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A Cross-study Exploration of Experiences of Induction Level Teachers Identified as Teacher Leaders

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A Cross-study Exploration of Experiences of Induction Level Teachers

Identified as Teacher Leaders

by

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“A CROSS-STUDY EXPLORATION OF EXPERIENCES OF INDUCTION LEVEL TEACHERS IDENTIFIED AS TEACHER LEADERS” a Doctoral research project prepared by ELAINE TINHOLT in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Education degree in Educational Leadership.

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ABSTRACT

Developing classroom teachers to become leaders within their school environments is an initiative which is gaining momentum nationally. Leadership from teachers is critical to a school's success due to their knowledge concerning the learning environment and the students they serve. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the experiences of early career teachers identified as teacher leaders. Data was collected through personal interviews with three early career teachers who had been identified as teacher leaders by either colleagues or administrators. The data analysis revealed the following themes: (a) new teacher leaders do not always see themselves as leaders, but rather perceive themselves as using their abilities to serve others; (b) growing as a teacher leader is fostered by feeling safe enough within the school community to seek help from others; (c) success in teacher leadership motivates new teachers to engage in their own growth, as well as their colleagues. Recommendations are made on how emerging teacher leaders, administrators, and teacher preparation programs can support the development of teacher leadership in school settings.

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I must begin by acknowledging the sovereignty of God which has brought me to this point. He has provided for my needs and sustained me throughout this experience. During challenging times, I have leaned on Jerimiah 29:11 “For I know the plans I have for you” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” His love has been and continues to be unending.

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DEDICATION

This research study is dedicated to the strongest woman I have ever known, my mother, Mary Teague. As she singlehandedly raised two daughters, she displayed courage, strength, and a complete reliance on God. She taught us to care for the oppressed and seek justice when needed. My compassion for new teachers was fostered by her call to support those who are less fortunate. During the final semester of my dissertation, she bravely faced breast cancer while continuing to love and care for her family. Six weeks after being diagnosed with cancer, the Lord called her home. Mom, I miss you greatly, and dedicate the pursuit to further my education to your memory!



CHAPTER ONE

Leadership from teachers is critical to a school's success due to their knowledge concerning the learning environment and the students they serve (Cranston & Kusanovich, 2015). When teachers take on leadership roles, even early in their career, and have a part in the decision-making processes that shape their practices they are more likely to remain in the profession (Pucella, 2014). As the researcher for this study, the topics of teacher leadership, induction support, and teacher retention appeal to me on many levels. I am currently a college professor who works with teacher candidates at a faith-based liberal arts college. However, twenty-three years ago, I was a novice teacher who faced similar challenges that my current graduates face as they develop into professional practitioners. Feelings of insecurity, doubt, and dismay were common during my induction years of teaching. Sharing my personal experience with my teacher candidates helps them understand the normalcy associated with first-year teaching challenges (Fry, 2010).

My curiosity related to this research recently piqued during a reaccreditation review of my institution. During the review, I observed graduates in their classrooms and then conducted interviews with them. These individual interviews revealed a large discrepancy in what graduates said about their professional experiences. Five of the eight teachers who were interviewed described varying degrees of challenges they faced during their induction time. However, three other graduates shared similar stories of frustration about their professional mentoring experiences, but went on to describe leadership opportunities they had engaged in during their first few years of teaching. They reflected on the role of the educator that took them outside the classroom to make a positive impact on the broader school population. These teachers displayed the teacher leadership skills of being self-reliant and forward thinking while managing to enact

change for the betterment of the school community (Cranston & Kusanovich, 2015). The experiences of these three graduates and their leadership inspired me to learn more about teacher leadership for early career teachers. Follow-up interviews during this accreditation review with principals further revealed that there was no funding for formally offering opportunities focused on enhancing the professional development of these new teachers or strengthening their capacity to lead outside of their own classroom setting. Nevertheless, these induction-level teachers had engaged in various leadership opportunities and initiatives.

These interviews provided new personal insights on the challenges new teachers face in the current educational landscape. Formalized induction support seems to be lacking, budget constraints impede professional development opportunities, and yet they are teaching well and some are emerging as teacher leaders. Yet, those young teacher leaders were being perceived as valuable contributors to the educational environment, despite the fact that they were not always given the opportunity nor the approval to engage in leadership endeavors outside of their own classroom setting. I began to wonder what contributing factors made it possible for the teachers I interviewed to engage in leadership opportunities. What induction experiences led them down the road towards teacher leadership? Were they active in seeking out leadership opportunities or were they first appointed to positions of leadership and then developed a leadership disposition? In addition, how did they see leadership being enacted in their schools and what role did they play in that process?

In this study, a teacher leader is defined as a teacher who leads within and beyond the classroom, identifies with and contributes to a community of teacher learners and leaders, influences others towards improved educational practice, and accepts responsibility for achieving the outcomes of their leadership (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009). For the purpose of my study,

new teachers with five or fewer years of teaching experience are referred to as early career teachers, induction-level teachers, and novice teachers throughout this dissertation.

Background

The education profession is facing an aging teaching demographic. Carroll and Foster (2010) note the decline in the veteran teaching force as baby boomers are reaching retirement age. This situation poses a potential leadership gap as our experienced teachers, who have traditionally filled leadership roles, retire and leave the profession. Therefore, investing in induction-level teacher leaders is not only a good idea but may be a necessity (Pucella, 2014).

Early career teacher retention is also an issue of concern for the state in which my college is located. In 2015 the Georgia Professional Standards Commission reported that 44% of the state's public school teachers leave education within the first five years (Owens, 2015). A survey of Georgia teachers revealed a better understanding of the teachers' perspectives in regards to this unusually high attrition rate. Over 53,000 surveys were collected, representing a distributional consistency across elementary, middle, and high school teachers. One survey question asked the respondents to rank eight often-cited reasons for teachers leaving education in Georgia. 'Level of teacher participation in decisions related to profession' was ranked among the top three reasons for teacher attrition. The open response section for this question revealed the teachers' feelings of frustration and hopelessness. The teachers felt decisions were being made without any input from those being affected. This feeling of being left out of important decisions was a consistent response regardless of grades taught, location of the district, or years of experience (Owens, 2015).

Nationally, 43% of the teaching force consists of educators with ten or fewer years of experience (Ingersoll et al., 2018). Research indicates induction-level teachers want to grow

professionally and serve in different capacities as educators throughout their careers, however these opportunities are not always provided in the current educational settings (Coggshall et al., 2011). When teachers are given the opportunity to lead, they are recognized by their peers and have the chance to share their teaching practices and perspectives while developing leadership skills (Coggins & McGovern, 2014). Teacher leadership can also be a means for enacting school improvement. Coggins and McGovern (2014) state that for teacher leadership to be effective it must: a) improve student outcomes; b) improve the access of high-need students to effective teachers; c) extend the careers of teachers looking for growth opportunities; d) expand the influence of effective teachers on their peers; and e) ensure a role for teachers as leaders in policy decisions affecting their practice. Engaging teachers in leadership may serve as a means for motivating and retaining early career teachers (Pucella, 2014).

Most organizations have always relied on the distribution of leadership to many other members of the organization to actually get work done, and educational establishments are no different (Leithwood et al., 2007). As a means of redistributing leadership within the school setting, the federal government has enacted legislation to formalize support of teacher leadership. Since 2016, the U.S. Department of Education has identified teacher leadership as a recommended strategy for supporting student achievement in the K-12 setting. States and local school districts are encouraged to use Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) funds for supporting teacher leadership opportunities (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). These funding opportunities raise questions such as “Who can be a teacher leader?” and “How do we develop teacher leadership skills?” This study has potential to offer some insight into these questions.

Problem of Practice

Given the challenges the teaching profession is facing in relation to teacher retention and developing teachers to engage in school-based leadership to fill the gap left by retiring veteran teachers, it is imperative for researchers to contribute scholarly studies that inform both practice and policy in relation to the development of teacher leaders (Grossman, 2008), especially for early career teachers. There are assumptions and theories in the field about how and when teacher leadership develops. Further insight is needed into how induction-level teachers are formed or emerge as teacher leaders in their school settings. Questions surface concerning the process by which these early career teachers rise to the ranks of leadership. Unique cases of new teachers who are also identified as teacher leaders constitutes an interesting point of study. These cases can offer insight into how new teachers make sense of what it means to be a teacher leader, the opportunities that are afforded them, and the people who influence their journey.

Research Questions

Qualitative research in schools can supplement a quantitative approach to provide detailed accounts of how induction-level teachers engage in formal and informal leadership (Torres, 2019). The study described is a qualitative exploration of individual cases of induction-level teachers as a means to better understand what they say contributed to their development of teacher leadership skills. A community of practice theoretical framework aided in the overall structure of the research study (Wenger, 1998). The community of practice framework allowed participants to contribute to the body of knowledge through practices and shared stories concerning the development of teacher leadership skills. The following questions guided the research process.

1. How do new teachers who have been identified as teacher leaders describe their teacher leadership experiences?
2. What elements of the communities of practice theoretical framework assist in understanding how new teachers develop as teacher leaders?

Significance of the Study

Most studies of induction phase teachers have focused mainly on the supportive measures offered during the first five years in the profession as a means of better understanding how to retain early career educators (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004; Fry, 2009; Gray & Taie, 2015). When considering teacher leadership, the vast majority of the research has highlighted the experiences of veteran teachers who have over five years of teaching experience (Berry, Daughtrey, & Wieder, 2010; Cranston & Kusanovich, 2015; Cherkowski & Schnellert, 2017). Relatively little is understood about the experiences of induction-level teachers who are encouraged to develop into teacher leaders in the early years of their careers. Through this study, I was able to gain a better understanding of how teacher leadership develops for beginning teachers.

Key Terms

For the purpose of this study, the following terms are defined to guide the flow of the research discussion and maintain consistency in the subsequent chapters.

Induction-Level Teacher: A teacher with 5 or less years of teaching experience; also referred to as novice teacher (Kim & Roth, 2011).

Veteran Teacher: A teacher who has 6 or more years of teaching experience (Kim & Roth, 2011).

Teacher Leader: A teacher who leads within and beyond the classroom, identifies with and contributes to a community of teacher learners and leaders, influences others towards improved

educational practice, and accepts responsibility for achieving the outcomes of their leadership (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009).

Teacher Leadership: The process by which teachers, individually or collectively influence their colleagues, principals, and other members of school communities to improve teaching and learning practices with the aim of increased student learning and achievement (Yorke-Barr & Duke, 2004).

Theoretical Framework

A community of practice framework informs this research through a case study analysis of induction-level teachers by offering a theoretical basis for understanding the role that relationships play in the development of teacher leadership. Wenger and Wenger-Trayner (2015) describe communities of practice as being formed by people who engage in a process of collective learning in shared endeavors. Through interaction with others who share a concern or passion, community members seek answers, improve their practices, and labor toward a common goal. A community of practice consists of three crucial characteristics: the domain, the community, and the practice. A community needs to possess an identity defined by a shared domain of interest. For teacher leaders, the domain might be working with colleagues to implement a new teaching strategy, spearheading a school improvement initiative, or responding to changes occurring in the broader community but impacting the school setting. The community is then developed through engaging in joint activities and discussions, helping each other to develop in a certain area, and sharing information concerning a given topic. These relationships enable the members of the community to interact and learn from one another. Through the practice, the community develops shared resources, experiences, stories, and ways of addressing or solving problems.

Lave and Wenger (1991) explore how identities are transformed through communities of practice. They propose that our identities transform as we learn, grow, and change through sustained practice and situated activity within communities. Therefore, engagement in everyday activities produces, transforms, and changes the identity of a person and helps them develop knowledgeable skills needed for community involvement. In the education profession, these identities also change over time as a novice teacher develops into a veteran practitioner. Wenger later developed the concept of *multimembership*, by which he means belonging in multiple communities of practice, and *reconciliation*, which Wenger describes as the means for managing competing demands from our various communities which in turn shape our identities (Niesz, 2009). This perspective offers a basis for examining the identity development of induction-level teachers as they engage in various aspects of their educational settings.

This theoretical framework was used to analyze the different communities that shaped the participants who engaged in teacher leadership. Communities of practice are not fabricated in a vacuum disconnected from the dynamics which exist within the given setting, but rather they are formed through informal networks of people with the ability and the passion to enact change within an organization (Wenger & Snyder, 2000). Personal accounts of how these induction-level teacher leaders engaged in communities of practice, whether within or outside of their school setting, can aid in better understanding how structures and relationships aid the development of early career teachers.

Purpose Statement

If the role of a leader is to assist and inspire others in achieving a goal, then teachers can be viewed as leaders without entering the ranks of administration (Warren, 2016). In recent years there has been a concerted effort to increase the research base and focus on the benefits

associated with teacher leadership. Research highlights how teachers who experience control over the school initiatives are more likely to remain in teaching and become invested in their careers (Ware & Kitsantas, 2007). These research studies tend to focus on the lived experiences of veteran teachers who have developed into teacher leaders. Historically, educational research has not recognized new teachers as being leaders in their educational settings. Therefore, it is an emerging idea for the field to consider and promote induction-level teachers' leadership. This cross-case analysis study has the potential to build and expand our theories on teacher leadership. This process would allow us to learn from new teachers' understanding and practice of leadership during years when the field might otherwise assume it's too early for them to be deemed leaders.

Limitations

Given the personal nature of this qualitative study, limitations exist concerning the overall research process. This study examines three cases of induction-level teachers who have engaged in teacher leadership. Teacher leadership experiences differ based on the context of the educational setting, therefore the information gained is reflective of those participating in the study. This means the situations will not be generalizable to the broader public since the information shared is context specific, however the themes revealed through this study may be transferable to other contexts and offer insight in teacher leadership development. An additional limitation exists in the personal nature of the interview process which requires participants to be truthful in order to collect accurate data. Another aspect or constraint that was beyond my control was the various types of teacher leadership initiatives the participants experienced during the induction phase. Since teacher leadership can include both formal and informal roles (Danielson, 2007) the opportunities varied depending upon the specific school setting, model, and

opportunity afforded the participants. One more limitation exists in the relatively small sample size from which to pull a purposive sample. Since the participants had to have five or fewer years of teaching experience and were identified as teacher leaders, these qualifications set boundaries which excluded a majority of the classroom teachers within a school setting.

Delimitations

All participants came from elementary school settings and had five or fewer years of teaching experience. Choosing to use similar school settings allowed me to analyze the support structures which foster and develop teacher leadership skills in certain contexts. Since I was looking at a very specific demographic of teachers, a small sample size was used to allow for a deeper look into specific cases of a few induction-level teacher leaders while keeping the research process manageable (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I conducted informal interviews with any recommended participants to determine their experience and level of engagement in teacher leadership (Gay et al., 2012). To allow time for the selected participants to consider how induction experiences have shaped them as teacher leaders, they were interviewed at two separate times, once in a focus group setting and once in an individual interview setting. The interview questions were written carefully to be open-ended and general (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006) to allow the participants to share about their engagement in induction experiences, teacher leadership, and how communities of practice aided in their development as teacher leaders. The process of self-reporting information concerning the interactions within a school can make participants be hesitant to share negative information for fear of repercussions. To address this issue, participants were reassured that the information they shared was kept confidential.

Organization of the Study

The idea of teacher leaders developing during the induction phase of their careers is an under-developed concept (Pucella, 2014). Chapter 2 explores this phenomenon by examining what is known about teacher development and support during the induction phase of their career and also investigates what research says about teacher leadership advancement. Chapter 3 focuses on the methodological process for selecting participants, collecting data, and analyzing the findings.

CHAPTER TWO

Leadership is a relational endeavor because it involves both leaders and followers who are moving toward a shared goal (Pucella, 2014). Engaging in leadership allows teachers to find their voice and be involved in decision making. In the past, principals have been viewed as the sole leader of the school setting. However, recent research points to a shift in this perspective to encourage principals to extend their authority to include grade-level teachers, department chairs, curriculum coordinators, and teachers in administrative responsibilities (Danielson, 2007; Lieberman & Friedrich, 2010). The decision-making process can be mutually reinforcing when multiple stakeholders are involved in the deliberation process (Ni, Yan, & Ponder, 2018). Teacher leaders are those who are able to maintain their focus on their function as classroom teachers while engaging in other activities that enrich the broader school community (Pucella, 2014). This perspective of teachers as leaders broadens the parameters to include both veteran and induction-level teachers. Previous work on teacher leadership has focused on the experiences of veteran teachers (Lieberman & Friedrich, 2010). However, an expanded view of teacher leadership presents insight into what induction-level teachers offer. Research highlights how both veteran and induction-level teachers are able to play a significant role in the success of their students and the school as a whole (Surian et al., 2018).

The focus of this review of literature is to ascertain the current landscape related to induction support and teacher leadership. This literature review is organized around four main themes derived across multiple studies, both qualitative and quantitative in design. The first theme focuses on the impact of induction support structures or programs for developing novice teachers' skills and abilities. The second theme highlights the role of communication in supporting novice teachers. The third theme centers on the role of novice teachers as advocates

for their own wellbeing. The fourth theme explores the development of teacher leadership skills and dispositions.

Induction Support Structures and Programs

Novice teachers experience a transition as they move from teacher preparation programs into fulltime teaching responsibilities. In order to successfully meet the expectations of being a lead teacher, novice teachers must implement strategies they learned through their teacher preparation program and during their student teaching experience (Fry, 2009). New teachers need different levels and methods of support during this time of transition (Sowell, 2017). Based on qualitative data gathered from 15 case studies conducted over a five-year period, Cochran-Smith, et al. (2012) reported that different teachers need different forms of support both to improve their instructional practices and increase the chances of remaining at a particular school setting. When structured properly, induction support can help early career teachers apply what they have learned to their new setting, build confidence in their teaching abilities, and remove the stress associated with unknown expectations. Support structures for first-year teachers typically include formalized induction programs, implementation of a mentoring program, and professional development opportunities.

Benefits of Formalized Induction Support Programs

Certain support structures used during the induction phase of teaching have been shown to aid in teacher retention. Ronfeldt and McQueen (2017) determined there was a measurable relationship between teacher induction supports and teacher migration and retention. The study used data from the three most recent administrations of the School and Staffing Survey, along with the Beginning Teacher Longitudinal Survey, which is a longitudinal survey of early-career teachers. The structured induction supports measured in the survey included having an assigned

mentor, participation in induction seminars, common planning time with peers, supportive communication with administration or department chairs, a reduced schedule for new teachers, and being provided with a teacher's aide. The data showed the more extensive the number of supports teachers had, the less likely they were to leave the profession. When a first-year teacher was offered four to six support structures, the migration and attrition rates were four to five percentage points lower as compared to teachers who received fewer than four support structures. This finding suggests the importance of offering multiple levels of induction support during the first year of teaching.

Whether at an individual school level or as a district initiative, trainings and workshops can provide new teachers with differentiated, research-based induction supports that build on the skills learned in their preparation programs (Fry, 2010). Based on the survey results of 451 induction-level teachers, Algozzine, Gretes, Queen, and Cowan-Hathcock (2008) found novice teachers reported induction activities focused on specific aspects of teaching were more favorable than diffused, global opportunities geared toward entire school districts. Other studies highlight the importance of induction-level teachers engaging in district level initiatives to allow them to connect with other teachers outside of their school setting. Kelly (2004) found that the use of cohort group networking for new teachers reduced the feelings of isolation and helped foster collaborative growth with teachers from multiple school settings. Through this networking opportunity, new teachers met monthly to discuss district standards, expectations, and procedures, while sharing resources and collaborating on instruction. This study points to the positive affect of using social networks to support new teachers through building relationships with others who are in the same phase of teaching.

During the induction phase, systematic, sustained support is critical to enable novice teachers to be successful (Carr & Evans, 2006). New teachers need to be provided with research-based induction support systems, inclusive of a strong mentoring component that builds on the skills learned during their teacher preparation program and student teaching experiences (Fry, 2010). When first-year teachers feel supported, they are able to focus less on self-preservation and more on caring for the academic, social, and emotional needs of their students.

Mentoring

During the first year of their profession, new teachers can experience the loneliness of a new setting, and in this particularly vulnerable time, they may lack supporting relationships to ensure their success. Mentoring programs are often implemented in order to offer new teachers systematic, intense mentoring in the first year as a means of support for developing their teaching skills, planning lessons, and problem solving (Scherer, 2012).

Benefits of mentoring programs. When Smith and Ingersoll (2004) conducted an analysis of the national Schools and Staffing Survey, they found the implementation of a mentoring program positively impacted teacher retention. First-year teachers who were provided with mentor teachers in their specific subject fields and participated in group activities, such as planning and collaboration with other teachers, were less likely to leave teaching after their first year. Having a mentor teacher in the same subject area or grade level reduced the risk of new teachers leaving at the end of the first year by 30%. Collaboration with fellow teachers was also shown to reduce the turnover rate for new teachers. This data highlights the need for new teachers to be involved in collaborative experiences with their peers and be given the opportunity to foster relationships with colleagues.

Through the use of a qualitative study, Fry (2007) also found similar benefits associated with providing mentors for new teachers. In the study, first-year teachers were better supported when they were provided with caring, eager, and capable mentor teachers who had common planning times and taught in similar content areas or grade levels. Having the new teachers' classrooms in close proximity to their teaching peers was another key finding related to the importance of fostering mentoring relationships. When teachers' classrooms are located in close proximity to their peers, it allows for new teachers to collaborate with others and avoid feelings of isolation. The implementation of common planning time with colleagues further supported new teacher development. Based on the results of her study, Fry also recommended encouraging new teachers to develop a support network that goes beyond their assigned mentors. Seeking advice from veteran teachers would be one way to foster relationships while gaining knowledge based on the prior experiences of others. Similar to Fry's results, Lozinak (2016) used an action research design consisting of 56 participants. The participants' surveys, interviews, and observations were analyzed to determine patterns in the responses. Participants indicated that accessibility of the mentors to the mentees (someone in their building) created a stronger sense of support. Participants also recommended that mentors/mentees should be at least in a similar grade or content area. This commonality allows mentors to offer specific support for instructional challenges, parent interactions, and content planning.

Professional Development Opportunities

New teachers face challenges which are associated with inexperience in their chosen profession. Such issues include lack of resources, parent/teacher conferences, building relationships with colleagues, the dynamics of bureaucracy that can exist within an organization, and teaching state standards despite a lack of funding for materials to support effective learning

strategies (Survival Guide for New Teachers, 2004). Based on an exploratory case study, Sowell (2017) reported positive outcomes of improving new teacher instructional strategies through the implementation of co-teaching, modeling, and planning teaching strategies with a mentor teacher. Schools and districts can mitigate these issues by offering professional development opportunities that address the concerns of new teachers (Wiebke & Bardin, 2009).

While conducting a qualitative study of support mechanisms offered to first-year teachers, Quinn and Andrews (2004) found that schools assume novice teachers know practical information concerning the procedures which are in place. Examples of school procedures that were unfamiliar to new teachers included setting up parent conferences, submitting grades, dealing with disciplinary situations, addressing classroom management issues, and obtaining classroom supplies. Based on the lack of clarity concerning these topics, they found schools needed to devote time to offering professional development experiences for new teachers. Orientations concerning information about policies and procedures were recommended, along with a handbook outlining the resources available to new teachers.

Wiebke and Bardin (2009) conducted a study of the Arizona Master Teacher Mentor Program, which is designed to reduce new teacher attrition and improve teacher performance. The study suggests the induction process for new teachers should begin by offering professional development before the first day of school and then continuing professional development support throughout the year, focusing on the issues faced by new teachers. This study highlights the need for sustained support for new teachers. The Alliance for Excellent Education (2004) recommends schools offer ongoing professional development consisting of regular learning opportunities for new teachers to expand their content knowledge, address diverse learning needs, manage student behavior, and improve pedagogical skills. Once teachers know how to work within the

parameters of their given school setting, they are able to spend more time focusing on the instructional needs of their students.

Fry (2007) suggests new teachers benefit when schools and districts evaluate the quality of their existing professional development opportunities offered to induction-level teachers. Professional development content which focuses on the challenges faced by new teachers is a means of mitigating the intensity and stress associated with first-year teaching (Fitchett, McCarthy, Lambert, & Boyle, 2018). The self-assessment process allows schools/districts to determine how to differentiate the professional learning environment to offer support for beginning teachers.

Concluding thoughts on formalized induction support programs. The purpose of formalized induction support is to offer scaffolding for new teachers as they develop the skills and dispositions needed to be successful in their chosen profession. Formalized induction support programs and strategies are often considered to be additional components or events added to the experiences of novice teachers. However, novice teachers benefit from receiving continuous daily support through ongoing communication with peers, colleagues, and administrators. Communication may include both formal and informal structures which are beneficial for supporting new teachers and helping them handle the realities of daily teaching experiences.

Communication Supports for Induction-Level Teachers

Novice teachers enter the profession with content and pedagogical knowledge concerning the concepts they will be teaching and the instructional strategies which support student learning. However, as they begin to connect learning theory with teaching application, they may desire feedback to navigate this process (Fry, 2007). When feedback is unclear or inconsistent, new

teachers begin to question whether the feedback offered was meant to be supportive or evaluative (Hannan, Russell, Takahashi, & Park, 2015; Sowell, 2017). For feedback to be meaningful, it needs to go beyond pleasantries and offer specific guidance to new teachers concerning their teaching practices. Communication that supports the development of new teachers includes constructive feedback, communication with administrators, and communication with peers. Each of these are explored here to illustrate how supportive relationships develop through communication with others in the school community.

Constructive Feedback

Constructive feedback focuses on improving the observed teaching skills of novice educators. Many new teachers are provided with a mentor teacher to help them transition into the role of lead teacher during the induction phase. Mentors help establish the relationship by treating new teachers as respected colleagues and devoting time to providing constructive criticism of their teaching (Algozzine, Gretes, Queen, & Cowan-Hathcock, 2008). Through post observation conversations, mentors have the opportunity to ask novice teachers why they did something and suggest ways to improve the teaching practice, if needed. Feedback on the use of strategies and collaboration on the implementation of the strategies also helps new teachers improve their instructional practices (Sowell, 2017). Intensive and specific guidance aids in improving teaching practices more than general comments and feedback. Standards and data-based conversations support new teacher development more than casual feedback, which is not supported by evidence (Wiebke & Bardin, 2009). This time investment assists new teachers as they navigate and master the challenges of the new profession.

Structuring and maintaining quality feedback aids novice teachers as they establish their own classroom protocols and teaching methods. Hannan et al. (2015) conducted a qualitative

case study analysis of a Feedback Management System constructed by the Building a Teaching Network organization. The Feedback Management System included conversation protocols, observation cycles, surveys, and coordination meetings aimed at supporting novice teachers. Participating teachers worked with principals and support facilitators to develop goals for classroom practices. Based on follow-up conversations with the novice teacher, the support team would determine whether the new teacher was ready for an observation that would show evidence of meeting the pre-determined goals. After the observation, the observer and new teacher would have a follow-up conference to discuss whether the goals were met. The new teacher and support team would begin working together to develop new goals once the original goals were met. If the goals were not met, the new teacher would continue to work on that specific focus area. The ten schools that participated in the Feedback Management System reported that regular and targeted feedback conversations appeared to support the development of positive relationships and encouraged new teachers' participation in the school environment.

The importance of constructive feedback and ongoing support is also evident in Fry's (2007) case study of four first-year teachers. Through the case study interviews, Fry suggests novice teachers benefit from scheduled post-observation conferences, feedback on self-identified teaching goals, constructive feedback about deficit areas, and assistance in helping beginning teachers brainstorm ways to improve their self-identified concerns. Open dialog often helps novice teachers self-assess their situations and determine structures needed for continued growth.

Supportive Communication with Administrators

Support for first-year teachers can come from multiple sources- including colleagues, family, parents, and the school community. However, research indicates one of the most influential sources of support for new teachers is the interactions they have with administrators.

In a survey of 106 first-year teachers, Quinn and Andrews (2004) report that first-year teachers who feel they have supportive principals also perceive they are receiving support from their colleagues. Based on the survey data, there is a significant correlation between the total support scores and principal support scores. The researchers concluded that principals who set an example of supporting first-year teachers develop a community perspective which leads to staffs that are also supportive of those teachers. These supportive communities benefit new teachers by reducing stress factors and curbing tendencies which lead to teacher attrition. Fitchett et al. (2018) used the US National Center for Education Statistics Beginning Teachers Longitudinal study to classify new teachers according to their risk for stress. Findings indicate teachers classified at risk for stress reported more burnout symptoms and less classroom control. The researchers highlighted the role of administrators to help reduce the stress factors through spearheading initiatives that make use of professional induction programs for new teachers.

Interactions with administrators may influence a new teacher's decision to remain at a school. Smith and Ingersoll (2004) indicate that regular supportive communication with the school principal or other administrators was associated with reducing the likelihood of new teachers leaving the school. Consistent with Smith and Ingersoll (2004), Ronfeldt and McQueen (2017) studied the three most recent administration of the Schools and Staffing and Teacher Follow-Up Surveys, as well as the Beginning Teacher Longitudinal Study. Supportive communication from school leadership reduced the odds of migrating schools by nine percentage points. The study's findings indicate in terms of migration, supportive communication persisted at significant levels across 5 years. Therefore, supportive communication from principals is positively associated with a teacher's decision to remain at a school.

First-year teachers in New York City completed a survey consisting of six working conditions faced by teachers, which were labeled teacher influence, administration, staff relations, students, facilities, and safety. Based on the results of the survey, Boyd et al. (2011) determine that the administration components of the survey significantly predicted teacher retention decisions after controlling for other school and teacher characteristics. Participants who had less positive perceptions of their school administrators were more likely to leave the school or even stop teaching in the school district. When asked what aspect of their job most influenced their decisions to leave or consider leaving, over 40% of teachers surveyed identified dissatisfaction with the administration as the most important factor. In the literature on communication support for new teachers, there seems to be general agreement that principals play a role in creating a supportive community which influences teacher retention.

Supportive Communication with Colleagues

To grow and develop as an educational practitioner, novice teachers need the support and experience of veteran teachers (Rodgers & Skelton, 2014). Experienced teachers can aid novice teachers in structuring classroom routines, refining teaching practices, planning for instruction, and learning how to work alongside parents to guide students toward academic success. Working through these challenges of first-year teaching with experienced educators allows new teachers to develop strong relationships with their colleagues (Fry, 2009).

Developing a network of support through interactions with colleagues allows novice teachers to ask questions, seek guidance, and consider choices from multiple perspectives. Clandinin et al. (2015) conducted a qualitative study in which forty induction-level teachers were interviewed concerning their personal experiences as they began their professional careers. A thematic analysis of the interviews revealed the theme of support as a key finding. Through

interactions with colleagues, new teachers recognized they were not alone in their challenges and developed a communication network with others. These communication supports ranged from collegial or collaborative interactions, formal or informal support, support from a teaching partner, and time with a principal. Participants stated they felt these support structures made a difference in the quality of their work. Boyd et al. (2011) found the role of support was a common theme revealed in surveys of first-year teachers in New York City. Based on the five survey questions dealing with staff relations, respondents were positive about building relationships with other staff members. The most positive response focused on getting good advice from other teachers in their schools when they have a teaching problem. These studies highlight the important role peer relationships play in new teacher support.

Concluding thoughts on communication supports. Perceptions of beginning teachers concerning the effectiveness of support structures offers guidance on what strategies actually help developing educators. Positive outcomes are associated with other teachers making beginning teachers feel like part of the teaching community (Algozzine, et al., 2008). This relationship building process includes supportive communication to aid novice teachers as they navigate the profession, then develops into constructive feedback focused on teacher and student growth, and possibly cultivates a reflective nature concerning the teacher's own professional growth. The next theme explores the development process of novice teachers as they strengthen the dispositions needed to advocate for their own professional growth.

Self-Advocacy for Novice Teachers

Novice teachers experience a professional transition during their first year of teaching. As college students, they were supported through interactions and observations conducted by college supervisors and mentor teachers. This process offers ongoing feedback during a

developmental stage of professional growth. As a lead teacher, novice teachers may not have the same opportunity to receive this level of feedback concerning professional endeavors such as lesson planning, interacting with parents, and dealing with classroom management issues.

Beginning teachers generally look to other teachers for solutions to problems they encounter (Smith, 2011). It is during this time when new teachers analyze their situations and draw upon the wisdom found in their own teaching community as a means of seeking support. Teachers are aided during this time of transition by engaging in reflective practice and seeking advice, participating in collaboration with peers, and taking part in collective leadership opportunities.

Novice Teachers Benefit from Reflective Practice and Seeking Advice

Reflective practice is based in real-life dilemmas which allow new teachers to think deeply, problem-solve, and feel confident in their ability to meet the needs of their students (Yost, 2006). Cherkowski (2018) defined reflective practice as an inquiry into the learning and teaching conditions of a school, with a focus on engaging in school improvement. When a teacher engages in personal reflection and development with a focus on the wellbeing of self and others, colleagues and students also become benefactors in this process.

Research suggests that when teachers employ reflective practice to analyze student learning and assess the effectiveness of instructional strategies, their self-confidence is enhanced (Kelley, 2004). Yost (2006) conducted a qualitative study concerning teacher reflection and self-efficacy. The qualitative research design used triangulated data based on interviews with principals who supervised the teachers, interviews with second year teachers, and observations of their teaching performance. Analysis of the collected data on the self-reported challenges indicated critical reflection was a problem-solving strategy which teachers employed to cope with the challenges associated with the first few years of teaching. In order for novice teachers to

become successful, they need time to reflect on their practice and determine solutions for solving problems.

Successful professional experiences during the induction years enhances a new teacher's desire to remain in the profession (Fry, 2009). Teachers report having a higher degree of job satisfaction when they feel like they are making a difference in the lives of students (Wang, Hall, & Rahimi, 2015). For success to occur, new teachers are encouraged to identify key areas of their own teaching practices in which they need additional support. Surian et al. (2018) conducted a case study based on an induction support program being implemented in an elementary school. The new teachers identified areas in which they wanted support, then a school wide curriculum team, consisting of instructional coaches and curriculum administrators, planned how that support would be given. Sources of support included instructional coaching, assistance with classroom management and setup, instructional modeling, and individual teacher professional development plans. After implementation of the new program, the teacher attrition rate dropped from 60% to 10%. New teachers who returned credited their decision to the support they received from school leadership, experienced teachers, and supportive peer relationships. This study highlights the benefits related to teacher retention when new teachers are allowed to seek advice from the broader school community.

Collaboration with Peers

Schools that support new teachers view relationships as central and at the core of all the work and learning which happens within the school environment. This perspective on school culture helps foster wellbeing for all (Cherkowski, 2018). Research suggests that communication and collaboration support teacher retention. Smith and Ingersoll (2004) found that activities involving teacher collaboration, such as shared planning time or regularly scheduled discussions

concerning instructional practices, reduced the risk of new teachers leaving a school by 43%. Having collegial support eases the transition new teachers experience as they grow in their chosen profession (Schuck, Aubusson, Buchanan, Varadharajan, & Burke, 2018).

Collaboration with peers allows new teachers to work toward a common goal and experience teacher leadership. Using the findings from a case study consisting of eleven teachers, Macaluso et al. (2015) suggests when teacher leaders work within networks of supportive embedded systems, they can develop and drive change towards a shared goal. In these situations, the principal plays a supportive role by empowering the teacher leaders to enact positive change within the school environment. Clandinin et al. (2015) also found that new teachers responded positively to relationships which developed through collaboration with peers. Based on interviews with forty new teachers, the theme of collaborative relationships were seen as helping the new teachers understand the need for, and participation in, team meetings, school-wide professional development, common assessment, and planning strategies. Novice teachers indicated these opportunities made them feel valued for the contributions they could make.

Collective Leadership Opportunities

Participation in collective leadership allows novice teachers to develop skills and dispositions which foster teacher leadership. These skills and dispositions include reflective practice, communication, development of interpersonal skills, implementation of teamwork and group dynamics, respect for others, a desire to work collaboratively, persistence, kindness, compassion, open mindedness, and deep listening (Pucella, 2014). Development of these skills and dispositions benefits not only the induction-level teacher, but the broader school community.

Teachers develop professionally through collaborative leadership opportunities. Cherkowski and Schnellert (2017) conducted a case study which aimed at illustrating teachers'

experiences participating in a collaborative inquiry approach to professional development. The themes of ownership and agency were derived from an analysis of the interview data. Teachers felt empowered to implement relevant changes which would make a difference in the learning process for their students. The researchers found that teachers were more successful in using collaborative leadership to enact change due to the opportunity they were given to work alongside colleagues to examine their practices and innovate their teaching to improve student learning. Collaboration with other teachers offered participants a safe space where they could develop new skills and abilities for improving their teaching.

Concluding thoughts on self-advocacy. Teachers need to know the value they bring to the learning environment and the contributions they can offer to the school environment through their own skills and abilities. Administrators facilitate self-advocacy by creating a strong learning culture that provides support, encourages collaboration, gives autonomy, and invests in continuing professional development (Suriano et al., 2018). To empower collective leadership and develop teacher leaders, the school environment should consist of trusting relationships among faculty and a collaborative culture in which teachers are offered time and support to learn to improve their practices (Nicholson, Capitelli, Richert, Bauer, & Bonetti, 2016). The fourth theme investigates the development of teacher leadership and the environmental contexts which foster teacher growth.

Teacher Leadership

In recent years, researchers have become increasingly interested in teacher leadership and the role it plays in school improvement and commitment to educational initiatives (Coggins & McGovern, 2014; Ankrum, 2016; Cherkowski, 2018). Building the capacity for school improvement means extending the potential and capabilities of teachers to lead within their

school settings (Pucella, 2014). This process happens when a power redistribution occurs within the school. In the teacher leadership model, the power base is diffused and authority is then shared amongst the members of the school (Muijs & Harris, 2006). When teachers are leading and learning side-by-side with colleagues, they have the opportunity to increase their knowledge and skills through shared experiences. Working alongside fellow educators allows teachers to better understand a new educational initiative and how it supports student learning. Teacher engagement in this process builds ownership and, ultimately, commitment to the new initiative (Wahlstrom & York-Barr, 2011). Leadership then becomes a reciprocal endeavor in which teacher leaders are supporting administrators through sharing in the implementation process for school improvement initiatives (Rieken & Petters-Hawkins, 2016).

Involvement in leadership can be seen by teachers as both empowering and motivational (Muijs & Harris, 2007). There are multiple avenues by which teachers can be involved in school leadership. Some opportunities arise naturally, while other opportunities require the teacher to assert a certain level of initiative in order to be considered for leadership. Infusing shared leadership in the school community serves as a catalyst for shared beliefs, responsibility, and accountability (Ankrum, 2016). The following research highlights the benefits of teacher leadership, how teachers engage in formal and informal leadership roles, conditions for fostering teacher leadership, and how teacher leadership is enacted through communities of practice.

Benefits of Teacher Leadership

School-based instructional improvement and learning is enhanced when teachers engage in instructional leadership activities. Wieczorek and Lear (2018) analyzed 39 published research studies dealing with the topic of teacher leadership and instructional improvement. Their analysis found evidence to support how teacher leaders develop and maintain professional networks with

their colleagues, build positive professional community and trust within the school setting, and encourage professional growth amongst their peers. Through these forms of community initiatives, teacher leadership serves as a means to build organizational learning and capacity to develop the classroom practices which then support student learning.

Engaging in leadership leads to transformation in the ways teachers understand and approach both teaching and leading. This shift in teachers' perspectives serves as a catalyst to positively impact both their colleagues and their schools. Ross et al. (2011) conducted a qualitative case study of twenty graduates from a job embedded, blended teacher leadership program. By engaging in leadership initiatives, teachers began to view student learning as a communal responsibility. The communal approach to learning is reflected in the teachers' willingness to share their successes and failures with their colleagues and opening their classroom doors to allow others to observe their teaching practices. Participants also reported a change in their leadership stance as they moved from seeing leadership as housed in particular roles toward seeing leadership as an attribute required in every teacher. This shift in perception of roles allows for others within the school community to engage in leadership. This finding further supports Wieczorek and Lear's (2018) stance concerning the opportunities teacher leaders have to encourage professional growth amongst their colleagues.

Teacher leadership is seen as a means for offering stability in the school environment. Berry, Daughtrey, and Wieder (2010) analyzed a survey of 1,210 teacher leaders to better understand the role that participation in leadership plays in supporting and retaining teachers. The survey data suggest that teachers who are empowered to lead within their school settings are more likely to remain in the teaching profession. The authors also highlight the need for structured supports to encourage teacher leadership and avoid frustration and professional

burnout on the part of the teacher. These supports and opportunities may include half-time release from teaching responsibilities for teacher leaders, roles to allow teacher leaders to serve as peer trainers, and opportunities to engage as policy advisors on committees within the district setting.

Informal and Formal Teacher Leadership Roles

There is a broad spectrum in which teacher leaders can engage in leadership opportunities. Through a qualitative study, Muijs and Harris (2006) found that there were five dimensions of ‘teacher leadership,’ which exhibit some form of professional initiative and learning. The first was shared decision-making in which the teachers were tasked with making decisions on behalf of the school in relation to educational initiatives. The second was a form of collaboration with peers to focus on improving teaching and learning. The third dimension considered the role of active participation where teachers understood teacher leadership in terms of being involved in tasks which shaped various dimensions of the school environment. The fourth was professional learning in which teacher leaders are engaged in learning alongside their colleagues. While at times they may be leading the activity, a stance of communal learning was being applied to the endeavor. The fifth was leadership as activism where teachers engaged with issues on behalf of the broader school community. They were viewed as representatives of their colleagues and asked to address issues on their behalf. These five dimensions form a foundation for teacher interaction and partnership as a means of benefiting the teacher leaders, their colleagues, and the students they serve.

Informal leadership opportunities generally emerge spontaneously or organically. Informal teacher leaders do not have positional authority, but rather their influence stems from the respect they command from their colleagues through their expertise and practice (Danielson,

2007). Informal leaders become involved in creating high-performance expectations, take initiative, and motivate others towards a common purpose. They build collaborative processes/teamwork as a means of developing community in the school (Leithwood et al., 2007). These leaders see engaging in initiatives as a form of positively contributing to the school culture (Muijs, Chapman, & Armstrong, 2013).

Formal teacher leaders are those who have been named or assigned to a specific leadership position. These positions may consist of filling the role of department or grade level chair, instructional coach, or committee member. Additional responsibilities are generally associated with these roles, such as managing curriculum, conducting meetings, and providing workshops (Danielson, 2007). However, research suggests that there must be a level of intentionality involved in supporting formal leadership roles. Teachers in formal leadership positions should be extended training to develop their abilities to envision how instructional improvement might move beyond their own classroom toward guiding productive conversations with their colleagues (Huggins, Lesseig, & Rhodes, 2017).

Conditions for Supporting Teacher Leadership

Research supports certain structures for facilitating the development of teacher leadership. Wenner and Campbell (2017) undertook a review of 54 research studies to examine factors that facilitate teacher leaders' work. Based on the research studies, a common theme is the need for training and professional development of some sort for teacher leaders. The study also highlighted the role of administrative support as paramount for teacher leadership to be successful. Principals play a large role in creating school environments that allow teacher leaders to do their work. Considerable research attention has been directed toward the influential role of administrators in supporting teacher leadership. Stein, Macaluso, and Stanulis (2016) used eleven

embedded case studies to examine how principal leadership style influenced teacher leader efficacy. The researchers found that transformational leaders provided opportunities for ownership of new ideas and shared decision-making. When teachers were included in the leadership decisions, they felt they were part of creating a vision for their school.

Leithwood et al. (2007) used an interview to inquire about patterns of leadership distribution in eight elementary and secondary schools. Results indicate that distributed patterns of leadership are nurtured when collaborative structures are established, there is an organizational culture of openness, staff members are committed to student success, and the school environment is free of favoritism and internal dissent. Staff participation in school initiatives is motivated when full explanations are offered for decisions being made and when staff are made aware of new directions and activities. This research highlights how distributing leadership is seen as an avenue for building leadership capacity in others.

Teacher leadership requires certain measures be taken to develop leadership teams and provide teachers with leadership roles. Muijs and Harris' (2007) analysis of three case studies highlights the need for a culture of trust and collaboration to facilitate teacher leadership. Teachers must be given the opportunity to lead and provided the moral support to encourage them to take risks. In the study, teachers felt they had a better understanding of decisions and their implications when they were more involved in the decision-making process. Trust was also seen as a key factor for developing teacher leadership. The researchers found that a community which supports its members through collaboration, fosters trust among the community members through the development of multiple and varied relationships.

Communities of Practice for Supporting Teacher Leadership

Communities of practice are formed through collective engagement in a shared topic or vision. Wenger (2004) defines communities of practice as groups of people who share a concern or passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly. While the members of the community of practice may share in their concern for a given topic, they may have a variety of interests and viewpoints concerning the topic (Cox, 2005). Collective learning is part of the process which occurs in a community of practice through engaging in discussions, sharing information, and building relationships.

Wenger's (1998) theory on communities of practice can serve as a resource for new teacher support and professional development. Cuddapah and Clayton (2011) used Wenger's theory to explore how a cohort-based professional development model supported new teachers as they transitioned into professional practitioners. The cohort was comprised of twelve participants from an urban school district. The model was structured to consist of 16 two-hour sessions hosted throughout the school year. Coding of the qualitative data revealed participants' conversations around resource sharing, affirming dialog, and discussions of dilemmas in order to problem-solve were all means of developing the new teachers' practice. Data also evidenced how the cohort structure supported the participants in making meaning from their experiences as new teachers. Through analysis of the dialog, the cohort members revealed their struggles with their teaching context, students, and classroom discipline. Participation in the cohort allowed the novice teachers to engage in meaning-making through these shared experiences. Coded dialog also showed how the cohort provided a forum for teachers to discuss understandings about themselves in relation to teaching. Findings included talk about self in relation to students, teacher roles, becoming a teacher, and self-assessment. For the community component, which is

central to Wenger's theory, the research findings highlight the holistic nature of community as well as its necessity in shaping all other aspects of the cohort model being studied. The insights stemming from this study present implications concerning the role communities of practice play in new teacher development.

Communities of practice may also offer structures for developing teacher leaders. Huggins, Lesseig, and Rhodes (2017) conducted a one-year, qualitative study of four early career mathematics teachers engaging in a professional development experience. The data highlighted how the professional development structure supported the advancement of the early career teachers' leader identities. The teachers were given opportunities to participate in two communities of practice, one being within the professional development setting and the other in the school-based professional learning communities. In these settings, the participants were able to engage in collegial conversations and support the learning of their fellow colleagues as they implemented new math standards. By engaging in communities of practice, the participants began to construct identities as leaders and consider future aspirations. Liberman and Miller (2005) highlight how teacher leaders learn to lead in communities of practice that promote collegiality and support risk-taking and experimentation. The teacher leaders then reproduce these communities of practice when they work with novice or veteran teachers and create safe environments for professional learning.

Concluding thoughts on teacher leadership. Teachers lead within their classroom settings on a daily basis through employing instructional strategies, guiding students in the learning process, and implementing approaches to classroom management. However, when teachers are given the opportunity to lead beyond their classroom walls, they have the chance to share their knowledge and abilities with their colleagues (Berry et al., 2010). This opportunity

for leadership helps create an environment for learning that has influence throughout the school community and affects students and teachers alike (Lieberman & Miller, 2005). By engaging in communities of practice, teacher leaders can work alongside colleagues on areas of shared interest, build relationships that allow for collective learning, and develop a body of knowledge to improve student learning (Wenger, 2004).

Conclusion

Over the years, an enormous amount of research has been conducted to determine the role induction support plays in developing and retaining new teachers (Ingersoll, 2012; Hannan, Russell, Takahashi, & Park, 2015; Carr & Evans, 2006). Ample evidence exists to suggest early career teachers benefit from structured supports which address the specific challenges that occur during the first five years of teaching (Cochran-Smith, et al., 2012; Ingersoll & Smith, 2004; Kelly, 2004). There is also a growing research base concerning the role of teacher leaders to exercise greater responsibility and assume more significant challenges as a means of benefiting student learning (Cherkowski, 2018; Lieberman & Friedrich, 2010; Katzenmyer & Moller, 2009). Recent studies have explored the role of teacher leadership in empowering teachers and developing collaborative communities (Wenner & Campbell, 2017). To date, few attempts have been made to investigate the role of teacher induction in developing early career teacher leaders. This dissertation research study seeks to look specifically at the experiences of induction-level teachers who have been identified as teacher leaders and the support structures which aided them in developing as teacher leaders.

CHAPTER THREE

The purpose of this research study was to gain further insight into the experiences of early career teachers who were identified as teacher leaders. The study explored early career teachers' perceptions concerning the support structures that affected or influenced their development in leadership. Insight into the lived experiences of induction-level teachers identified as teacher leaders has the potential to inform best practices related to new teacher support. In this chapter, I discuss the methodology for the study, including the procedures for selecting participants, data collection and analysis processes, and how ethical considerations were addressed during the research study. The following questions guided the research process:

1. How do new teachers who have been identified as teacher leaders describe their teacher leadership experiences?
2. What elements of the communities of practice theoretical framework assist in understanding how new teachers develop as teacher leaders?

Research Design

This qualitative study employed a collective case study model (Cresswell & Poth, 2018) for exploring the experiences of three induction-level teachers who were identified by their administrators or colleagues as teacher leaders. Collective case study employs an analysis of multiple cases at the same time as part of an overall investigation (Stake, 1995). The information from a collective case study is often considered more compelling than a single case study because the results are more likely to be transferable to other contexts or settings (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006). I conducted a collective case study by selecting three induction-level teachers who shared the common trait of being identified as teacher leaders by administrators or fellow teachers based on specific criteria. A cross-case analysis was then conducted to determine

commonalities and differences in the lived experiences described in the three participants' interview data (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Case study research offers an opportunity to take a careful look at unique cases or circumstances (Gay et al., 2012), such as new teachers who are unexpectedly emerging as teacher leaders. Since teacher leadership is often studied in relation to veteran or experienced teachers, this study has the potential to offer insight into what new teachers experience, understand, and learn about themselves as emerging leaders, during their induction years.

Throughout the research process, each participant represented a single case of "induction level teacher leadership." The methodology employed gave the participants the opportunity to communicate with one another, share their stories, and develop an increasing understanding of teacher leadership by participating in the study. Cross-case analysis offered insights into the ways the participants were similar and different in their understandings of teacher leadership in their early years.

Participants and Setting

This qualitative case study occurred in the Southeast region of the United States and focused on emergent teacher leaders who were currently teaching in K-6th grade. For this study, I used a purposive sample to select three induction-level teachers who met at least three of the five following requirements:

- improves school culture in identifiable ways;
- is a positive influencer of peers, without a formal title;
- is not afraid to look critically at their own practice and invites others to look at it with them through collaboration;
- is committed to the idea that all children can learn;

- demonstrates successful student outcomes (Whole Child Symposium, 2014)

As a college professor in a teacher education preparation program, I was connected to both administrators and teachers in seven different school districts. For developing a pool of potential participants, I contacted administrators and teachers at different schools that I knew supported teachers exercising leadership within the school setting and the broader community (Danielson, 2007). Potential participants were identified by either a school administrator or a teaching colleague. Selected participants did not include graduates from the teacher education program in which I teach. This decision allowed me to investigate these unique cases without personal biases related to prior relationships.

Two methods were used simultaneously to identify the participants for this research study. I emailed six school administrators to ask them to recommend induction-level teachers with five or fewer years of teaching experience who matched at least three of the following five criteria: improves school culture in identifiable ways; is a positive influencer of peers, without a formal title; is not afraid to look critically at their own practice and invites others to look at it with them through collaboration; is committed to the idea that all children can learn; demonstrates successful student outcomes (see, e.g., themes from Whole Child Symposium, 2014). Two of the descriptors addressed classroom leadership (is committed to the idea that all children can learn; demonstrates successful student outcomes), while the other three descriptors (improves school culture in identifiable ways; is a positive influencer of peers, without a formal title; is not afraid to look critically at their own practice and invites others to look at it with them through collaboration) referenced teachers engaging in leadership among the broader school community. Since teacher leaders are those who find opportunities for extending their influence beyond their own classroom walls (Danielson, 2007), asking administrators to select three of the

five descriptors meant at least one descriptor would reflect leadership within the broader school community. Simultaneously, I employed a snowball sampling strategy (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006), by asking practicing teachers in three different schools to recommend induction-level teacher leaders who met three of the five criteria. Through administrator contacts and snowball sampling, I collected the names of twelve possible participants. Three of the suggested participants were graduates from the education program in which I teach, so they were ineligible for the study. After further conversations with administrators, I found that three of the suggested participants had more than five years of teaching experience and one suggested participant was not currently a classroom teacher. I conducted informal interviews with five of the remaining participants to determine their willingness to participate in the study.

Prior to the informal interviews, I gained approval through the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at George Fox University. Once participants were selected, they were asked to sign an Informed Consent (Appendix A) document approved by the IRB. As a means of protecting their confidentiality, participants were given the option to select a location for their personal interviews.

Data Collection

The data collection happened in three phases: Informal Interview, Focus Group Interview, and Individual Interviews. I used semi-structured interview questions (Appendix B & C) to ask participants to share about their induction experiences which shaped and supported them during their professional development as teacher leaders. Participants were provided with a copy of the interview questions prior to the focus group and individual interviews to allow them time to consider the topics we would be discussing during our interview sessions. I collected data, coded, categorized, and analyzed recorded interviews and memos to find emergent themes

throughout the research process (Saldana & Omasta, 2018). I drew upon the work of Seidman (2013) that suggested using an interview process consisting of three separate interviews, each maintaining a different purpose. Seidman's model recommends the first interview should focus on context, the second interview deals with the details of the experience, and the third interview engages in reflection of the experience being studied. Due to the participants being full-time teachers who have limited free time for the interview process, I modified Seidman's model to conduct two formal interviews- the focus group interview dealt with the context and details of the participants' induction experiences and initial thoughts concerning teacher leadership, while the individual interview was devoted to the experience of engaging in teacher leadership during the induction phase, reflecting on what support structures aided in this process, and tailored questions related to how the participants engaged in communities of practice.

Informal Interview Phase

Gay et al. (2012) recommends conducting informal interviews of key participants to determine their willingness to participate in the study and ensure that they fully understand the nature of their commitment. Once administrators and teachers had recommended potential participants, I contacted them via email to arrange for an informal interview. This informal interview allowed me to personally meet with potential participants and engage in conversation about the idea of teacher leadership. After the informal interview, I completed a write-up of each person concerning our conversation and my initial impressions. This information served as memos concerning the participant selection process.

I conducted five informal interviews with potential participants. Two potential participants were removed from the study due to the information gained during the informal interviews. During the informal interview, one potential participant revealed she actually had

over five years of teaching experience because she had paused her career to stay at home when her children were younger and then returned to teaching once her children started school.

Another potential participant shared that she had graduated from the college where I teach, which meant she could not be considered for participation in the study. I went on to interview three other potential participants and they all met the qualifications for participation in the study and expressed a desire to be included in the research.

Focus Group Interview Phase

Official data collection began with having the participants engage in a focus group meeting. The focus group meeting was structured to allow the participants to share about their induction experiences from their various school settings, what they think teacher leadership means and ways they enact it, who had supported them during this developmental phase, and how they had engaged in formal/informal leadership opportunities. While set questions were used to structure the focus group (Appendix B), it is the nature of a focus group conversation to elicit multiple pathways in the conversation. This experience was designed to allow participants to engage in free association of stories as they built on one another's experiences (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006). The group dynamics were monitored to ensure all members had an opportunity to share about their experiences as a means of accurately gathering data for future analysis (Onwuegbuzie, Dickinson, Leech, & Zoran, 2009). The focus group meeting was audio recorded to insure accuracy of data collection, then transcribed electronically, and manually corrected. I conducted written memos during the focus group concerning key information that was shared in relation to the communities of practice theoretical framework. These memos helped determine follow-up questions for the individual interviews in relation to ways communities of practice aided the participants in teacher leadership through developing shared knowledge, participating

in different communities, navigating multi-membership, and engaging in reconciliation (Wenger, 2004).

Individual Interview Phase

After the focus group interviews, I conducted individual interviews with each of the participants. The individual interviews centered on participants' personal experiences as teacher leaders and incorporated relevant themes of inquiry which emerged from the initial focus group meeting. Semi-structured interviews were used to allow flexibility based on the responses of the participants (Seidman, 2019). Seidman (2019) states that while the researcher comes to the interview process with basic questions to establish the purpose and focus of the interview, it is in response to what the participant says that the researcher then follows up by asking for clarification, seeking concrete details, and requesting further information concerning the stories being told. While the interviews consisted of set questions (Appendix C), I deviated from the questions to elicit additional information from participants concerning their engagement in communities of practice or asked them to elaborate on personal experiences in which they engaged in multi-membership or reconciliation. Three elements of a community of practice theoretical framework aided in generating follow-up interview questions: domain- what participants share concerning an 'area' of knowledge that they have explored and developed; community- how participants develop relationships to enable them to address problems and share knowledge; practice- how participants accumulate practical knowledge in their domain, which makes a difference in their ability to act individually and collectively (Wenger, 2004). Both the focus group and the interviews were conducted in a face-to-face format and audio-recorded for later transcription and analysis.

As a means of accurately documenting and describing my research, I kept memos concerning the research process and interactions with my participants. I composed analytic memos (Saldana & Omasta, 2018) during the interview sessions, writing down both observations and my personal interpretations of the interviewees' responses concerning the topics of teacher leadership and how their experiences had been shaped by communities of practice. These memos helped me determine the stated or implied perspectives offered by the participants. This also constituted an audit trail to explain why and how information was developed and built upon throughout the study. These memos were completed as either Word documents or written reflections conducted during the interview process. I kept analytical memos after each cycle of coding to help me examine the information I was collecting.

Data Analysis

Data analysis consisted of three phases. Saldana and Omasta (2018) suggest researchers condense and code data to determine the categories, themes, and patterns occurring throughout the data, while only highlighting the key information pertaining to the stated research questions. Auerbach and Silverstein (2003) also recommend analyzing only relevant text that directly relates to and can help answer the chosen research questions. To apply this approach, the first phase of data analysis consisted of reading and rereading the transcribed data from the focus group and individual interviews to determine which portions of the text are relevant to my research questions. During this phase, I employed a priori coding to highlight themes that related back to the topics discussed in my literature review (Saldana & Omasta, 2018). Engaging in multiple readings of the text allowed me to employ a filtering process for selecting which parts of the text I included in my analysis and which parts did not apply to the research topic.

(Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). My two research questions served as the guide for selecting relevant portions of the text.

Auerbach and Silverstein (2003) suggest that the second phase of data analysis include organizing relevant text into repeating ideas, organizing repeating ideas into more general themes, grouping themes into more general concepts or theoretical constructs, and then using the theoretical constructs to narrate the results. Within-case analysis was used to analyze each of the individual interviews with the participants as an individual data source (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The individual interview data was used to answer research question one. Research question two was answered by determining themes in the data that enabled communities of practice to manage knowledge through the combination of domain, community, and practice. For the purpose of answering research question two, I used Wenger's (2004) communities of practice elements (domain, community, and practice) to analyze data for the fourth and fifth passes through the transcripts. As I read, I highlighted places where teacher leaders were working with their colleagues on key issues, building relationships through discussions and activities, and enhancing their own knowledge by developing methods, stories, and tools along with their fellow teachers.

The third phase of data analysis was comprised of a cross-case analysis. Cross-case analysis compares the similarities and differences of individual cases (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I reviewed data across the three individual cases, focusing on which ideas occurred across the participants' teacher leader experiences (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006). During this phase, additional analysis was conducted to determine themes that revealed principles of community of practice which are evident in the collected data across all or some of the cases. This information was used to offer additional insight into research question two.

Member checks were used to verify the accuracy of the summative content from the focus group and individual interviews (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006). I asked the participants to review my written summations and verify that my interpretations of their experiences and responses were accurate.

Role of the Researcher

I wanted to know more about how to prepare future educators for their chosen career. I also desired to prepare my teacher candidates to move quickly from first-year survival mode to becoming contributing members in a collaborative school culture. When teachers participate in a collaborative culture and actively contribute to the decision-making process, they have the opportunity to assume new leadership roles (Nicholson et al., 2016). Incorporating novice teachers in this process allows them to foster trusting relationships with colleagues, consider possible instructional initiatives which meet the needs of their students, and begin developing as teacher leaders through professional growth in their own skills and dispositions. When induction-level teachers develop identities as leaders it opens up possibilities for contributing not only to their own students but also to other educators (Lieberman & Friedrich, 2010).

The research design and questions were structured to address my assumptions concerning the role induction experiences play in developing teacher leaders. Throughout this study, I was mindful of my own subjectivity in this research given my personal first-year teaching experiences and my current role as a professor in an educator preparation program. To address my biases and assumptions, I conducted memos regularly and reflexively on the ways I encountered my own ideas and beliefs in this work. I also engaged my critical friend in discussions concerning my perceptions of the research and asked that she offer insight into any biases being revealed.

Trustworthiness and Credibility

Credibility is established by straightforwardly self-reporting the research process and engaging the participants in the analysis of any findings (Saldana & Omasta, 2018). To address the analytical processes and outcomes of my work, participants were asked to conduct member checks of any written information to determine if my interpretations accurately described their lived experiences. I also asked a fellow education professor to serve as my critical friend throughout the research processes. A critical friend is one who will ask provocative questions and offer helpful critiques (Costa & Kallick, 1993). This person reviewed my work and helped me determine if my methodological process, data, findings, interpretations, and conclusions were justified.

Research Ethics

Teacher confidentiality was an essential part of this study. Teachers needed to feel protected from negative ramifications which could have occurred based on the information they shared about their current teaching locations. I explained to participants the means by which their identities would remain confidential. To address confidentiality, pseudonyms were used for the teachers, schools, and districts in which they taught (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006). As an additional means of addressing confidentiality, I allowed participants to select sites for their individual interviews. Participants were provided with letters of consent which outlined the procedures, timeline, and purpose of the research study.

Participants were asked to conduct member checks of the written documentation to ensure accuracy and representation of my analysis. The participants were asked to review my written documentation to verify that my interpretations reflected their lived experiences and perspectives. My critical friend was also be asked to conduct a member check of any interviews

to address any inconsistencies or vague information. These member checks allowed me to check for accuracy and credibility while critiquing my own analytical thinking process. All data was housed on my computer, which was password protected. Any audio or video recordings were deleted from all devices once the information had been obtained and the recordings transcribed. Written interview transcripts will be destroyed three-years form the completion of the study.

Conclusion

Researching the experiences of induction-level teachers who have developed into teacher leaders can offer additional insight into not only overcoming challenges, but also engaging in personal and professional development that allows for leadership (Pucella, 2014; Danielson, 2006). This chapter focused on the methodological process for selecting participants, collecting data, and analyzing the findings. Chapter 4 will present the findings of my research based on the data collected during the focus group and individual interviews.

CHAPTER FOUR

This study examined the experiences of early-career teachers who were identified as teacher leaders. The results of this study reflect the interview data gathered from the three participants. In this chapter, I first provide individual information for each of the participants' journeys in teacher leadership. After the individual participant analysis, I present a thematic overview based on the major themes resulting from a cross-case analysis of the interview data.

In this case study, I personally interviewed three participants identified as teacher leaders. The interviews occurred over a four-week period to accommodate their different schedules. The interviews consisted of three phases: an informal interview with each of the participants to determine their willingness and fit for the study, a focus group interview with all the participants at the same time to discuss their induction experiences, and an individual interview with each participant to learn about their development as teacher leaders. I attempted to investigate the experiences of three induction-level teachers who were identified by their administrators or colleagues as teacher leaders. The following questions guided the research process:

1. How do new teachers who have been identified as teacher leaders describe their teacher leadership experiences?
2. What elements of the communities of practice theoretical framework assist in understanding how new teachers develop as teacher leaders?

To answer these research questions, I conducted nine interviews in total, three for each participant (one informal interview, one focus group interview, and one individual interview). The following section describes their individual teacher leadership experiences and is then followed by a cross-case analysis concerning themes that were consistent throughout the data.

Mia's Journey in Teacher Leadership

Once Mia completed college, she was eager to start her teaching career. When she was hired for her first teaching position, Mia was promised support to help her navigate the challenges associated with her first year of teaching. However, she was unaware at the time of her hire that at the conclusion of the previous school year there was a mass exodus of teachers at the school. When she arrived in August, she found the majority of the faculty consisted of new teachers. Mia recounted,

I would say I was very naïve when I took my first teaching position. I thought it would be one way and was told one thing, then when I actually got started it was completely different. I think they were so desperate to get teachers that they sugarcoated the situation. Then when I was actually in the midst of my first year of teaching, I was like ‘What have I gotten myself into?’, but it was too late by that point.

This concerned Mia in the beginning, but she hoped that her teaching team would rally together to support one another. However, as the school year progressed, her hopes for support began to unravel. Her colleagues began functioning in survival mode as a means of meeting the needs of their specific classes. In desperation, she sought the assistance of a reading specialist who worked with all the teachers at her school. Mia stated,

I went to the reading specialist for help. I sought this person out because my team members were all overwhelmed. None of us had been there very long, so there was no direct leadership from our team. We were all too new to offer guidance to one another.

This first year experience was both eye-opening and disheartening, which led to Mia choosing not to return to the school in the fall. She spent the next two years working as a teacher's aide in another school setting.

When Mia decided to go back to fulltime teaching, she recognized the importance of receiving support to help her grow professionally. The wisdom she gained from her first teaching experience helped her navigate the interview and recruiting process. As she began the interview process at her current school, she looked for a teaching environment that functioned as a community. Mia felt her initial desire for a collegial learning community was being fulfilled at the school where she had been teaching for the past two years at the time of this study. She and her colleagues build on each other's strengths and help each other grow in their weaknesses. She stated,

I believe the most essential form of support for me has been my mentor who is a veteran teacher. This person is one who answers all my questions and continually offers me advice. Having the mentor teacher to model and speak truth into a situation has been helpful. Also at my current school, administrators rely on you to seek help and that is viewed as part of your professional development. They encourage us to reach out to others when we are in need, they want us to seek help. They have also structured our environment to offer additional help through teachers such as the reading specialist and the math specialist. These teachers are there for all of us to reach out to for help.

This environment has allowed Mia to participate in building and fostering a learning community.

Mia felt safe to engage in teacher leadership that builds on some of her gifts and passions. Administrators have created a professional culture at the school which encourages teachers to engage in leadership beyond the standard school day. This has enabled Mia to take on leadership roles in both the cross country and track programs.

Here, I have gradually taken over cross country and now I am becoming more involved with the track team. It has been a gradual process so as not to overwhelm me. During the

first year, the administrators did a lot to help me and it was tremendous. Now, I have slowly taken over but they are still there to offer guidance if I need something. It has been great having other leaders who are willing to guide you, especially if you're new at it and just figuring it out.

Mia is surrounded by both colleagues and administrators who are willing to put forth additional effort to help others be successful. While at her first school Mia was not empowered to lead; at her second school, Mia has been given tools, resources, and people to support her leadership journey.

Sophia's Journey in Teacher Leadership

When Sophia decided to become a teacher in her late thirties after working as a social worker for several years, she knew the sudden change in careers would present challenges. Going back to college, while having an active family, was going to be a major shift in her lifestyle. She also had a desire to work with the underprivileged students who lived in her community. Despite the challenges, she felt committed to pursuing her dream to be a teacher. After college, she was fortunate to work in a co-teaching setting with a skilled mentor in an urban school environment. This year allowed her to grow professionally and enact much of what she had learned in her college courses.

The next year, she learned of a new school that would be opening locally to serve the inner-city students. Sophia felt both called and somewhat apprehensive to apply for a teaching position at this new school. The thought of working with this segment of the local population was exciting and the idea of starting a new school seemed adventurous. She wondered how she might contribute to such a setting since she was a new teacher with very little teaching experience. Much to her delight, she found that her fellow teachers were equally new to the

school model and setting, regardless of the number of years they had been teaching. Sophia recounted,

For us, we were all new to our school. Some teachers were in their first or second year of teaching while others had over 25 years of experience. Regardless of how many years of experience we had, we were all new to this school and we were in this together. So in that sense it is a different environment. We are all new in some sense and we are trying to figure it out together. To help with this process, we all team teach and the less experienced teachers are paired with someone who has been teaching longer.

This situation allowed Sophia to feel as though she was on an equal playing field with her more experienced colleagues.

Being part of a new school has shaped the way Sophia views teacher leadership and it has presented her with organic opportunities to lead. She desires for things to run smoothly both for her and her school.

I would say teacher leadership involves being willing to help others and serving as mentors to others. It is important to be involved in the things that are helping the school run well but are outside of your own classroom. These things are often not administrative tasks. For example, I rewrote our grade level's schedule. The way our schedule was written at the beginning of the year was not working for us. So, I came up with a plan and I sent it to my principal, then we made the needed changes. I think part of teacher leadership is seeing those same needs that exist within our school and just being willing to be solution oriented to find a way to help.

Sophia indicated that she does not hesitate to communicate with her principal or colleagues to share in the work that needs to be done as a means of helping their new school function smoothly.

Within her school, Sophia recognized how her colleagues work collaboratively to support one another to be leaders. She mentioned,

Within my school team, I feel like there were other teachers that really encouraged me to step up and tried to help give me confidence by saying, ‘Yeah, you are new, but you can do these things,’ which was helpful. But there is also an expectation that I have to lead because we are all part of a new school and we want to succeed.

This need has driven Sophia to take on leadership roles when they arise.

When I think about how I navigate with my teaching team, if I see something that needs to be done and I feel like I can contribute, then I just do it. I’m more likely to speak up if I feel like it’s something that is my strength. For instance, I oversee all the math instruction for our grade level and go to all the district trainings then redeliver the information to train my fellow teachers. I feel like this is one way I can help out not only my colleagues but the students we teach.

Sophia’s dedication to work for her students and her colleagues allows her to take on leadership opportunities that benefit the entire school community.

Nicole’s Journey in Teacher Leadership

Nicole displays passion for her calling as a teacher. It is obvious that Nicole is committed to helping both her students and her fellow teachers in any way possible. She is also aware of how fortunate she is to be working in a caring environment.

I'm very blessed with the people that I work with and the people I work for. They are all very supportive. In my grade level, we talk all the time and we make sure everybody's okay. Not just in the classroom, but also making sure things are going well outside of the classroom.

When Nicole started her second year of teaching in the same school where she taught her first year, she felt knowledgeable concerning what to expect during the upcoming nine months. By receiving support from her colleagues and administrator, she had grown in her understanding of the school's curriculum, how to navigate relationships with parents, and effective instructional strategies to help teach her students. Now in her second year, she was presented with a new opportunity, mentoring the newly hired first-year teacher. Nicole felt called to extend to another the gracious support she had received during the previous year. She embraced the challenge with enthusiasm and reflected with me on what helped her develop as both a teacher and a teacher leader. Nicole approaches leadership by first engaging in reflection and then seeking to serve those around her. She expressed,

I try to be approachable so others can give me advice. I think being approachable and being willing to ask for help or constructive criticism is important for a teacher leader. Then, I take what is said and try to apply it in a way that helps those around me grow. This year, we have a new first grade teacher and I can relate because I was a new teacher last year. It's been great to say 'Hey, I remember exactly how you feel.' So I have been able to empathize with her this year and let her know she can do this. In these situations, I have been able to walk alongside her, which I think is another aspect of being a leader. Instead of just saying things to her, I am trying to lead by example.

In taking notice of the new teacher's needs, Nicole has been able to share strategies to help improve her teaching abilities.

The other day, the new teacher was explaining that she was struggling to teach a certain math concept. I invited her into my classroom to watch the way I instructed my students concerning the same concept. When her students returned from art, she tried the same strategy and we later discussed how it went with her class. I just happened to notice her need and reached out to her. This is what others would have done for me during my first year of teaching.

Nicole recognized the support she received from her colleagues and tried to extend that same assistance to others when they were in need. The help she extended to her colleagues came from inside the teaching ranks instead of coming from an administrator.

Given her newness in the profession, Nicole has faced challenges in relation to receiving respect from parents.

I think the biggest challenge for me in being a teacher leader is probably my age. Parents tend not to listen to my guidance for their child because they think I am too young.

However, I feel so supported by not just my grade level, but all my colleagues, administrators, and even the maintenance staff. They are behind me and let me know these are the kind of knocks you take in the beginning, but it's going to be okay. They remind me it will get better and offer me strategies to deal with the challenges I face. The challenges to me being a leader definitely come from the outside, but I have support from the people on the inside.

These words of encouragement help Nicole find some normalcy in the obstacles she faced while also recognizing how others have successfully surmounted those same challenges. Connections with others throughout the school help her foster a genuine community.

Thematic Overview

This study explored the experiences of early career teachers identified as teacher leaders. Through the interview process, each participant expressed their ideas and situations in their own unique way as a means of describing their specific case. While each participants' story described specific experiences which helped them develop as teacher leaders, the stories also reflected elements of Wenger's (1998) communities of practice theoretical framework. Based on the participants' interviews, I discerned the following themes as common across all three cases: (a) new teacher leaders do not always see themselves as leaders, but rather perceive themselves as using their abilities to serve others; (b) growing as a teacher leader is fostered by feeling safe enough within the school community to seek help from others; (c) success in teacher leadership motivates new teachers to engage in their own growth and support their colleagues. The quotations and examples provided below are selected to summarize the ideas expressed by the participants and highlight how communities of practice aided their development as teacher leaders.

Theme One: New teacher leaders do not always see themselves as leaders, but rather perceive themselves as using their abilities to serve others.

Throughout the interviews, all three participants were reticent to call themselves leaders. For these early career teachers, they perceived the title of *leader* as being reserved for the more experienced veteran teachers. Nicole expressed,

It's hard for me to see myself as a leader because I am a new teacher and I am still learning from everyone. I would say my ability to lead is shaped by my beliefs concerning whether something is developmentally appropriate for my students. I want to do what is best for my students at all times, and this can sometimes direct me into leadership positions among my colleagues.

While wrestling with her inexperience in relation to the number of years she has been teaching, Nicole also recognized she does have wisdom to help lead the next generation of teachers. She went on to describe one such example,

One leadership opportunity I have experienced is hosting college students who are studying to be teachers. I was able to give them insight into what to expect during their first year and how to be prepared. I remember being in that spot and it was good to share my learning experiences with them.

Part of being a teacher leader is sharing your lived experience, the good and the not-so-good, as a means of helping others. While expressing her lack of security in being called a teacher leader, Nicole did recognize how the practices she had developed could benefit those around her and she was willing to share her experiences to help others.

Mia, like Nicole, struggled to envision herself as a leader. However, she did recognize how her natural gifts and talents presented her with opportunities to assume leadership roles. When recounting her journey in leadership, she said,

I often do not feel like a leader, it just kind of happens based on who I am. For me, taking on more leadership in sports activities definitely built on the assets I already possessed. My administrators really encourage teachers to be involved in other activities outside of

school. To help the school run well, teachers need to be involved and that is why they encourage us to use our abilities to lead.

For Mia, leadership seemed more organic since it was built upon a skill set she possessed prior to becoming a teacher. This indicates how new teachers can grow as leaders when they are able to develop their natural abilities in the context of school communities who recognize the assets they bring to that setting.

For Sophia, she overcame her hesitancy to lead out of a desire to help her school be successful. She stated,

I don't feel like a leader, but I do try to lead by example. I'm just trying to make sure that I'm doing the right thing and trying or attempting to go above and beyond when I can. I look out and reach out to other people when I notice them struggling. I too am always looking for ways to improve myself, which I feel is leading by example to others. Given the fact that it is the first year of our new school, we are all still improving and trying to get better, no matter where we are on the spectrum.

Teacher leaders desire to make positive change in their school environments, which means taking note of what needs to happen outside of their own classroom settings. Sophia shared her experience of being at a new school and how it afforded her various domains to explore with her colleagues:

Since we are in a new school, some of us have gotten together to address different things. We are in the process of applying to be a science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) certified school and implementing project based learning for curriculum planning. This has given us many opportunities to work together. At other times working together just happens on a daily basis, we see a need and we fill that need with a solution.

We often get together to brainstorm solutions which opens up leadership opportunities because nothing is set in stone. I have gotten to work on schedule changes, implementing the design thinking model, and even recruiting teachers for next year.

Through the use of a common domain, Sophia has been able to work alongside her colleagues as an equal and contribute in ways to help the school succeed. Engaging with her colleagues on a shared area of interest, allowed Sophia to contribute to the development of practices which then shaped the community. These opportunities also afforded her the chance to lead certain initiatives and serve her community.

These early career teachers struggled to see how they were leaders due to their lack of experience, yet they each described multiple ways they led initiatives within their school settings. Even though they may have lacked numerical years of experience, they did not lack engagement in their teaching communities. For each of them, their community served as the support source that allowed them to surmount their inexperience and engage in leadership. They shared ways they had engaged in school improvement initiatives and the positive outcomes which resulted in their own professional growth as new teachers and teacher leaders. Through this process, they also worked alongside fellow teachers to share in the school initiatives which helped foster a vested interest in the end results:

“Involving teachers in the decision making process could be one way to keep good teachers in the classroom so they don’t just move to administrative positions out of a desire to be involved in leadership.” –Sophia

“When teachers are allowed to choose which initiatives they become involved in, they are more likely to take ownership of what happens.” –Mia

“I love to help and take on ownership of our curriculum pacing guide for our grade level. This makes me feel like I am helping out my team.” -Nicole

Working in conjunction with their colleagues on a common domain or point of interest allowed the induction level teachers to contribute in meaningful ways to their school community.

Theme Two: Growing as a teacher leader is fostered by feeling safe enough within the school community to seek help from others.

Each participant mentioned how they benefitted from self-reflection concerning their own teaching capabilities. This self-reflection enabled them to identify struggles or concerns they had about their own professional development. When they recognized areas for personal growth, they sought assistance from their teaching community. Nicole stated,

All the help from the people around me has probably been my biggest source of support to grow as a teacher. They were not all my mentor teachers necessarily, but they were there for me and served as an outlet for me to get advice. It was more organic in that I could reach out to anyone in our school community.

She went on to describe how this support helped her overcome some of the struggles she faced as a new teacher,

I think the community aspect was very helpful for me during my first year of teaching. It was encouraging to hear that another person had made the same type of mistake as me and then they would describe what they learned through that process. So it is reassuring to know that it's not just me that's making mistakes. Now, I feel safe to seek help and advice from others. I am not afraid of criticism because I know it is meant to make me a better teacher. Then, I can take all that I am learning and use it to help the people around me, even if they have been teaching for more years than me.

Being part of community created a safe space for Nicole and allowed her to seek help from colleagues when she was struggling. Nicole could then use their constructive feedback as an opportunity to grow in the profession she loves.

For Nicole, her colleagues provided assistance to help her develop practices to address both curriculum and student behavior issues which arose during her first year of teaching. She described the support she received to implement the school's reading program as "A team effort to help understand how to plan for specific components of the reading program. We share strategies to figure out what works best to reach different students' needs." During her first year of teaching, she struggled to know how to deal with a certain student's behavioral needs. She shared, "My administrator and teaching team noticed I needed support, so they all offered ideas to help me figure out what to do. It was nice to know I was not in the situation by myself, they were my resources." Nicole's teaching abilities and classroom management skills grew as a result of addressing the domains of curriculum and management to develop practices that helped her navigate these first-year challenges. She viewed these situations or domains as learning opportunities she explored with her more experienced colleagues.

Within the context of a safe community, Mia felt empowered to seek guidance on how to develop practices to meet the needs of her students. She also viewed teacher leadership as giving rise to engage others to help her grow,

If I am struggling with an issue or I can think of a way to guide decision making in my school, I have to be willing to voice my opinion. This may mean doing things differently because it's the right thing to do and not just because it is easier. Sometimes you might have to be willing to have hard conversations with others, which is when it is nice to know you can do this without fearing repercussions. This gives you an opportunity to

voice your thoughts, concerns, and even seek help when needed. I think a big part of teacher leadership is realizing that you don't have it all together and being willing to ask for help when you are in need.

Sophia also described how she interacted with her principal within the confines of a trusting relationship,

After each of my formal observations, I am always asking my principal for more tips or advice on how I can improve as a teacher. So in that sense, I am asking for support but at the same time I think that it makes her feel more at ease giving it.

The trusting relationships Mia and Sophia have with their colleagues and administrators allowed them to seek advice and then grow professionally.

All three participants were provided mentor teachers to help them engage in the school community and develop their teaching abilities. They spoke about the close relationships they had with their mentor teachers, the level of trust that developed within that relationship, and how they were able to feel safe in confiding their challenges to their mentor teacher. They each identified how their mentoring experience shaped their early career experiences:

“For me, having a mentor teacher was a game changer, it gave me a resource to go to when I needed support.” -Mia

“I was given two mentor teachers: one in my grade level to help me figure out the curriculum/teaching strategies and one in a different grade level to help me navigate learning about the school.” -Nicole

“At my school, we team teach and they purposefully placed me with a veteran teacher to help me with planning and managing our classes.” –Sophia

Having a mentor teacher allowed the induction-level teachers the opportunity to seek insight into the practices of their colleagues. Investigating a common domain with their experienced colleagues then aided them in shaping their own practices and approaches to teaching.

The three teacher leaders engaged in various forms of leadership because they felt it was safe to proceed into new endeavors. The positive support they received was a foundation for their leadership development. As their experience in leadership grew, it served as a catalyst to encourage them to engage in additional initiatives to benefit not only their students, but also their larger school community.

Theme Three: Success in teacher leadership motivates new teachers to engage in their own growth and support their colleagues.

The participants expressed in varying ways how they see teacher leadership as a vehicle for improving the positive culture at their schools. Their teacher leadership experiences were influenced by engaging in school communities who were focused on an area of shared interest that brought about practices to aid in the management of knowledge. In the process of managing knowledge, the participants were afforded opportunities to lead their colleagues in various initiatives and engage in the process of collective learning. They reflected on times they were allowed to lead school initiatives and the emotions they felt through this experience. Sophia recounted,

When I am put in leadership situations, I experience anxiety at first because I set really high expectations for myself. I can start to compare myself to the veteran teachers who have been teaching for 15 or 25 years, and wonder if I can lead. But thankfully our staff builds each other up, so I don't necessarily feel that newbie status. While leadership is anxiety inducing, it is also confidence building at the same time. I start feeling that the

more I lead, the more capable I am to lead, and then the more I want to lead. It is just like our students, the more success they feel the more they want to keep trying.

She then reflected upon how these opportunities can shape young teachers,

Everyone likes to feel successful and there is nothing worse than a new teacher feeling like they can't do their job. This makes it very hard to keep going and even ask for help when you get down so low that you feel like you can't do it. I think teacher leadership is a huge confidence boost. Once you have success at leading then it builds your confidence and encourages you to try new opportunities. This can help your outlook on your whole career.

For young teachers, teacher leadership can serve as an avenue for leading their peers without having to move into administration. Through social interactions within their teaching communities, the three participants were offered resources when facing challenging or unfamiliar situations and then they used these practices to give back to their community of colleagues:

As a team, we began to look at what we were doing in our curriculum. I was able to ask questions and make suggestions. Some of my suggestions were used in the way we teach our reading program. I felt safe to do this with my team and I wanted to share in the job of planning our lessons. –Nicole

Our team works together collaboratively. When there is a problem, we try to share our knowledge with each other to figure out different ways to solve the problem. It is nice to know I am not in this alone and I can reach out to others. –Mia

Thankfully, our staff builds each other up, so I don't necessarily feel that newbie status. If I feel like I can contribute then I am willing to speak up. At the same time, sometimes I don't realize I need help until I start something new. That is when I know I can go to my

fellow teachers and they will offer whatever help I need so I won't be floundering and lost. –Sophia

By engaging in communities of practice, the three participants were able to focus on a common domain with their colleagues and develop practices which helped their communities manage and develop knowledge related to their teaching practices. In these settings the induction-level teachers were part of the leadership teams addressing the challenges facing their schools.

While leadership initiatives that end with positive results are what most teachers desire, that is not always the outcome for every leadership opportunity. However, those situations can also be times of learning and motivate teacher leaders to share their experiences with others. Nicole shared,

This year I have been able to serve more in a leadership role and it definitely made me feel more confident. With this new confidence, I am more motivated to try new things. If it works, I can share my success with others and if it doesn't work I can also share that experience. I am in a safe setting so I feel comfortable sharing the good and the challenging situations with my other teachers. This makes me feel good, like I am doing the right thing for my students and trying to help my colleagues teach their students.

Working within a safe community frees teacher leaders to share with their colleagues, which then benefits all the students.

A teacher leader can be a positive influencer for those in their community, both colleagues and students. When success occurs, teacher leaders grow in their motivation to try new endeavors. When failure occurs, they can reflect on what happened and share the lesson they learned with others in their community. Through observing this professional growth process, other teachers might emerge as teacher leaders themselves. Carrying out teacher

leadership can be motivational not only for the one engaged in leading, but also for the observers who are following.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided detailed accounts of how three new teachers describe their journeys in teacher leadership. A cross-case analysis was conducted to present three themes consistent in each of the teacher leaders' experiences. Based on these findings, Chapter 5 discusses the significance of my study and proposes recommendations for future research in the area of teacher leadership.

Chapter 5

Introduction

Considerable research attention has been directed toward challenges faced by new teachers and the role of induction support in curbing teacher attrition (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004; Ronfeldt, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2013; Gray & Taie, 2015). There is also a growing research base concerning the benefits of teacher leadership within school environments (Muijs & Harris, 2006; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009; Pucella, 2014). Yet, there is limited research concerning the dynamics of induction-level teachers who engage in teacher leadership. This study explored how induction-level teachers make sense of what it means to be a teacher leader and how the people around them influenced their development in leadership.

Through a qualitative cross-case analysis, I investigated the experiences of three induction-level teachers identified as teacher leaders. This qualitative research was conducted through personal interviews which allowed participants to reflect on how their early career experiences supported and shaped their development as teacher leaders. My study was guided by the following two research questions:

1. How do new teachers who have been identified as teacher leaders describe their teacher leadership experiences?
2. What elements of the communities of practice theoretical framework assist in understanding how new teachers develop as teacher leaders?

After analyzing the teacher leadership experiences of my participants and how they were influenced through communities of practice, I discovered three main themes: (a) new teacher leaders do not always see themselves as leaders, but rather perceive themselves as using their abilities to serve others; (b) growing as a teacher leader is fostered by feeling safe enough within

the school community to seek help from others; (c) success in teacher leadership motivates new teachers to engage in their own growth and support their colleagues. The following section answers the two research questions while reflecting on current literature regarding teacher leadership.

Discussion of the Findings

Research question one. *How do new teachers who have been identified as teacher leaders describe their teacher leadership experiences?*

The challenge of determining one's professional ambitions can be difficult for new teachers. These teachers experience a significant transition as they move from teacher preparation programs into fulltime teaching responsibilities. Fry (2009) found that in order to successfully meet the expectations of being a lead teacher, new teachers must implement strategies they learned through their teacher preparation program and during their student teaching experience. Pucella (2014) stated that as their content knowledge and teaching pedagogy increases, the new teacher begins to improve his or her effectiveness within the classroom. My findings affirm the research of Fry and Pucella by highlighting how new teachers learn to navigate their early career experiences. My research goes on to offer insight into how communities of practice can aid new teachers in developing leadership skills when faced with challenging situations. The three participants in my study reflected on how they implemented strategies they had learned in college to help them achieve success in their own classrooms. Experiencing these early successes then propelled them to engage in initiatives to share their content knowledge with their peers and moved their leadership beyond their own classroom environment. Nicole and Mia both shared how they were asked by their administrators to attend curriculum training events and then come back to train their fellow teachers concerning the

strategies they had learned. They discussed how this opportunity made them feel as though their administrator trusted them and had faith in their abilities to be both a strong classroom teacher and a leader amongst their peers. These early successes allowed them to use their abilities to serve their colleagues while engaging in leadership opportunities.

While each participants' professional journey into leadership was unique based on their circumstances, one common experience that was beneficial to all three teacher leaders was having an assigned mentor teacher. Sowell (2017) found three elements necessary for the effective implementation of a mentoring program. First, the mentoring process begins by establishing a trusting relationship with the new teacher. Next, the mentor teacher offers guidance to aid the new teacher in creating a positive classroom environment. Finally, the mentor teacher offers support for the new teacher in instructional strategies focused on the content and context of the classroom setting. The new teachers in my study were offered mentors as a means of ongoing support to aid in student learning. They each identified how their mentoring experience shaped their early career experiences and served as a foundation for them to engage in leadership initiatives. The mentor/mentee relationship allowed participants to feel safe in their school settings and empowered to seek advice when needed. The new teachers were able to share their experiences and solicit guidance from veteran teachers. The participants discussed how they grew professionally through co-teaching, modeling, and planning teaching strategies with their mentor teachers. The reflections of my participants extends the research findings of Sowell (2017) to illustrate how mentor relationships can aid in developing teacher leaders during the onset of their careers.

Developing classroom teachers as leaders within their school environments is a needed shift that recognizes the value classroom teachers bring to school leadership. Muijs and Harris

(2006) highlight how this perspective extends the potential and capabilities of teachers to lead within an organization to allow for a shared vision on school improvement. The three research participants shared ways they had engaged in school improvement initiatives and the positive outcomes which resulted in their own professional growth as new teachers and teacher leaders. Through this process, they also worked alongside fellow teachers to share in the school initiatives which helped foster a vested interest in the end results. The participants' engagement in teacher leadership compliments Muijs and Harris' findings, while extending it to include early career teachers to be part of developing a shared vision for school improvement. When induction-level teachers engage in school improvement initiatives, they have the opportunity to experience ownership along with their school community and develop a vested interest in the end results.

For new teachers, they may not recognize that what they are doing is a form of leadership. Katzenmeyer and Moller (2009) consider the teacher's self-perception to be a barrier in the development of teacher leadership. Often, teachers are engaging in leadership within the school environment, though the teachers may not see themselves as being leaders. This scenario was true for each of the participants in my study. While they all seemed to struggle to envision themselves as leaders, they each went on to describe multiple ways they were enacting leadership in their school settings- coaching sports, mentoring a first year teacher, leading the application process to receive school-wide science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) certification, serving as a school representative for regional curriculum training, hosting preservice teachers for college based fieldwork experiences, and serving on search committees for hiring new teachers. They each spoke about how the opportunities naturally developed based on their skill sets, which motivated them to engage in the initiative, and then led to them

spearheading leadership roles. Clearly, the new teachers were engaging in leadership that resulted in positive outcomes for their school communities, even if they did not realize they were technically ‘leaders.’

Research question two. *What elements of the communities of practice theoretical framework assist in understanding how new teachers develop as teacher leaders?*

The three participants in my study shared multiple ways their journeys in teacher leadership were shaped through communities of practice. Wenger (2004) contends that communities of practice serve as social structures that focus on knowledge and enable the management of knowledge to be placed in the hands of practitioners. It is the combination of domain, community, and practice that enables communities of practice to manage knowledge. Based on this perspective, domain points to an area of knowledge that needs to be explored and developed. Community involves people who interact and who develop relationships that enable them to address problems and share knowledge. Practice involves members of the community who are involved in doing something or working towards a shared goal. Practice consists of methods, tools, stories, cases, documents, which members share and develop together (Wenger, 2004). A foundation of knowledge was fostered for my three participants through a community of practice in which: the domain provided them a common focus, their community built relationships that allowed for collective learning, and practice anchored the learning in the teacher leadership initiatives in which they were engaging.

The new teachers who participated in this study explained different school initiatives or domains, in which they actively engaged with their colleagues. Sophia shared her experience of being at a new school and how their teachers were able to explore this domain of curriculum development together along with applying to receive school wide STEM certification. Sophia

and her colleagues labored toward a common goal and shared in the decision making process which was required to enact changes to their school model. This approach to shared decision making is evident in the research of Cherkowski (2018) which highlights the importance of providing opportunities for teacher leaders to connect with colleagues to reflect on what matters and engage in shared learning. Collaboration centered on reflective practice allows teachers to talk with each other concerning the dynamics which exist in various educational settings. Kutsyuruba and Walker (2015) further state that through engaging in the process, teachers are able to share together, develop collegial relationships, learn to respect one another's work, and collaboratively become leaders together in the school setting. Through the use of a common domain, Sophia has been able to work alongside her colleagues as an equal and contribute in ways to help the school succeed.

The three participants were able to engage in practices with their colleagues which helped them develop their capacity for leadership. For Nicole, she was able to attend a conference to be trained on their school's reading program, then serve as a trainer for her colleagues. Sophia worked with her teaching team to use project-based learning for writing their school curriculum. Mia navigated the challenges of coaching sports by receiving guidance from athletic administrators as to how to establish and maintain a quality program while learning to clearly communicate with parents. Scherer (2012) found collaboration between novice and experienced teachers can be structured through planning curriculum, building professional learning communities, and encouraging ongoing inquiry into practice. Through collaboration, the new teacher becomes both professionally and personally socialized through ongoing collegial interactions. Kearney (2015) states that these peer relationships can then support beginning teachers to become more active in the learning community. Surian et al. (2018) found through

this process, a reciprocal relationship can develop in which new teachers can share their knowledge with veteran teachers.

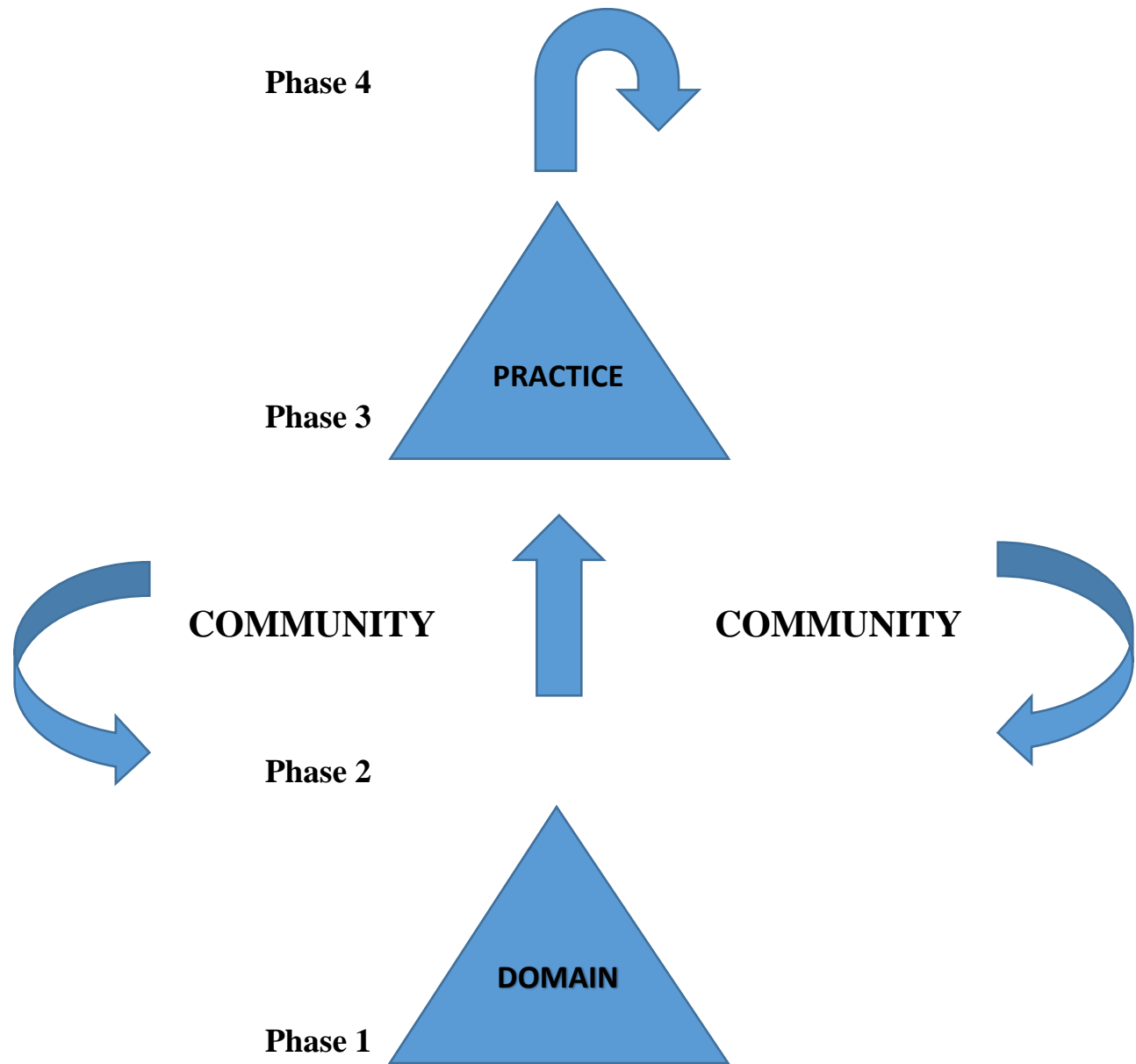
Each of the participants shared how their teacher leadership journey was impacted through the community in which they were teaching. Their administrators and colleagues took the time to develop relationships with them which fostered the sharing of knowledge and aided the new teachers in solving problems that naturally arose in their classrooms and with parents. Stressful experiences can occur for new teachers, whether it may be with students or parents. This research study affirms how essential relational support systems are for counteracting stressors during the first year of teaching. Doney (2013) found that new teachers benefit when they form support systems that are comprised of reciprocal learning relationships, both inside and outside of the school. These reciprocal relationships may serve as pathways to leadership for new teachers. Fry (2007) suggests a practical support which can help alleviate first-year stress includes being part of a positive school community. In these communities, beginning and veteran teachers comfortably ask colleagues and administrators for help. Observing and participating in this type of support system allows beginning teachers to feel more confident about asking for help and seeking advice.

Through social interactions within their teaching communities, the three participants were offered resources when facing challenging or unfamiliar situations. Their experiences further highlight Wenger's (1998) assertions that we become who we are as we learn through social interactions with those around us. It is through communities that we experience mutual engagement, joint endeavors, and develop a shared collection of experiences. For the three participants, they credit their communities for supporting their development as teacher leaders.

They recognized the opportunity to develop professionally which was afforded them through social interactions with their colleagues and administrators.

Wenger (1998) proposed that three elements (community, domain, and practice) work together to allow for knowledge development. The communities of practice theoretical framework views this knowledge development and management as being in the hands of the practitioners, in this case it would be the teachers. After analyzing the data from the various interviews, I found that the induction-level teachers described their development as teacher leaders by first starting with a domain, or area of focus, they were seeking to develop with their colleagues. Through the interactions and discussions with their communities concerning this domain, they built relationships which led to collective learning. This process resulted in practices, such as methods or tools, which they used to help their community function and grow. The following diagram illustrates a community of practice as described by the participants in my study. Phase 1 begins with a common Domain; Phase 2 consists of interactions with community members to seek answers and labor toward a common goal; Phase 3 represents practices which are developed or improved through this shared endeavor; Phase 4 illustrates how the participants used their knowledge and practices to serve their community.

Communities of Practice in Practice Chart



Limitations

From the onset, I sought to structure my research design and development to better understand the experiences of early career teachers who were identified by their colleagues or administrators as teacher leaders. The participants who were selected for my study were located in three different schools. Each of the participant's stories is unique, given their school settings and the opportunities they were afforded to engage in teacher leadership. The small sample size, however, does not allow findings to be generalized, but the themes revealed through this study may be helpful by offering insight into the leadership development of new teachers.

The interview process and questions were structured to allow participants to reflect on their journey in teacher leadership. The process involved participants recounting their stories based on a retrospective viewpoint. Given this vantage point, some of the details may have been forgotten or changed over time. Their stories represent a single perspective even though the stories involve multiple members of their school community.

The same questions were used in each of the interviews, however in the course of the interview process I chose to ask additional follow-up questions based on the specific responses of the participants. These follow-up questions may have allowed differing aspects of the participants' stories to reveal varying ways in which they developed as teacher leaders.

Based on the design of this research study, participants were nominated by either an administrator or a colleague. I wonder if I had asked for volunteers who were new teacher leaders, would they have seen themselves as being able to qualify for the study. They were each reticent to call themselves leaders, despite the fact that they were engaging in leadership in multiple ways. They were also in supportive communities which encouraged them to grow in the area of leadership. I wonder what the results of this study would have been like if I interviewed

teachers who were not able to lead due to barriers at their schools. I also wonder how those barriers might have affected their self-perception.

Implications

My research study highlights the positive experiences of three new teachers who are engaging in teacher leadership. Despite their new status as teachers, they are seeking to be involved in their school as a means of serving their students, colleagues, administrators, and broader community. They have a desire to serve others through their leadership endeavors and are willing to take on additional assignments that stretch them beyond their own classroom setting. Their experiences offer several insights for how educational leaders might respond to nurture new teacher leaders.

Implications for Emerging Teacher Leaders

Developing as a teacher leader begins with recognizing the assets one brings to the teaching community. Induction-level teachers may be reticent to initiate new endeavors or point out issues which exist within their school communities. However, being solution oriented is a good way to approach challenges which will naturally occur in any school setting and then use one's skill set to help solve the issue at hand. Being willing to seek advice and guidance from others within the learning community can aid new teachers in addressing issues.

Developing a solution-oriented mindset that supports teacher leadership begins with reflective practice. Cherkowski (2018) defined reflective practice as an inquiry into the learning and teaching conditions of a school, with a focus on engaging in school improvement. Bond (2011) highlights how new teachers can engage in reflective practices in order to become effective leaders. First, teachers need to be able to recognize how their choices guide their practices and actions within the classroom setting and the larger school community. They serve

as models of lifelong learning for both their students and their colleagues. Second, they need knowledge of others within their school setting, inclusive of students, colleagues, parents, and administrators. This knowledge helps them connect class/school-based initiatives and endeavors to the broader community. Third, teacher leaders need to understand the bureaucracy of schools and their organization contexts, which include the processes for decision-making, improvement, and governance. This information can support teachers in overcoming barriers which may arise when an initiative is being proposed or implemented. Fourth, teacher leaders need to possess a strong knowledge of teaching, inclusive of the latest professional development in pedagogy and instructional strategies. A better understanding of these four areas can help teacher leaders become effective decision makers within their school community.

Implications for School Administrators

The term school leadership may evoke connotations of an administrator or principal who oversees the day-to-day functioning of the school. Often, conversations about the challenges associated with school leadership narrow to focusing solely on the role of the administrator. This view has inadvertently sent a message that in order to lead change within a school, one must be formally designated as an administrator (Pucella, 2014). This restrictive perspective towards leadership may alienate some of the most influential leaders within the school setting- the teachers.

When new teachers are presented with this one-sided perspective, they can develop a negative outlook concerning the future of their professional career. Danielson (2007) explains how this perspective can lead to the view of teaching being a flat profession. In other professions, with experience comes greater opportunity and sometimes professional mobility. However, the classroom teacher's responsibilities tend to stay the same throughout his or her

career, unless there is movement into administration. Danielson highlights the fact that many teachers do not want to go into administration, but still have the desire to exercise greater influence in their schools and in the broader profession. When these desires for responsibility are left unfulfilled, it can lead to dissatisfaction and inability to retain talented teacher leaders.

Broadening the view of leadership to include early career teachers allows for additional manpower to aid in school initiatives. Administrators need additional support given the challenges schools are facing- teacher retention, veteran retirements, and increased state/federal mandates. Early career teacher leaders can offer support that is grounded in research since they are relatively recent graduates from teacher preparation programs. This fresh perspective, combined with the experienced vantage point of veteran administrators, holds the potential to imagine new solutions to some of the challenges facing today's schools. By sharing information and experiences, new teachers and veteran administrators learn from each other as a means of developing both professionally and personally (Darling-Hammond & Oakes, 2019).

Implications for Teacher Educators

During the focus group interview, the participants were asked to reflect on their college experiences and how they had helped prepare them for being teacher leaders. The participants discussed challenges they faced during their first few years of teaching which included dealing with parent issues, learning to navigate school dynamics, and engaging in relationship building with their colleagues. While the three participants leaned into their communities for support, some new teachers are not as fortunate to have support structures in place and choose to leave the teaching profession due to this lack of support (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004).

As a college professor teaching in an educator preparation program, I understand how high attrition rates affect not only the students who are served in the classroom, but also the

stability of the school setting and the strength of the education profession. Early career educators who leave the profession have no opportunity to develop into the teacher leaders that the field so desperately needs. Studying the experiences of new teachers can help teacher educators understand what makes new teachers, who are identified as teacher leaders, unique.

Preservice preparation consists of content-based courses, fieldwork experiences, and student teaching, all of which occur under the guidance of a higher education establishment. The components of content, theory, and practice are structured in ways to offer scaffolding for college students as they transition into teaching practitioners. However, even the best preparation programs can not foresee every challenge a first-year teacher may face. Pre-service preparation programs understand that teaching is complex work and recognize a significant portion of the knowledge needed for success has to be acquired on the job (Ingersoll, 2012).

As I consider my role in preparing future educators, this research helps me better understand how new teachers develop into teacher leaders. The three teacher leaders I interviewed shared the importance of school community. They recognized how their communities allowed them to develop as teacher leaders through positive communication, constructive feedback, collaborative endeavors, and administrative support. While different in context, these same approaches can be addressed within the teacher preparation program. The way we offer feedback, structure our coursework and projects, and provide guidance during clinical practice can mirror the supportive measures described by my participants. Preparing future teachers to engage in their school communities goes beyond the content knowledge they will need for teaching in the classroom. They will also need to navigate challenging situations, give and receive constructive feedback, and learn to be solution oriented.

To help prepare new teachers for these challenges, higher education is encouraged to collaborate with school districts to inform teacher candidates of the demanding environments associated with education as a means of decreasing the risk of stress for first-year teachers and avoid possible burnout (Fitchett, McCarthy, Lambert, & Boyle, 2018). Institutions of higher education can also take a more active role by tracking their graduates' successes and challenges in relation to teacher leadership. The best source of program assessment lies in our graduates' experiences. Collecting both quantitative and qualitative data can help institutions determine programmatic changes which will prepare candidates for developing into teacher leaders.

Pucella (2014) highlights the need to prepare pre-service teachers in the areas of knowledge, skills, and dispositions as they relate to teacher leadership. Knowledge concepts that can be developed during the pre-service experience include definitions of teacher leadership, an understanding of the change process in schools, and an awareness of the political and bureaucratic structures of schools. Pucella (2014) suggests skill sets which may aid college students in developing as teacher leaders include reflection, well developed oral and written communication skills, and the ability to adjust in teamwork and respond to group dynamics. Dispositions central to developing pre-service teachers to be teacher leaders include self-confidence without arrogance, a desire to work collaboratively, and a willingness to take risks. Pucella (2014) recommends overtly teaching these knowledge, skills, and dispositions as a means of helping pre-service candidates develop into good teachers, while empowering them to be teacher leaders.

Teacher preparation programs are given a short window of time to prepare candidates for the expectations associated with the career and help them develop into future teacher leaders. Programs are expected to cover required content the teacher candidates will need to know,

address appropriate pedagogy based on the developmental levels of the students, equip teacher candidates with classroom management strategies, and instruct them on how to analyze student data and adjust their teaching practices based on the learning which is or is not occurring. Given the amount of information preparation programs must cover, it is easy to overlook the challenges faced by new teachers, such as working in collaboration with other teachers, parents, and administrators, implementing management systems, and finding a balance between teaching and life outside of the school setting. As a means of caring for future educators and helping them develop into teacher leaders, these challenges can become focus topics for seminar classes offered during a teacher candidate's final semester of college. Creating time within the clinical practice semester to host informative meetings can help future graduates consider the impact these issues will have on their teaching experience. These informative meetings may include inviting graduates to come back and speak with teacher candidates concerning the successes and challenges they have faced as new teachers. This information can also help prepare pre-service teachers for the interview process by allowing them to think through key questions they may want to ask concerning what types of professional development opportunities and support they will be given during their first year of teaching (Tinholt, 2020). Preparing teacher candidates to navigate uncharted waters can help them avoid feeling overwhelmed during their first few years of teaching and allow them to continue developing their leadership skills.

Fieldwork and clinical practice experiences can be structured so that teacher candidates have the opportunity to observe teacher leaders. Colleges and universities can arrange teacher candidate placements, with graduates from their programs, who are teaching in the local school systems. These opportunities would allow for the teacher candidate to observe and inquire about the experiences the graduate faced during their first few years of teaching. The teacher leaders

could also share how the college experiences aided them as they developed into leaders within their teaching community. Sharing a similar college background may enhance the fieldwork and clinical practice experience for both the teacher candidate and the teacher leader.

The teacher leaders in this study reported how they actively sought feedback and support from their colleagues. To aid in developing this disposition, colleges and universities can help prepare pre-service teachers for this transitional time by encouraging them to engage in constructive feedback and planning with their assigned mentor teachers during the clinical practice experience. One component of the clinical practice experience may include an observation of a lesson conducted simultaneously by both the mentor teacher and the college supervisor. After the observation, the teacher candidate, mentor teacher, and college supervisor meet to discuss the observation. This dialog opportunity can offer the teacher candidate a chance to engage in reflective practice and seek advice on how to improve in the areas of instructional strategies and student engagement (Tinholt, 2020). This process also allows the teacher candidates to understand how constructive feedback is a form of professional growth and not just an assessment of their teaching abilities.

Recommendations for Further Research

In a recent study, Ingersoll et al. (2018) found the teaching workforce consists of more beginning teachers than their veteran colleagues. These findings indicated that teachers' decisions to remain in the profession are impacted by two factors: the degree of autonomy teachers are allowed and the level of collective faculty influence over school-wide decisions that directly affect teachers' jobs. Ingersoll states that high levels of departures can be a symptom of underlying problems within the teaching occupation. Research may be warranted to see if there is a correlation between teacher leadership opportunities and teacher retention for early career

educators. If new teachers were given more of a voice in their school settings, would they be more likely to stay? Does a certain level of autonomy correlate with job satisfaction? Answers to questions such as these might aid school districts in structuring systems to encourage retention of early career teachers.

Research into the relationship between school climate and teacher leadership opportunities might assist schools in determining how to create supportive environments for classroom-based leaders. Dahlkamp, Peters, and Schumacher (2017) suggest that an assessment of the school's climate can aid administrators in determining the needs of teachers and increase teacher retention. Administrators can evaluate the areas in which the teachers feel the need for more resources. McCarthy et al. (2016) found that through the school assessment process, administrators benefit from gaining sensitivity to the classroom conditions which are considered by teachers to be demanding. These assessments can also inform administrators when individual teachers are experiencing an imbalance between resources and demands.

If I had the opportunity to conduct further research with early career teacher leaders, I would like to also survey their colleagues to determine the overall perception of the school climate. I wonder if new teachers naturally have an optimistic perspective related to the general excitement associated with starting the teaching profession. Interviewing colleagues of early career teacher leaders could offer an additional perspective concerning how the teacher leaders are perceived by their peers. It would also be informative to conduct a longitudinal study of teacher leaders to determine how they respond to changes that might naturally occur over time—changes in administration, changes in grade level assignments, or changes in school locations. Research into the fluidity of teaching circumstances might shed light on how teacher leaders display grit when faced with challenging situations.

Conclusions

The purpose of this cross-case analysis study was to investigate the experiences of early career teachers identified as teacher leaders. It was my hope to better understand how new teachers rise to the ranks of leadership amongst their veteran peers. Through the data collection and analysis process, I gained insight into how early career teachers perceive their role and personal development in leadership. I also learned how communities of practice create avenues for fostering teacher leadership. Based on the findings of this research study, it is apparent that teacher leaders develop through engaging with their colleagues and administrators to meet the needs of the students they serve. They see their role as one of service to those around them and not as a means for attaining a title or personal accolades.

After conducting three interviews with each of the participants, I walk away with a renewed commitment to the education profession. Most teachers enter the profession to make a difference in the community in which they serve. They possess a love for students and a desire to see them succeed. Sophia shared, “Success for one is success for all because we are all in this together.” When I consider the role communities played in the success these three teacher leaders, I can see how they are reciprocating that success to the schools they love.

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Appendix A

Letter of Consent for Participating Teachers

Experiences of Induction-Level Teachers Identified as Teacher Leaders

Dear (Participant),

I am currently a student in the Doctor of Education program at George Fox University in Newberg Oregon. As a requirement of the program, I will be conducting a qualitative research study concerning the experiences of induction-level teachers who have been identified as teacher leaders. Your administrator or fellow teacher has identified you as an induction-level teacher leader.

You are invited to engage in a focus group interview and an individual interview regarding your induction experiences and your opportunity to engage in teacher leadership. The interview questions are open-ended and relate to induction, teacher leadership, and your future career plans. I hope the findings of my research will off a better understanding of the role induction support structures play in the development of teacher leaders.

The risks associated with the research are minimal. The interview questions focus on allowing you to share your experiences and reflect on how those experiences have shaped you as a teacher leader, so they should not create any uneasiness. Please be aware that your participation is completely voluntary and you may decline to answer any questions at any time. You also have the freedom to be removed from the study at any time, if you so choose.

The results of this study will be used for research purposes and may include professional presentations or academic publications. All interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed to ensure accurate reporting of the information you share. To avoid personal information being shared, a pseudonym will be used for your name and your school name will not be used in any reported data. Any personal information, documents, or artifacts you choose to share will be kept confidential.

All research materials (recorded interviews, transcriptions, etc.) will be stored in secure locations. After three years, I will personally destroy all relevant material and delete any audio recordings.

Thank you for considering this opportunity to engage in an educational research study. If you have any questions you may contact me at (423)227-1156 or my advisor at George Fox University, Dr. Karen Buchanan at (503)554-2884.

If you understand this research study and agree to participate in interviews and audio recordings, please sign below.

Participant Signature: _____ Date: _____
 Researcher Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix B

Focus Group Questions:

1. Please tell me about what it was like to enter the teaching field after you graduated from college.
2. What induction supports were offered to you to help you transition into your position?
3. Did your colleagues offer support? How were these supports structured (formal or informal)?
4. How did your administration offer tailored support to you that was different from the general professional development received by all the teachers?
5. How are new teachers receiving support at your school currently?
6. What supports do you believe would help new teachers?
7. How would you define teacher leadership?
8. How were you encouraged to engage in leadership when you first started teaching? Who offered this encouragement?
9. During your induction phase, what were some of the leadership skills you wanted to develop personally? How and where were those skills modeled for you?
10. What areas of induction should I consider during my research process?

Appendix C

Individual Interview Questions:

1. Describe yourself as a leader.
2. Describe the leadership opportunities you have been able to engage in at your school.
3. Please describe some ways you are currently engaging in leadership at your school?
4. Tell me about a time when you were asked to serve in a leadership role and the feelings you experienced in this role.
5. How do you engage in leadership with your colleagues?
6. How do you receive support from administrators?
7. What are some challenges you face as you engage in teacher leadership? How do you deal with these challenges?
8. How active are you in choosing your teacher leadership opportunities? Are you asked/assigned leadership roles or do you tend to volunteer for various leadership opportunities?
9. How has or would have induction support helped you develop skills for leadership opportunities?
10. What supports help teachers develop as leaders?
11. What other factors should I consider about how induction supports can lead to teacher leadership?
12. Where do you see yourself in your career in the future?