions with my dissertation chair during our weekly Monday meeting. I rewrote the focus group questions, and I assigned pseudonyms to all participants. Until this point, participants were assigned numbers.
3/26/24	I asked Co-Pilot to create two random groups of eight from the list of participant pseudonyms that I created. After, I sent focus group email invites to the two groups. The first group, Jillian, Marie, Bobby, Lisa, Harper, Courtney, Stanley, and Debra were invited to a focus group meeting on 4/1/24. This date did not work with everyone's schedules, so another email was sent to determine which date, 4/8, 4/9, 4/10, or 4/11 would work. After getting a response from everyone, I determined 4/8/24 would work best for focus group one to meet. The second group was invited to meet on 4/2/24, and all confirmed attendance. Focus group two, Elizabeth, Heather, Harper, Lilly Marie, Jennifer, Bethany, Autumn, and Pam were the original members of focus group two randomly selected by Co-Pilot. However, Harper got sick and could not attend, so Hayley replaced them. Before the meeting, Autumn texted me saying they could not make the meeting, so I proceeded with seven of the eight members. Focus group two consisted of Elizabeth, Heather, Hayley, Lilly Marie, Jennifer, Bethany, and Pam. Autumn was scheduled to join focus group one on 4/8/24 with Harper and the others listed above. The correspondence with the participants to confirm dates and attendance occurred on 3/26/24, 3/28/24, 3/31/24, 4/1/24, and 4/7/24. The first focus group meeting occurred on 4/2/24.
4/1/24	My answers to the focus group questions. 1. My first year as a 6th grade teacher was my happiest. I transitioned from honors level HS to 6th grade, and it was so refreshing to have 11-year-old students who cared about me and about learning. 2. I realized I was a leader in high school when I helped all of my classmates pass their courses. They would come to me for tutoring and mentoring. My teacher noticed and let me teach a unit on Emily Dickinson. 3. I am a teacher leader because I help teachers grow, and I move the school forward. 4. Student learning is academic and shown by reading and understanding complex texts, writing complex pieces both informational and creative, and participating/leading collegiate discussions.

	5. Informal and formal TL are valuable to student learning the teachers next door to each other are partners and the teams are partners with administration. 6. My performance as a TL with students and peers motivates me to keep going. I feel validated through those avenues. 7. TL makes me more satisfied in my job and encourages me to stay because I feel more invested in the school. 8. Other than working as a team or department on school improvement initiatives, I have not experienced collective teacher efficacy to a great degree. 9. Nothing.
4/2/24 4/22/24	Today I met with Focus Group One. The meeting lasted 1.5 hours. While most questions elicited healthy banter, some were misunderstood. Like the answers provided in the individual interviews, the term collective was understood as collaborative and a few of the questions involving terms from the literature such as job satisfaction, type of teacher leadership, teacher retention, etc. did not elicit rich, insightful answers. Notably, the question about formal and informal teacher leadership did not follow the literature and was understood by the group as a difference in instructional delivery rather than roles. I am not sure how to solve this problem before the next focus group meeting, or if this is a problem that needs to be solved. I am trying to be very careful and not lead participants to the answers I seek or believe in myself. Because I wanted to explore whether beginning teachers can be teacher leaders, I asked the group if they believe beginning teachers can be teacher leaders. One of the participants in the group is a beginning teacher, and I hope this did not make them feel uncomfortable. After this question, they continued to participate in the discussion. Elizabeth asserts that they are not a leader, like Stanley and Bobby. When I asked if new teachers can be teacher leaders, several participants said yes. With elaboration, I understand they mean that it is not the years of service that make a teacher a leader but their character, ability, and skill. For the student learning question, the group insists student learning is any growth of any kind, yet they continually return to behavior, social, and emotional growth and health rather than academic learning. When asked which type of teacher leadership was most valuable to student learning, I hoped to hear a discussion of formal versus informal teacher leadership. Instead, I learned the group does not define those terms like I do. They related formal teacher leadership to a formal position within the classroom like the delivery of direct instruction, and they related informal teacher leadership to group and collaborative work. I hoped to hear a discussion about whether teacher leaders with titles to teacher leaders without titles were more influential to student learning. Additional ideas that surfaced during our discussion were the importance of healthy teams. Several participants mentioned eating together and planning together as factors contributing the

	job satisfaction rather than teacher leadership. Moreover, when discussion collective efficacy and collective efficacy of teacher leaders, the conversation veered more to vertical and horizontal alignment within teams, schools, and across the organization. Collective efficacy cannot be addressed until the organization achieves alignment.
Horizontalization 4/6/2024 4/21/24-4/22/24	I completed coding all individual interviews once and have been researching coding and reviewing NVivo tutorials to determine what to do next. Should I code the physical artifact discussions or start a second round of coding the individual interviews? I believe I should code the discussions and will view the videos and clean the transcripts of the remaining 13 discussions while researching qualitative data analysis and viewing tutorials. I have a lot of codes. Several of them are similar, so I think I will review them and try to consolidate several into one that is more inferential and analytical rather than descriptive. After reading *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers* and watching additional NVivo tutorials, I cleaned my existing codes and coded the physical artifact discussions. I decided to add the physical artifact discussion evidence to existing codes and create new codes as necessary depending upon evidence. I found that several existing codes were pertinent to the discussion. I will do the same for the focus group transcripts.
4/7/24	Stanley messaged me that they will not be able to attend tomorrow's focus group meeting. After consulting with my dissertation chair, I decided to continue with the meeting. I sent Stanley a Teams invite in case they feel up to attending remotely. I hope to be allowed to use Stanley's data for the interview and discussion but am not sure it will be allowed. My dissertation chair will instruct me on that point. Nevertheless, because I have sixteen participants, I am not in an emergency. I sent a reminder about tomorrow's focus group meeting to all participants, Jillian, Marie, Bobby, Lisa, Harper, Courtney, Stanley (Teams invite), Autumn, and Debra.
4/8/2024	Today I met with Focus Group 1. The meeting was for 1.15 hours. In attendance in-person were Jillian, Marie, Bobby, Lisa, Harper, Courtney, Autumn, and Debra. Due to an emergency, Stanley attended via Teams. Because the other group misunderstood the intent of question 5 to explore the types of teacher leadership meaning formal and informal, I inserted those terms into the question. I wish I would not have done that, though. It severely limited the group's responses. Instead of talking about the teacher leader behaviors such as instructional choice or classroom management, they focused on formal versus informal leadership. The conversation was good, but I inserted myself too much into the question when I should have let them draw their own conclusions about what I was asking.

	Additionally, the last two questions are very wordy targeting gaps in the literature, so I asked them as they were written and then worded differently. It is hard not to give the group ideas to talk about. Although this group had more members, the meeting was fifteen minutes shorter. Stanley denies that they are a leader and asserts that they are happy to be part of this discussion, and Bobby brings the discussion around to leadership removing the teacher aspect. Bobby believes leaders have followers, and they bring up classic characteristics from leaders such as communication and trust. However, Bobby does not offer evidence to support his ideas. When discussing formal versus informal teacher leadership, Lisa shares that teacher leadership addressing curriculum and instruction impacts student learning and Jillian says makes the distinction that informal teacher leadership happens in the classroom with the use of lessons or ideas provided by the formal teacher leader. I find this interesting. Can informal teacher leadership occur independently? Additionally, Harper brings up the idea of fresh start. I have heard this idea in this research study before, but I cannot pinpoint it at this time. I think it was Harper talking about her portable, paper calendar and penciling in events. This group offers the idea of teacher retention being supported by teams helping new members and the school overall stepping up to take care of each other, meaning that no one is alone. Jillian mentions this is standard operating procedure, so with everyone stepping up, teacher leadership multiplies. When asked about collective teacher leadership, both Lilly Marie and Courtney reference the vision statement, High Expectations High Achievement and how the whole school promotes the vision. When I asked individuals whether their department experiences collective efficacy, they said yes, but all did not provide examples.
4/22/24	I completed first-round coding for the physical artifact discussions and focus groups. Before proceeding to the second round, I will meet with my dissertation chair.
4/27/2024	Today, I finished cleaning the codes and reduced them from 372 to 183. Additionally, I sent each participant an email to verify their transcriptions for member checking.
5/4/24	Started second-round coding using the initial codes. Lilly Marie, Lisa, and Jennifer all referred to having increased patience, a longer fuse, or accepting areas of gray as teacher leaders. They admitted to having increased tolerance and understanding of others whether students or colleagues.
5/5/24	Recurring comments and ideas include a comparison of teacher experience, teacher attitude, and teacher character as leadership qualities rather than title. Additionally, participants refer to “hard days” and “not a boss” when referencing how physical artifacts are used and the behaviors

	exhibited by teacher leaders. I understand teacher leaders' hesitancy or fear of being authoritative or dictatorial. The participants, especially in the focus group, prioritized teacher leaders as not being over the team but part of the team. The idea of equality among the team and department is important to the participants. This sentiment aligns with the egalitarianism presented in the literature review.
5/9/24	Today I viewed tutorials and researched qualitative coding and finding themes. I decided I would divide my study into 6 phases. Phases 1-3 are familiarizing self with data, phase 2 is coding, and phase 3 is reviewing the codes, cleaning the codes, and second-round coding. Phase 4 is clustering and categorizing codes to create themes. Phase 5 defines the themes, and phase 6 presents the findings. Because I have spent almost 2 months with the data, I feel ready to uncover the essence and identify themes. Second-round coding is complete, and no new codes were discovered.
5/15/24-5/17/24	I completed writing the beginning of chapter 4 in which all the participants are introduced. I am reminded of why I chose to keep sixteen participants when only fifteen were required. I needed representation for elementary, middle, and high school as well as the different subject areas, genders, and ethnicities. A definite limitation of the study is that I have only 2 male participants and all the participants are white.
5/19/24 -5/21/24	I began clustering codes.
5/25/24	I continued clustering and started categorizing codes. During this process I found similar codes and merged them into the dominant codes and placed them under the appropriate research questions. When clustering and categorizing, I arranged the codes according to the research questions to better target my findings. Notably, when coding I decided a priori to organize codes based on research questions.
5/27/24	I continued to clean the codes finding several remaining similarities such as building and feeling trust and building rapport and trust. Also, I merged several codes into a new cluster such as increasing tolerance, knowing students, and creating community in the classroom. Under the central research question, I created three tables with data that answers the question.
5/31/24	When choosing which codes to cluster into categories, I chose the dominant codes working down the hierarchy to less dominant codes. Codes with 2 or few case counts or number of connected participants were not included in the categories due to a lack of triangulation.
5/31/24	After merging several similar codes, I now have 144 codes. I have created a table of codes, clusters, and categories. I have labeled each cluster of codes with a title representing the theme of the clusters. I also wrote a descriptive statement of the cluster. From the codes, clusters, categories, and descriptive statement, I defined a theme for each cluster. For example, for the central research question, I defined the theme of Influential Relationships and the sub-themes of Instructional Design and Academic Achievement, Transformational Student Behavior, Confirming Feedback

	from Students, and Influence Validates Teachers. I am still deciding if personal feedback and relationships are too similar and need to be combined.
5/31/24	Once I identified the themes, I added the file and references numbers to create a hierarchy. I identified the categories with the highest frequencies as the theme and the lower frequency items as subthemes.
6/01/24	For one category, using imaginative variation, I analyzed the meanings of the clustered codes, settling on hopeful affirmation as capturing the essence of how teacher leaders feel about their influence on student learning. They hope they influence students, and when they receive proof of their influence, such as verbal or written feedback, it affirms their choice of vocation. This line of thinking reflects the process for one category and sub-theme.
6/01/24	In conducting data-analysis to find the definition of student learning, I merged several codes into one another. For example, "students enjoying learning" was merged with "social emotional learning" because of the emotional aspect. Additionally, I merged "any kind of growth that they need" with "reaching their goals" because of the growth concept. Again, I merged "students teaching students" with "applying what they know" because of the application element. If students can teach other students, they are applying what they know. I now have 130 codes.
6/01/24	When conducting data-analysis to arrive at the essence of the clustered codes and overall category, I think broadly across the different codes and meanings expressed by each. I settle upon the similarity between them all and write a descriptive sentence. From the descriptive sentence, I define the category. With the category definition and descriptive sentence, I used Word Hippo to learn the different aspects of the meaning of the words used to define the category. In Word Hippo, I also look at the synonyms and antonyms of the word to create parameters around the essence and the experience. I keep the word "essence" in my mind rather than theme, definition, or description because I must remember this is a person's lived experience not a definition of a term.
6/02/24	Today, I created a thematic analysis overview, listing all the themes in a hierarchy. I believe I have too many, but I am not sure. I emailed my dissertation chair for guidance and am reading the SOE template and two transcendental phenomenology's published by Liberty University in 2024. One example listed three themes with two sub-themes each. The theme was the overall essence of the category, and the sub-themes were the codes within the category. If that is how I should proceed, I have more data analysis to conduct to reduce further. I should title my clusters and then organize them into themes. Next, I will look at the categories and see if any could be combined and nested under one theme.

	The example dissertation I have been reading shows a list of codes, clusters with sub-themes, and an overall theme.
6/02/24	Because I want to make sure I am staying true to transcendental phenomenology, I returned to Moustakas. I reviewed epoché, transcendental phenomenological reduction, and imaginative variation. Unlike my initial experience with Moustakas, I now have the experience of conducting a research study to compare with my reading. As I understand it, epoché is bracketing or journaling to set aside knowing or bias so that the phenomena is revisited in a naïve or pure state of mind. Transcendental phenomenological reduction is creating textural descriptions through coding and categorizing. Finally, imaginative variation is writing the themes that capture the participant's experience and answer the research questions.
6/2/2024	Summary of coding, first round axial codes with descriptive phrases and characteristics and descriptive codes with nouns and short phrases to describe data. Second round of coding, review of axial and descriptive codes changing many to in vivo and process codes. Third round of coding, focused coding aligning codes into clusters and organizing via themes.
6/4/24	A fourth round of data analysis involving the evaluation of themes and sub-themes was conducted to merge existing themes to identify the four biggest themes and related sub-themes. I started with 12 categories of potential themes. On the second round of data analysis, I merged from 12 to 6 categories, and on the third round I merged from 6 to four categories. For example, from rounds 1-2, I merged self-efficacy, self-agency, and developing professionally, and I further merged the other categories into three by the third round. The fourth category had 5 categories clustered, and, because that was too many, I merged influential relationships and confirming feedback into connection and trust. On the fourth round of data analysis, I applied themes capturing the essence of each category.
6/8/24	I returned to NVivo and created new codes representing the categories included in each cluster/theme. I dropped the existing codes into the categories. Then, I created new codes for the themes, and I dropped the categories into the themes. I removed all non-used codes that did not represent a clustered category or theme. Before changing the research study to this degree, I saved a copy titled 128Codes. Later, I started writing the remainder of chapter 4.
7/01/24	I invited a peer to conduct peer debriefing. I emailed my dissertation in full giving emphasis on chapter 4 to my peer. I attached all transcripts for each participant and asked the peer debriefer to compare the quotes in my dissertation to the original transcripts ensuring fair representation of the participant. See the email below: [redacted] <[redacted]> Attachments Mon, Jul 1, 1:35 PM (22 hours ago)

	to [redacted] Hello [redacted], Thank you for agreeing to perform peer debriefing for me. To perform peer debriefing you will compare the quotes in the dissertation to the original transcripts to ensure I represented the participants fairly. Please email me back with your findings. I've attached my dissertation in full; however, you need only review pages 110-138 (chapter 4) to access the participant's quotes. Each participant quote refers to the data collection method used, so you will know which transcript to search. To save time, use ctrl+F to search the documents. I've attached each participant's interview, physical artifact discussion, and focus group transcript. Volunteering your time to do this means a lot to me. If you have questions, don't hesitate to ask.

Appendix K: Participants

Table 4
Participants

Teacher Participant	Years Taught	Highest Degree Earned	Content Area	Grade Level
Debra	30 +	Specialist's in Education	Dual-Enrolled Statistics and Pre-Calculus	9-12
Autumn	1	none, professional certification	Health Sciences, Career Technical Education	6-12
Harper	16	Specialist's in Advanced Curriculum and Instruction	Teacher on Special Assignment, Guidance Department	6-12
Jennifer	18	Master's in Elementary Education	English Language Arts	6
Marie	15	Specialist's in Curriculum and Instruction	English	10
Heather	8	Bachelor's of Education	Special Education	6-12
Bobby	3	Master's in Mechanical Engineering	Engineering, Career Technical Education	9-12
Lisa	32	Master's in Elementary Education	Social Studies and Reading	5
Bethany	26	Master's in Secondary Education	Math	8
Stanley	3	Bachelor's in Psychology	Computer Science, Career Technical Education	6-8
Elizabeth	42	Master's in Math Education	Dual-Enrolled Math	9-12
Hayley	1	Bachelor's in Elementary Education	All Subjects	2
Pam	20	Bachelor's in Early Childhood Education	English Language Arts	6-8
Courtney	27	Bachelor's of Science	Algebra and Geometry	7-8
Jillian	18	Master's of Curriculum and Instruction	Secondary Math Coach	6-12
Lilly Marie	2	Bachelor's in Psychology	Science	9-12

Appendix L: Theme One Development

Table 5
Themes, Sub-Themes, and Codes

Themes	Sub-Themes	Codes
Theme 1 Diversity of Collaborative Leadership	Modeling Behaviors	Modeling for Students & Peers Influencing Peers Being Positive Increasing Tolerance Having Experience
	Outcomes of Collective Action	Improved Student Learning Teaming Healthy Teams, Healthy School Acting Collectively Everyone Unified Everyone has a Voice
	The Variety of Teacher Leadership	School and Classroom Informal and Formal Teacher Leadership Student Recipients of Teacher Leadership Peer Recipients of Teacher Leadership

Appendix M: Theme Two Development

Table 6
Themes, Sub-Themes, and Codes

Themes	Sub-Themes	Codes
Theme 2 Empowered Professional Growth	Self-Agency	Autonomy Careful Planning Being Innovative Being in Control Ways to Decrease Burnout Being Organized Flexibility Implementing Routine Communicating Expectations
	Self-Efficacy	Feeling Good Increasing Confidence Self-Fulfilling I am Able, Capable I Can Do More than I Thought
	Developing Professionally	Improving my skills Stepping Up Helping Teachers Grow Changes Associated with Teacher Leadership Greater Self Discipline Better Teacher Deeper Understanding of Content

Appendix N: Theme Three Development

Table 7
Themes, Sub-Themes, and Codes

Themes	Sub-Themes	Codes
Theme 3 Transformative Learning Connections	Connection and Trust	Building Rapport and Feeling Trust Comfort of Students They Tell Me Notes from Students, Colleagues, and Parents Students Come Back to See Me
	Student Learning Outcomes	Student Academic Achievement Lesson Design & Goals Social Emotional Learning Academic Success Reaching Their Goals Applying What They Know
	Changing Student Minds and Behaviors	Increased Student Confidence Changing Students' Minds and Behavior Bringing out the Best in Students

Appendix O: Theme Four Development

Table 8
Themes, Sub-Themes, and Codes

Themes	Sub-Themes	Codes
Theme 4 Leadership and Validation	Rewards of Teacher Leadership	Motivating and Challenging Keeps Me Going on Hard Days Proof of Influence Confirms Increases Job Satisfaction
	Risks Associated with Teacher Leadership	Extra Work and High Stress More Responsibility Need More Teacher Leaders More Work and Effort with Colleagues
	Challenges of Teacher Leadership	Self-Doubt and Frustration Hesitancy to Lead Colleagues Not a Boss Hoping I'm Influencing

Appendix P: Alignment Between Themes and Research Questions

Table 9
Alignment Between Themes and Research Questions

Themes	Sub-Themes	Research Question
Theme 1 Diversity of Collaborative Leadership		CRQ
	Modeling Behaviors	CRQ
	Outcomes of Collective Action	SQ3
	Variety of Teacher Leadership	CRQ, SQ3
Theme 2 Empowered Professional Growth		SQ1
	Self-Agency	
	Self-Efficacy	SQ1
	Developing Professionally	SQ2
		SQ1, SQ2
Theme 3 Transformative Learning Connections	Connection and Trust	CRQ
	Student Learning Outcomes	CRQ
	Changing Student Minds and Behavior	CRQ
		CRQ
Theme 4 Leadership and Validation		CRQ
	Rewards of Teacher Leadership	
	Risks Associated with Teacher Leadership	SQ2
	Challenges of Teacher Leadership	CRQ
		CRQ