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Accountability policies constitute a form of surveillance that in many cases serve to suppress teachers' leadership from within the classroom for the benefit of students. However, some teachers working in schools that are operating under surveillance from accountability policies successfully practice this type of teacher leadership. The Theory of the U (Scharmer, 2009b; Senge et al., 2005) may explain why some teachers succeed in exhibiting leadership under conditions of accountability. In order to explore the theory of the U as a theoretical basis for teacher leadership, this study employed phenomenology as both philosophical approach and method to uncover the lived experiences of teacher leaders in low-performing and underperforming schools in order to answer these research questions:

- How do teacher leaders (TLs) perceive and describe their experience of teacher leadership?
- How do the pressures of accountability policies such as NCLB or Race to the Top figure in teacher leaders' lived experiences?
- What constraints on their leadership do teacher leaders perceive?
- What are teacher leaders' perceptions of supports/mediating factors that enable them to demonstrate leadership?
- What strategies do teacher leaders employ to negotiate structural constraints on teacher leadership?

- What similarities and/or differences are there in the experiences of TLs who have left the classroom versus those who have stayed?

Three interviews were conducted with each of eight participants who were recognized by others as teachers who led from within the classroom for the benefit of students following the procedure for phenomenological interviewing advocated by Seidman (1991). Half of the participants continued to teach in low-performing schools and half had left the classroom and were working as new teacher coaches. Data were analyzed using the method of phenomenological analysis presented by Moustakas (1994). Analysis occurred in four stages: 1) open, descriptive coding; 2) identifying invariant constituents by eliminating codes that are not necessary and sufficient to understanding the experience; 3) clustering invariant constituents into themes; and 4) checking the themes against the participant's entire case file. Profiles of each participant's experience of the research questions were developed. Themes were developed and articulated across all participants as well as for each group, teachers who stayed in the classroom and those who left. Common themes that emerged across the research questions included support from collaboration and from colleagues and support from administration. All of the teacher leaders experienced conflicting values as a constraint. Overall, the teacher leaders shared an overriding sense of personal responsibility and an intense focus on meeting the needs of their students.

Study findings suggested that the successful exercise of teacher leadership from within the classroom for the benefit of students under the constraints of accountability policies depended upon a delicate balance between living within structural constraints and challenging those constraints. The support of colleagues and principals was critical in developing and sustaining leadership for all participants. Inner sources (Scharmer et al., 2002) of a sense of personal responsibility and a focus on meeting the needs of students appeared to help teachers negotiate constraints on their leadership that resulted from accountability policies. Tapping into inner sources (Scharmer et al., 2002) of leadership allowed the teacher leaders in this study to find ways to enact outcomes for their students that were different from the status quo, in spite of technologies of surveillance (Bushnell, 2003) and other structural forces that might discourage such agency. The results of the study led to several implications for teacher educators, administrators and policy makers.

TEACHER LEADERSHIP IN THE BALANCE: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by

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To Michael, Dylan and Clare

Thank you for letting me turn it up to eleven.

APPROVAL PAGE

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The exercise of teacher leadership is constrained by a set of structural forces that are predicted by Foucauldian theory and supported by existing research (Bushnell, 2003; Muijs & Harris, 2007; Olsen & Sexton, 2009; Silva, Gimbert & Nolan, 2000; Smylie & Denny, 1990). The weight of these structural forces has been dramatically increased in many high poverty, high minority schools by increased use of “technologies of surveillance” (Foucault, 1977a) under accountability policies such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) (Daly, 2009). Organizational theories such as the theory of the U (Scharmer, 2000, 2001, 2009a, 2009b, 2010; Scharmer, Arthur, Day, Jaworski, Jung, Nonaka & Senge, 2000; Senge, Scharmer, Jaworski & Flowers, 2005) as well as some additional empirical studies (Beachum & Dentith, 2004; Birky, Shelton, & Headley, 2006; Daly, 2009; Little, 2003; Muijs & Harris, 2007; Scharmer, 2009; Sloan, 2006) indicate, however, that the constraining effects of these structural forces, though daunting, might be countered by a set of supporting forces that enable teacher leaders to exercise individual agency within structural constraints. While a number of studies have been done that point to the existence of such supporting forces (Beachum & Dentith, 2004; Birky, Shelton & Headley, 2006; Little, 2003;

Muijs & Harris, 2007; Scharmer, 2009; Sloan, 2006), few studies have studied teacher leaders working under the added constraints of accountability from a phenomenological perspective. This perspective is important in that studying the experience of leaders has been called the “blind spot” of leadership (Scharmer, 2009b, 2010) . This chapter will argue that in order to better understand how some teachers are able to negotiate the constraints of accountability policies and successfully demonstrate teacher leadership for the benefit of their students, it is necessary to study who teacher leaders are, as opposed to what they do or how they do it.

Statement of the Problem

I began my teaching career in 1992, the first year of North Carolina’s state testing program and later was a first-year principal in one of the first schools in North Carolina to face sanctions under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). In my first year of teaching, state mandated criterion-referenced end-of-grade testing was just being introduced in North Carolina. Teaching in what has been since categorized as a low-performing school, I was expected to write the state objectives that I was teaching, along with their numbers, on the blackboard and in my lesson plan book. Beyond monitoring for this one aspect of teacher practice, I experienced very little surveillance as a beginning teacher. My principal visited my classroom once in my first year. Later, while working as a teacher leader in a high-poverty, high-minority school before NCLB, I

experienced a high degree of personal agency. I was given leeway to find solutions to problems that my colleagues and I identified.

In contrast, by the time I accepted my first principalship in 2002, again in a low-performing school, NCLB had been enacted and my school was one of the first to be threatened with federal sanctions for failure to make adequate yearly progress. I was expected by my superiors to visit every classroom every day, in order to ensure that every teacher was teaching the NC Standard Course of Study and using research-verified teaching strategies faithfully. In ten years, surveillance of teacher practice had increased dramatically in North Carolina. Additionally, while I looked for and would have supported teacher leadership by the teachers that I worked with, I did not observe this kind of personal agency in teachers after NCLB. Having come of age as an educational leader in the age of accountability, and having spent my entire teaching career working in high-poverty, high-minority schools, I am interested in the effects of accountability policies and sanctions on the exercise of teacher leadership

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the phenomenon of teacher leadership in high poverty, high minority schools from the teacher leaders' own perspective, in order to uncover their lived experiences of structural constraints and supporting forces.

Theoretical Rationale

The existing research on teacher leadership under conditions of intense scrutiny such as are present in the current context of school accountability suggests a contradiction. In many cases, the exercise of teacher leadership is suppressed by policies and practices consistent with accountability measures (Achinstein & Ogawa, 2006; Bushnell, 2003; Daly, 2009; Olsen & Sexton, 2009). On the other hand, there are studies that show that some teacher leaders are able to successfully negotiate the accountability context and exhibit the type of leadership from within the classroom which influences their colleagues to improve practice for the benefit students' learning (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). This type of teacher leadership is defined in the literature as third wave teacher leadership (Pounder, 2006; Silva et al., 2000). This study draws on two theoretical constructs to explain this contradiction.

Foucault and Accountability as Surveillance

Michel Foucault's theories of hierarchical power, panopticism and surveillance predict that personal agency and capacity to lead is suppressed in an environment of constant surveillance. Foucault conceptualized power as institutionalized and embedded within social relationships, rather than as a tool that is consciously exercised by its holder (Anderson & Grinberg, 1998). This kind of power operates without regard to individuals who occupy positions within the structures. The power resides in the established structures, such as norms

and hierarchical relationships. According to Foucault, under conditions of hierarchical power, those subject to the power often police their own behavior and that of others to ensure that the behavior follows established norms.

Accountability policies function as a set of norms that are enacted in a hierarchical, top-down structure. The expectations that schools and teachers will meet the expectations set by the policies are monitored by policy makers and by the public, who exercise what Foucault (1977a) refers to as “normalizing judgment.” Foucault predicts that under conditions of constant surveillance and normalizing judgment, the capacity of individuals to behave in novel or unexpected ways is suppressed. This theory explains why teacher leadership is frequently not seen in schools experiencing high levels of scrutiny from accountability policies.

The Theory of the U and Implications for Research on Teacher Leadership

In recent years, Otto Scharmer and colleagues (Scharmer, 2000, 2009b; Senge et al., 2005) have developed a theory of leadership and change that they refer to as the Theory of the U. According to this theory, in response to rapid changes in our world, leaders and organizations are being forced to change in order to survive. “In environments where small differences can cause powerful effects the task of a leader is to sense and recognize emerging patterns and to position him- or herself, personally and organizationally, as part of a larger generative force that will reshape the world” (Scharmer et al., 2002, p. 3). The

theory of the U describes a process that some leaders go through that enables them to break free of established patterns and norms and then imagine and enact new possibilities. This theory is based in part on the notion that success in the context of constantly changing, dynamic systems requires leaders to be able to respond to “a different set of variables: the variables that used to be referred to as soft, such as intentions, interpretations, and identity” (Scharmer et al., 2000, p. 4). The theory of the U suggests that leaders who are successful in enacting new realities are those who have experiences that enable them to shift their thinking beyond what is already done and imagine what could be. Scharmer et al (2000) argue that it is important to study the experience of leaders to understand the source of their leadership. They write, “we see what we do. We also form theories about how we do things. But we are usually unaware of the place from which we operate when we act” (Scharmer et al., 2000, p. 7). Therefore, in order to understand the phenomenon of teacher leadership in the context of underperforming schools under conditions of accountability, it is necessary to study in depth the experiences of teacher leaders.

Propositions

Despite Foucault’s theory and the empirical evidence that suggest that teacher leadership is suppressed by the increased surveillance of accountability policies, other research indicates that some teachers are in fact able to demonstrate teacher leadership from within the classroom for the benefit of

students. The Theory of the U presents an alternative that may explain these contradictory findings. Thus, the study proposes that 1) an inner source of vision, along with an understanding of the system that they are a part of and their role in that system could help teacher leaders move beyond the structural constraints that they face, overcoming the effects of surveillance and disciplinary judgment; 2) once teacher leaders suspend and become aware of the taken-for-granted notions that tend to imprison, they may have the opportunity to sense their role in creating reality and can develop a vision that will help bring forth a new reality, free from the constraints of the imprisoning structures; and 3) teachers who successfully exhibit third wave teacher leadership (Pounder, 2006; Silva et al., 2000) under the structural constraints imposed by the current context of accountability may be able to do so because they have moved through the U process, whereas teachers whose leadership and innovation is suppressed by structural constraints perhaps have not experienced presencing and are therefore not able to produce not-yet-embodied knowledge.

Research Questions

In order to explore teacher leaders' lived experiences of negotiating the constraints of accountability, I was guided by the following questions:

- How do teacher leaders (TLs) perceive and describe their experience of teacher leadership?
- How do the pressures of accountability policies such as NCLB or Race to

the Top figure in teacher leaders' lived experiences?

- What constraints on their leadership do teacher leaders perceive?
- What are teacher leaders' perceptions of supports/mediating factors that enable them to demonstrate leadership?
- What strategies do teacher leaders employ to negotiate structural constraints on teacher leadership?
- What similarities and/or differences are there in the experiences of TLs who have left the classroom versus those who have stayed?

Significance of the Study

This study contributes to the knowledge base on teacher leadership by furthering our understanding of the experience of teacher leadership in high-poverty, high-minority schools experiencing increased surveillance due to accountability policies. The existing research tells us what teacher leaders do and how they do it but too often does not seek to understand the inner sources of teacher leadership, the experiences of the teacher leaders. Understanding more about the inner sources of teacher leadership may be helpful to teacher educators, school leaders, policy makers and teacher leaders themselves.

Definitions of Terms

Terms Related to Foucault

Disciplinary power (Foucault, 1977a) refers to the use of disciplinary practices such as enclosure (containing people, keeping groups of people

separated from one another), partitioning (assignment of specific, defined spaces to individuals), rank (identifies people by their location in a network of relationships) and observation (an individual watches the behavior of other individuals) to manage the behavior of individuals through the use of social norms and public opinion. According to Foucault (1977a), disciplinary power emerged out of political and economic conditions that required people to be both individually strong and at the same time obedient to the collective political will. With the end of feudal society and the rise of more democratic forms of government that required people to follow abstract principles rather than sovereign individuals, society began to depend on disciplinary power to control the behavior of the masses rather than personal power. Disciplinary power depends on *hierarchical relationships, hierarchical pyramids of observation, normalizing judgment and technologies of surveillance*. For example, schools and universities, as Anderson & Grinberg (1998) argue, exercise disciplinary power through dictating the study of certain content and through the normalization of the behavior of students, faculty and staff.

Hierarchical relationships place one individual in a position such that he/she may observe the behavior of several others and *hierarchical pyramids of observation* arrange hierarchical relationships in such a way as to ensure that someone is also observing the behavior of each supervisor. These systems sustain the effects of power and coerce *compliance* through *visibility*. Individuals

comply with the rules and standards set for them because their behavior is *visible* to others and failing to comply would result in negative social or professional consequences.

Normalizing judgment (Foucault, 1977a) is a means of establishing that which is and is not punished or rewarded. Normalizing judgment is “an order defined by natural and observable processes: the duration of an apprenticeship, the time taken to perform an exercise, the level of aptitude refer to a regularity that is also a rule” (Foucault, 1977a, p. 179). Acceptable ranges of behavior and performance are established along a continuum from good to evil. The quality of behavior or performance can then be quantified and assigned a rank or grade. “The distribution according to ranks or grade has a double role: it marks the gaps, hierarchizes qualities, skills and aptitudes; but it also punishes and rewards” (Foucault, 1977a, p. 181). By establishing norms that are assumed to be right and true, and then ranking individuals according to those norms, normalizing judgment “imposes homogeneity; but it individualizes by making it possible to measure gaps, to determine levels, to fix specialties and to render the differences useful by fitting them one to another” (Foucault, 1977a, p. 184). The process of normalizing judgment determines who is located at the margins of society, who succeeds in meeting expectations and who does not. As it is constructed today, schooling can be seen entirely as a process of normalizing judgment. Structures that provide for the monitoring of subjects in such a way as to create

the sensation that one is always being watched are known as *technologies of surveillance* (Bushnell, 2003).

The term *panopticism* (Foucault, 1977a) describes systems of continuous, unobtrusive observation, where all occupants are permanently under the watchful eye of others. Behavior is controlled not physically, but mentally, by setting up a system in which individuals are constantly aware of the supervisory gaze of others. Once the system is established, it functions as a machine, and individuals can move around within the system without disturbing its essential functions. Systems of power such as Foucault describes are made up of physical and mental structures that exert power over individuals. I refer to the exertion of power by systems rather than individuals as *structural forces*.

Constraining effects Merriam-Webster defines the verb constrain as “severely restrict the scope, extent, or activity of.” To say that something has a constraining effect, therefore, is to say that it severely restricts the scope, extent or activity of the thing in question, in this case teacher leadership. I use the term *constraining effects* to refer to the negative impact of certain policies and organizational structures on the scope, extent or activity of teacher leadership.

Agency is the felt or perceived capacity of an individual to act.

Sanctions Merriam-Webster defines a sanction as a threatened penalty for disobeying a law or rule. In the context of school accountability policy, sanctions are penalties that schools and school districts face for not meeting the

expectations set out by the policy. Some examples of sanctions that public schools have faced under No Child Left Behind include allowing parents to choose to transfer their children to another school, requiring schools to provide supplemental educational services to students, replacing school staff and complete school restructuring.

Social isolation Dictionary.com defines social isolation as “a state or process in which persons, groups or cultures lose or do not have communication or cooperation with one another, often resulting in open conflict.”

Discourse about the nature of teaching Merriam-Webster defines *discourse* as “formal and orderly and usually extended expression of thought on a subject.” *Discourse about the nature of teaching*, therefore, refers to the formal, extended expression of thought on the subject of the nature of teaching as it appears in literature and the media.

Terms Related to Teacher Leadership

First wave teacher leadership construed teacher leadership as a specific set of roles within the structural hierarchy of schools (Pounder, 2006; Silva et al., 2000). Examples of first wave teacher leadership roles include union representative, department head and lead teacher (Pounder, 2006; Silva et al., 2000). First wave teacher leadership roles place teachers in positions of hierarchical authority over other teachers, turning them into middle managers who tell other teachers what to do (Pounder, 2006; Silva et al., 2000). In

response to the perceived limitations of first wave teacher leadership, *second wave teacher leadership* roles were developed (Pounder, 2006; Silva, et al., 2000). New, formally established positions were created for teacher leaders that kept an instructional focus and placed value on teachers' professional knowledge and skills (Pounder, 2006; Silva et al., 2000). Examples of second wave teacher leadership positions include instructional coach, curriculum developer, and staff developer (Pounder, 2006; Silva et al., 2000).

Third wave teacher leadership is conceptualized as being a part of the day-to-day work of teaching, rather than a separate position that a teacher moves into (Pounder, 2006; Silva, et al., 2000). It builds on the ideals of professionalism and collegiality rather than efficiency and control (Pounder, 2006; Silva, et al., 2000). Pounder (2006) identifies some of the elements of third wave teacher leadership found in the literature as: exemplary classroom practice combined with an ability to navigate the structures of school, encourage change, question the status quo, develop and maintain relationships with other teachers and foster similar skills and dispositions in others.

Terms Related to Theory U

Groupthink Senge, Scharmer, Jaworski & Flowers (2005) define *groupthink* as “the continual, albeit subtle, censoring of honesty and authenticity in a team” (p. 27). I use the term *groupthink* to describe the tendency of members

of a group to avoid challenging the shared norms and shared ways of thinking of the group.

Theory of the U refers to a theory of personal and organizational change developed by Peter Senge, Otto Scharmer, Joseph Jaworski and Betty Sue Flowers (Jaworski & Scharmer, 2000; Scharmer, 2000; Scharmer et al., 2000; Senge et al., 2005). The theory is named after the shape of the movement through different depths of perception and levels of action that is described as follows: According to the theory of the U, individuals or organizations first must move down through an observing phase to a phase of retreat and reflection and then up into a phase of action.

Sensing is described as “tuning in to emerging patterns that inform future possibilities” (Scharmer et al., 2002, p. 14).

Suspending is a term derived from the work of Francisco Varela. Senge et al (2005) describe the act of suspending as becoming aware of our habitual ways of thinking and perceiving so as to be able to lessen their influence over us.

Presencing is “accessing one’s inner sources of creativity and will” (Scharmer et al., 2002, p. 14)

Merriam-Webster defines *realizing* as “bringing into concrete existence.” In the context of the theory of the U, *realizing* refers to the phase of the U process when individuals work to enact new possible realities that they have discovered through presencing.

Merriam-Webster defines *vision* as “a thought, concept or object formed by the imagination.” I use the term *vision* to refer to an individual’s imagined concept of a future possible reality. A *vision* is one’s idea of a possible future reality that one strives to enact.

Self-transcending knowledge is defined as “the ability to sense and presence the emerging opportunities, to see the coming-into-being of the new” (Scharmer, 2001).

Not-yet embodied knowledge is another term for the same concept. In other words, self-transcending knowledge or not-yet-embodied knowledge is knowledge of what is about to be, as opposed to what already is.

Self/self In the context of the theory of the U, *self* with a lower case ‘s’ refers to one’s historical self, while *Self* with a capital ‘S’ refers to one’s highest future possibility (Scharmer, 2009b; Senge et al., 2005).

Summary

In this chapter, I have argued that accountability policies constitute a form of surveillance that in many cases serves to suppress teachers’ leadership from within the classroom for the benefit of students. This suppression of teacher leadership is consistent with Michel Foucault’s (1977a, 1977b) theory of panopticism. In contrast, I have argued that another theoretical construct, the Theory of the U (Scharmer, 2009b; Senge et al., 2005) may explain why some teachers succeed in exhibiting leadership under conditions of accountability. I

have also argued that in order to explore the Theory of the U as a theoretical basis for teacher leadership under conditions of surveillance, it is necessary to research teacher leaders' experience. In the coming chapters, I will review the literature on teacher leadership, expand on the theoretical basis for this research and review related bodies of research on the effects of accountability policy and teacher turnover in high-poverty, low-achieving schools. I will then explain the importance of my use of phenomenology as philosophy and method and outline my proposed research method.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The existing literature relevant to this study comes from several bodies of knowledge. In this chapter, I review the existing literature related to teacher leadership. I then contextualize this study of teacher leadership by presenting a theoretical framework that situates contradictions in our knowledge of teacher leadership under conditions of surveillance as a juxtaposition between Foucault's notion of panopticism and Scharmer's Theory U. I then review the existing literature about equity and accountability policies in the United States and their impact on the practice of teacher leadership. Finally, I examine the literature on teacher turnover in high-poverty, low-achieving schools and how that turnover is exacerbated by or mediated by structural forces such as accountability policy and school culture.

Teacher Leadership

Two recent large-scale reviews of the literature on teacher leadership (Harris & Muijs, 2003; York-Barr & Duke, 2004) reveal a number of themes from the body of research. First, much of the literature on teacher leadership focuses on providing a rationale for teacher leadership as a practice (Harris & Muijs, 2003; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). The benefits of teacher leadership include

improved teacher morale and motivation and increased teacher self-efficacy, as well as professional growth and development for the teacher leaders themselves (Harris & Muijs, 2003; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). A second finding of these reviews is that there are multiple ways of defining teacher leadership. Both reviews (Harris & Muijs, 2003; York-Barr & Duke, 2004) conclude that there are significant structural barriers to teacher leadership, but also that there are supporting forces that increase the potential for teacher leadership. Definitions of teacher leadership and the research supporting the existence of structural barriers and supporting forces are discussed below.

Defining Teacher Leadership

Silva, Gimbert and Nolan (2000) describe the evolution of the concept of teacher leadership as having three waves. In its early form, or first wave, teacher leadership was primarily conceived of as a leadership position that teachers took on, with chiefly supervisory duties (Pounder, 2006; Silva, Gimbert & Nolan, 2000). In the second wave, teacher leadership was still conceived of as a specific role but with more of an instructional focus (Pounder, 2006; Silva, et al., 2000). In the third wave, a shift has occurred and teacher leadership is most recently conceptualized as a process rather than as a position (Pounder, 2006; Silva, et al., 2000). For the purposes of this study, it is third wave teacher leadership that is of interest. Specifically, I am defining teacher leadership as York-Barr and Duke (2004) do: "Teacher leadership is 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” (p. 287-288).

This definition of teacher leadership implies a focus on instruction, however across the literature teacher leadership has been defined to include a variety of leadership roles and responsibilities. Teacher leadership is construed to include instructionally-focused tasks such as providing professional development, leading study groups, continuously reflecting upon and improving their own practice, conducting action research and mentoring and coaching colleagues (Harris & Muijs, 2003). On the other hand, teacher leadership has also been described as including more administrative tasks, such as participating in site-based decision making, serving on committees, serving as department chair or participating in the evaluation of colleagues (Harris & Muijs, 2003). Some authors construe teacher leadership as a bridge between administration and teachers, with teacher leaders taking on responsibility for some instructional leadership tasks so that administrators can focus their efforts in other areas (Andrews & Crowther, 2006; Camburn, Rowan & Taylor, 2003; Chew & Andrews, 2010; Harris & Muijs, 2003). Overall, however, York-Barr and Duke (2004) found in their review of twenty years of research that teacher leadership efforts are most likely to produce positive effects on student learning when focused on improving practice at the classroom level rather than on decision making at the organizational level.

Barriers to Teacher Leadership

Regardless of the definition used, research on teacher leadership has uncovered a number of barriers that teacher leaders face. One significant barrier identified in York-Barr and Duke's (2004) review of the literature is that the established norms of the teaching profession encourage isolation and individualism and discourage hierarchical advancement of some teachers over others. Thus teachers who assume leadership roles can face significant resistance from colleagues (Chew & Andrews, 2010; Firestone & Martinez, 2007; Harris & Muijs, 2003; Hatch, White & Faigenbaum, 2005; Smylie & Denny, 1990; York-Barr & Duke, 2004).

Another set of barriers uncovered by York-Barr and Duke (2004) center around the structure of schools. Teacher leaders struggle to overcome structural barriers such as lack of time for leadership activities, lack of access to colleagues for collaboration and lack of incentives for participating in leadership activities. The top-down organizational structure of schools is also a barrier to teacher leadership (Harris & Muijs, 2003; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Unless principals and others in supervisory roles are willing to share or delegate power to teacher leaders to enact change, teachers have little authority (Harris & Muijs, 2003).

Hierarchical, Compartmentalized Structures

Teacher leaders working in roles that give them hierarchical authority over other teachers face a number of challenges to the ideal of improved student

outcomes. Teachers assuming roles of hierarchical authority over other teachers often encounter resistance from colleagues. For example, in de Lima's (2008) study of two schools with explicit distributed leadership roles for teachers, department heads had little influence over their peers in terms of developing a culture of instructional collaboration. Ghamrawi (2010) studied the influence of department heads in three high achieving private schools in Lebanon. She found that hierarchical power relations between department heads and classroom teachers tended to stifle teacher leadership.

In Hatch, White and Faigenbaum's (2005) in-depth study of four third wave teacher leaders, the teacher leaders actively avoided the appearance of hierarchical authority over other teachers, even when their position afforded them that authority. The authors write, "all the teachers we studied actively pursue a variety of strategies to downplay their accomplishments and, essentially, to maintain the diminished status common to most teachers" (p.1024). In other words, the teacher leaders felt that equal status was critical to maintaining the relationships with other teachers that afforded them influence.

Feeney's (2009) phenomenological case study of five high school department heads in a single school found that department heads' perception of leadership focused on managerial activities rather than on developing the instructional or leadership capacity of other teachers. Feeney concludes, "managerial priorities currently dominate the daily work of department leaders. A

focus on curriculum and student learning is critically missing, which indicates that teacher collaboration and learning are not priorities, compared to the completion of non-instructional tasks” (p.216).

Even when teachers participate in instructionally focused leadership activities, their influence can be limited by the top-down decision making structures of schools. For example, while Cannata, McCrory, Sykes, Anagnostopoulos & Frank’s (2010) quantitative survey study of National Board Certified Teachers (NBCTs) found that teachers holding National Board Certification participated in leadership activities in the school and district at higher rates than non-NBCTs, they also found that the increased leadership activity did not result in the NBCTs perceiving any increased influence over school-wide decision making.

A number of studies have found that the structure of schools interferes with teacher leadership by limiting time and opportunity for teachers to work together (Virginia Davidhizar Birky, Shelton & Headley, 2006; Firestone & Martinez, 2007; A. Harris & Muijs, 2003; Smylie & Denny, 1990; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Birky, Shelton and Headley’s (2006) study sought to discover factors that encourage and discourage teacher leadership. They found that the practice of isolating teachers from one another was a significant limiting factor. Firestone and Martinez (2007) studied teacher leaders in four schools across three districts involved in a math and science reform initiative. The participants

reported significant challenges in finding time for leadership work in the face of other responsibilities.

Socially Constructed Meanings

Sometimes it is the teacher leader's own understanding of the role that interferes with the effective practice of leadership. A seminal study by Smylie and Denny (1990) exposed the limiting nature of teacher beliefs about power. The authors found patterns of beliefs in both teacher leaders' and teachers' responses that valued teaching as a private activity and that maintained a single, hierarchical level for all teachers. Teachers serving in leadership roles were anxious to distance themselves from administration but despite their efforts were often seen as administrators by fellow teachers. The authors conclude that significant barriers to teacher leadership exist based on teachers' own notions of how power is distributed in schools. This has been born out in more recent research. For example, Scribner, Paredes and Bradley-Levine (2010) studied teacher leadership in a small, urban high school and found that even though the school was implementing a reform model that provided a structure for distributed leadership, teachers themselves constructed meanings of leadership based on hierarchical roles, content area expertise and gender rather than on leadership activities associated with the reform.

In the absence of the formal authority granted to principals and other administrators, teacher leaders depend on positive relationships with other

teachers in order to do their work (Firestone & Martinez, 2007; Ghamrawi, 2010; Hatch et al., 2005). The absence of trusting relationships with other teachers is frequently cited as a barrier to teacher leadership (Firestone & Martinez, 2007; Harris & Muijs, 2003; Muijs & Harris, 2007; York-Barr & Duke, 2004).

Conditions that Support Teacher Leadership

Collegial School Cultures

Research has repeatedly found that collegial school cultures support the practice of teacher leadership (Chew & Andrews, 2010; Ghamrawi, 2010; Harris & Muijs, 2003; Muijs & Harris, 2007; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Ghamrawi (2010) found that trusting relationships, respect, collegiality, equality and leaving space for teacher autonomy were crucial aspects of supporting and nurturing teacher leadership. She writes, “teachers must be granted sufficient autonomy to innovate and flourish, free of excessive bureaucratic control and surveillance of subject leaders” (p. 311). Muijs and Harris (2007) studied and compared three schools that demonstrated three different levels of practice of teacher leadership. They found that the differences between the school with a high degree of teacher leadership and those with less practice of teacher leadership were a function of three factors: a supportive culture, structures such as professional development that promoted teacher leadership and the degree of trust among the staff. The culture of the high teacher leadership school, which also happened to serve a high-poverty student population, provided an encouraging environment for

teachers in which they felt safe to take risks, such as undertaking action research or revising curriculum.

Principal Support and Encouragement

Principals and administrative support are a critical factor in fostering teacher leadership (Beachum & Dentith, 2004; Birky et al., 2006; Chew & Andrews, 2010; Harris & Muijs, 2003; Hatch et al., 2005; Mangin, 2007; Muijs & Harris, 2007; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Chew and Andrews (2010) studied schools in Australia and Singapore implementing a reform model based on the concept of parallel leadership, where teachers and principals share leadership of the school by differentiating between pedagogical leadership that is left to teacher leaders and meta-strategic leadership that is the purview of principals. The study's findings emphasized the importance of principal facilitation to support and nurture teacher leadership. In Beachum and Dentith's (2004) study of schools that nurtured teacher leadership, administrators put structures in place that allowed teachers to take risks and make decisions without having to seek prior approval.

Birky et al (2006) found that principals supported teacher leadership by giving verbal support, encouragement and thanks, by demonstrating a spirit of collaboration and by supporting risk taking and collaboration. Mangin (2007) specifically studied principal interactions with teacher leaders in fifteen elementary schools to examine how principal knowledge of teacher leader roles

influenced those interactions. The study showed that the teacher leaders perceived principals who had more knowledge of the teacher leader role and had more high-quality interactions with the teacher leader as more supportive.

Theoretical Framework

Theoretical Constraints: Foucault and Disciplinary Power

The idea that policies and practices frequently utilized in the name of accountability constrain the practice of teacher leadership is supported by the theories of Michel Foucault (1977a). Foucauldian theory says that the tools of disciplinary power, such as sanctions, hierarchical relationships and social isolation, act as a kind of machinery that allows those in power to maintain control. Furthermore, the exercise of disciplinary power reduces the incidence of individual resistance (personal agency) by using a variety of structures to illuminate individual behavior.

According to Foucault (1977a), hierarchical relationships exist as a means of controlling the behavior of large numbers of people through observation. Hierarchical observation enables a few to observe many, and in turn ensures that the observers are also observed. Through the construction of hierarchical pyramids of observation, systems are created that sustain the effects of power, coercing compliance through visibility. The hierarchical system of observation makes it possible for disciplinary power to be:

Organized as a multiple, automatic and anonymous power; for although surveillance rests on individuals, its functioning is that of a network of

relations from top to bottom, but also to a certain extent from bottom to top and laterally; this network 'holds' the whole together and traverses it in its entirety with effects of power that derive from one another: supervisors, perpetually supervised. (Foucault, 1977a, p. 176-177)

With the development of disciplinary power and the extension of mechanisms of punishment comes normalizing judgment, a means of establishing that which is and is not punished or rewarded. Acceptable ranges of behavior and performance are established along a continuum from good to evil. The quality of behavior or performance can then be quantified and assigned a rank or grade accordingly. "The distribution according to ranks or grade has a double role: it marks the gaps, hierarchizes qualities, skills and aptitudes; but it also punishes and rewards" (Foucault, 1977a). By establishing norms that are assumed to be right and true, and then ranking individuals according to those norms, normalizing judgment "imposes homogeneity; but it individualizes by making it possible to measure gaps, to determine levels, to fix specialties and to render the differences useful by fitting them one to another" (Foucault, 1977a, p. 184). The process of normalizing judgment determines who is located at the margins of society, who succeeds in meeting expectations and who does not.

When leadership positions are created for teachers that are seen as effective, as in first wave teacher leadership (Pounder, 2006), it gives some teachers relational power over others. However, this relational power can create barriers to the exercise of teacher leadership, as Smylie and Denny (1990) noted

in their case study of first wave teacher leaders. Regardless of their position in the hierarchy, however, teachers and school administrators are all caught in the machinery of institutionalized disciplinary power.

The term panopticism refers to structures that allow for those in power to observe and control the behavior of subjects from a distance, without being observed themselves. Foucault calls structures that allow such observation “technologies of surveillance” and says that these technologies suppress individual resistance and create conditions in which people become willing participants in their own subjugation. Foucault uses the image of Jeremy Bentham’s panopticon as a metaphor for the way that technologies of surveillance operate in social institutions such as prisons and schools. Bentham’s panopticon was a building with a central tower surrounded by cells that radiated outward. Through the strategic placement of windows and use of backlighting, a single guard could turn and watch all the prisoners without being seen. The structure of the panopticon is such that it sustains the illusion of surveillance, even when no one is watching.

For Foucault, the image of the panopticon illustrates how disciplinary power as a system operates by de-emphasizing the power of individuals and replacing it with positional power. The person standing in the tower has relational power over those in the cells, because he or she is able to observe without being observed. As long as the structure of power exists, it does not matter who

occupies the various positions, the power remains in place. Behavior is controlled not physically, but mentally, by setting up a system in which individuals are constantly aware of the supervisory gaze of others. Through the effects of this perpetual supervisory gaze, the subjects themselves begin to monitor their own behavior and the behavior of others. Once the system is established, it functions as a machine, and individuals can move around within the system without disturbing its essential functions. Panopticism is thereby a relatively stable form of disciplinary power, difficult to disrupt because of its machinery. Foucault (1977b) writes, "It's a machine in which everyone is caught, those who exercise power just as much as those over whom it is exercised" (p. 156).

The current policy context presents a new set of challenges to third wave teacher leadership, by imposing additional structural barriers to teacher agency through increased surveillance and by instituting centralized, top-down efforts to encourage specific kinds of leadership activities for teachers (Little, 2003). Policies such as NCLB construct systems of accountability that keep teachers under continuous surveillance by the public eye. Such policies serve to institutionalize disciplinary power, taking the supervisory power out of the hands of individual school leaders and making the supervision more of a collective process. Often, teachers become complicit in their own subordination. For example, in Bushnell's (2003) study, some of the teachers simply worked within the constraints imposed by the systems of surveillance. Bushnell argues that

most teacher resistance is superficial in nature and even when successful it only gives the illusion of power, without actually challenging the existing power structure. For example, in a review of literature on site-based councils, Malen (1999) found that teachers often resist challenging the taken-for-granted order of things in schools and will in fact censure one another for raising contentious issues.

Theoretical Supports: Theory U

There are, on the other hand, organizational theorists (Morgan, 1998; Scharmer, 2000, 2001, 2009a, 2009b, 2010; Scharmer et al., 2000; Senge, Scharmer, Jaworski & Flowers, 2004; Senge et al., 2005) who present theories that may explain how some teacher leaders are able to successfully negotiate the structural constraints posited by Foucault. Like Foucault, Senge, Scharmer, Jaworski & Flowers (2005) acknowledge the power of normalizing judgment, likening this process to the human immune system: “The mainstream culture of an organization is often toxic to the innovators it spawns. And when the organizational immune system kicks in, innovators often find themselves ignored, ostracized, or worse” (p. 30). This metaphor is supported by studies such as Achinstein & Ogawa’s (2006) comparative case study of two beginning teachers who experienced alienation due to their resistance to a prescribed curriculum.

Morgan (1998), like Foucault, compares the bureaucratic organizational structure typical of schools today to a machine, designed to work through the interaction of a network of highly standardized parts that have clearly defined roles and follow distinct patterns of authority. According to Morgan (1998), this type of organization is effective only in situations where tasks are relatively simple and repetitive, with little chance of changing conditions. Morgan sees the most significant drawback of the machine model to be its dehumanizing effect. Because this model of organization treats people as interchangeable parts, it leaves no room for individual decision-making or innovation. The more machine-like the organizational structure, the less likely it is that the organization will be able to adapt to change. Morgan says of mechanistic organizations, “their highly centralized systems of control tend to make them slow and ineffective in dealing with changing circumstances” (Morgan, 1998, p. 51).

Senge et al. (2005) describe the difficulty that innovators have within mechanistic organizations as “the voice of judgment” (Ray, as cited in Senge et al, 2005). According to Senge et al. (2005) the voice of judgment, or “groupthink” is the tendency to suppress ideas that challenge the status quo, or the taken-for-granted ways of seeing the world that Foucault (1977b) refers to as discourse. Senge et al. (2005) refer to the process of learning to see beyond the discourse as “suspending” and they argue that suspending is the first step of an organizational phenomenon that they call the theory of the U.

Morgan (1998) likewise theorizes the importance of learning to see the ideas that imprison us. He uses the metaphor of Plato's cave to illustrate the fact that "while organizations may be socially constructed realities, these constructions often have attributed to them an existence and power of their own that allow them to exercise a measure of control over their creators" (p. 182). In Plato's allegory of the cave (as cited in Morgan, 1998), prisoners are chained in a cave with their backs to a fire, facing the cave wall. The fire casts shadows on the wall, and the prisoners believe these shadows to be reality. If one prisoner were to escape the cave and go out into the world, should he return to the cave his perception would be forever altered, and he would no longer be able to relate to the cave prisoners in a way that they could understand.

Morgan points out that this is often the case in organizations as well. When someone begins to experience reality differently from the way it is generally understood within an organization, that person's ideas are often perceived as dangerous, leading others to cling more tightly to their accustomed ways of being. Morgan (1998) calls these accustomed ways "favored ways of thinking" and describes how these favored ways (Foucault's [1977b] notion of discourse) imprison people and organizations in the status quo, preventing change and innovation.

The theory of transitional phenomena (Morgan, 1998) offers some insight into how change agents can successfully deal with the problems associated with

avored ways of thinking. The theory of transitional phenomena says that in order to be willing to give up something that is highly valued, people must find something of value to replace it with. Successful change agents do not try to take away valued beliefs or structures without allowing people time to reflect on new ideas and develop new, individually held values. Morgan (1998) puts it this way, “in situations of voluntary change the person doing the changing must be in control of the process, for change ultimately hinges on questions of identity and the problematic relation between me and not-me” (p. 203). In one study, the teacher leaders in Hatch, White & Faigenbaum’s (2005) study exemplified an understanding of the importance of allowing teachers to control their own change, rather than have someone else act as an expert and tell them what to do. Emily Wolk, for example, “invites the teachers to watch her and help her deal with a problem she is having, only gradually moving to examine jointly the practice of her colleague” (Hatch et al., 2005, p. 1008). Wolk said, “What I provide is a colleague to bounce ideas off of” (Hatch et al., 2005, p. 1008). For example, in one situation:

A veteran colleague told Wolk that she had run out of ideas for teaching reading and literature. They worked on lessons together, attended relevant trainings, and developed a new set of teaching strategies particularly suited to the needs of her weakest readers. (Hatch et al., 2005, p. 1008)

In scaffolding a colleague to find her own solutions to her perceived problems, this teacher leader demonstrates an understanding of the importance of allowing teachers to control the process of change.

The theory of the U (Scharmer, 2009b; Senge et al., 2005) suggests an explanation for how individuals experience this type of voluntary change, as well as possibilities for encouraging such voluntary change. The theory of the U describes a process that individuals and groups go through as they move towards a view of institutions not as machines but as living parts of an interconnected organic system. The theory, based on the authors' firsthand experiences as researchers (in the fields of organizational theory, English literature and leadership), activists and entrepreneurs, but also on more than 150 interviews of innovators and entrepreneurs from science, business and social fields, proposes that individuals and institutions can make major shifts in thinking and doing, abandoning the existing discourse and creating new discourses, if you will, by moving through the U process.

The U theory has three phases: *sensing*, or moving down the U, *presencing*, at the bottom of the U, and *realizing*, or moving up the U. The sensing phase begins with suspending, or learning to see beyond the established patterns of behavior. In this phase, Senge et al. state, "people are more likely to feel unsettled than empowered" (p. 34). The next part of sensing involves realizing that one is a part of a system and that one has a role in creating that

system. This realization helps people to start to see that they themselves have a role in changing the system that they help to create and sustain. According to Senge et al. this shift in thinking from “they” to “we” is critical in forming vision. “Only when people begin to see from within the forces that shape their reality and to see their part in how those forces might evolve does vision become powerful” (Senge et al., 2005, p. 106). In the theory of the U, visions are tools that help us to focus on what we are trying to accomplish. The authors say that “the power of some visions over others comes from their source, not their sentiment- and from our ability to continually reconnect with that source” (Senge et al., 2005, p.113). According to this theory, an inner source of vision, along with an understanding of the system that they are a part of and their role in that system, could help teacher leaders move beyond the structural constraints that they face, overcoming the effects of surveillance and disciplinary judgment.

At the bottom of the U, presencing occurs. Presencing is described as a sort of transformational awareness, a “call to give ourselves to something larger than ourselves, and to become what we were meant to become” (Senge et al., 2005, p. 177). According to the U theory, presencing is a necessary precursor to realizing new possibilities, or moving up the U. In order to innovate, to enact new discourses, people and institutions must move down the U, through presencing, and then up the U. Presencing is where Foucault’s theory and the theory of the U diverge. In a Foucauldian view, individual action is relatively impotent.

Collective action and a shift in public opinion are required in order to change the prevailing discourse. Theory U provides an explanation of how this collective action can begin with an individual experiencing presence.

The U process is grounded in a new way of thinking about organizations and knowledge. According to Scharmer (2009b), our current global context demands that individuals and organizations adapt rapidly to ever changing conditions. In order to do this, we must move beyond thinking of knowledge as a thing that can be stored and retrieved, and even beyond thinking of knowledge as something that is created through human interaction. Moving through the U process allows for the possibility of creating what Scharmer (2001; 2009b) refers to as not-yet embodied knowledge, or self-transcending knowledge. Self-transcending knowledge is defined as “the ability to sense and presence the emerging opportunities, to see the coming-into-being of the new” (Scharmer, 2001). Like Foucault, Senge et al. (2005) see institutions as prisons:

We’re all in the bowels of this giant machine, the modern global economy, being used as instruments to serve its ends. We create the machine collectively, but we feel trapped individually. We’ve shifted the burden so much to the machine that we don’t see a lot of options, even though they may really be there (p. 185).

However, they theorize the U as a way out of the self-imprisonment, a vehicle for personal agency. “The core of presencing is waking up together- waking up to who we really are by linking with and acting from our highest future Self- and by

using the Self as a vehicle for bringing forth new worlds” (p. 186). Scharmer (2009b) discusses the distinction between the self and the Self:

One self is the person or community we have become as a result of a journey that took place in the past. The other self is the person or community we can become as we journey into the future. It is our highest future possibility. People sometimes refer to the first self using a lowercase “s” and to the second self with a capital “S.” When these two selves talk to each other, you experience the essence of presencing. (p. 41)

Theoretically, then, once teacher leaders suspend and become aware of the taken-for-granted notions that tend to imprison, they may have the opportunity to sense their role in creating reality and can develop a vision that will help bring forth a new reality, free from the constraints of the imprisoning structures. In fact, Andrews and Crowther (2006) studied teacher leadership in the context of Australian school reform and referred to something akin to self-transcending knowledge in defining their concept of neopedagogy:

Teaching enhances the lives of children through the creation of new knowledge, the assertion of sustainable values, and the development of futures-oriented capabilities. Neopedagogy derives from the power of teachers’ collective engagement in processes of holistic school development and the realization in their workplaces of their talents and gifts as individual professionals. (p.18)

This collective engagement of teachers that leads to what Andrews and Crowther (2006) term neopedagogy is what the theory of the U refers to as presencing.

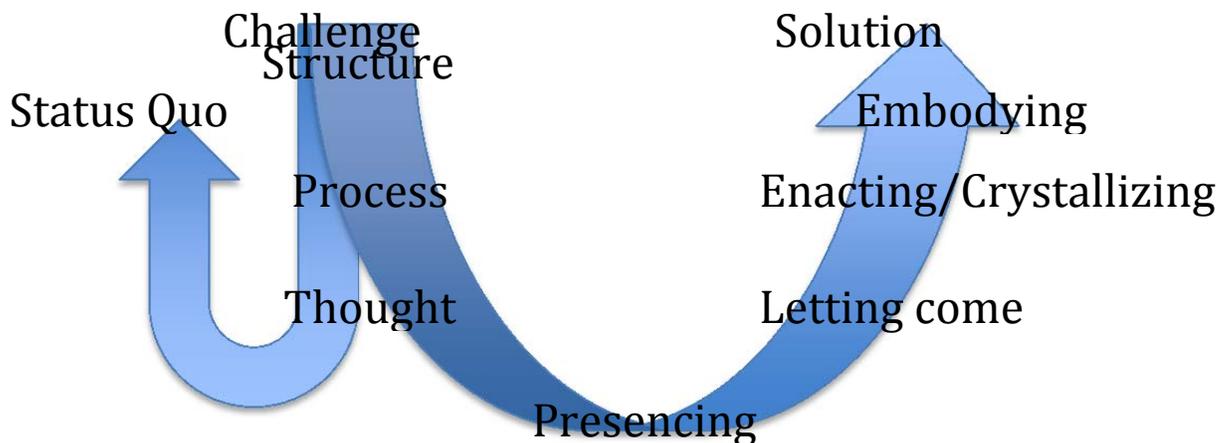
Scharmer's (2009b) conception of leadership emphasizes the importance of the Self as a leadership tool that enables individuals and organizations to focus on the "inner place from which they operate or the *source* from which all their actions originate" (p. 7, italics in original). In order to study this kind of leadership, Scharmer (2009b) argues, we must move beyond studying what leaders do and how they do it (product and process of leadership) and begin to look at the sources of individuals' leadership, what he calls the blank canvas perspective or the blind spot (Scharmer, 2009b, 2010; Scharmer, et al., 2000).

Foucault and Theory U agree that individuals exist in a structure, that they may become aware of that structure, and that individuals can think about dealing with the perceived challenge. However, in the Foucauldian model, individuals determine that they are unable to resolve the structural challenges presented and assimilate to the existing structure, becoming complicit in their own subjugation. In the Theory U model, individuals experience presencing. They see themselves as part of a living system that is capable of change, and they move forward to let new possibilities emerge, crystallize those possibilities into action and create new ways of being.

Figure 1 suggests two paths, one leading to successful leadership and innovation (Theory U) and the other remaining within existing ways of doing things (Foucault). Therefore, in theory, teachers who successfully exhibit third wave teacher leadership under the structural constraints imposed by the current

context of accountability may be able to do so because they have moved through the U process, whereas teachers whose leadership and innovation is suppressed by structural constraints perhaps have not experienced presencing and are therefore not able to produce not-yet-embodied knowledge.

Figure 1. Diverging Theories of Leadership and Change



Historical Context of Equity and Accountability Policies in the U.S

The landmark Supreme Court decision of *Brown v. the Board of Education of Topeka* ("Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka," 1954) first raised the issue of educational equity in the United States (Talbert-Johnson, 2004). With this decision, the court promised all students in public schools, regardless of race, ethnicity, language or disability, equal access (Talbert-Johnson, 2004). While the *Brown* decision called attention to the disparities present between the education of white students and students of color, it also provided evidence to support the

argument that race explains differences in educational outcomes and made no effort to guarantee equal outcomes (Ladson-Billings, 2004).

With the publication of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983 (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) the standards movement emerged as the national reaction to the perceived need to improve educational outcomes for all American children (Kornhaber, 2004; Viteritti, 2004). The advent of widespread standardized testing to measure student achievement highlighted differences between the achievement of white students and their non-white peers. This “achievement gap” between white children and African-American children led to the adoption of additional language in subsequent federal reforms, such as the Educate America Act (1994) which stated that “the distribution of minority students in each quartile will more closely reflect the student population as a whole”.

The Demographic Imperative

Banks and Dilworth have used the term the “demographic imperative” as cited in Cochran-Smith, Davis & Fries (2004) to refer to the need to address deeply embedded inequities in the American educational system (Cochran-Smith et al., 2004). These inequities include the rapidly increasing numbers of students of color enrolled in public schools (Cochran-Smith et al., 2004; Cohen & Lotan, 2004; Talbert-Johnson, 2004), the fact that public schools are becoming increasingly segregated (Cohen & Lotan, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 2004; Talbert-

Johnson, 2004) and the significant overlap between schools serving large numbers of children of color and schools serving large numbers of children living in poverty (Cohen & Lotan, 2004; Darling-Hammond, 2004; Kim & Sunderman, 2005). Additionally, schools serving large numbers of students of color and students living in poverty tend to exhibit lower student achievement (Farkas, 2003; Harris, 2007; Talbert-Johnson, 2004).

This imperative to increase student achievement (particularly minority student achievement) as measured by standardized tests culminated in the current authorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, known as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). NCLB was signed into law in January 2002 (Fusarelli, 2004; Hursh, 2007). This legislation established a set of standards for public school accountability that states must follow in order to receive federal funds. Under NCLB, states must test all students in grades 3-8 annually in reading and math and report the results of these tests to the public and the federal government. Furthermore, the states must report test results for each student subgroup (e.g., economically disadvantaged, ethnicity, English language learners and special education). Schools and districts that fail to meet the established target mean score each year for every subgroup face sanctions in the form of withdrawal of federal funds, public school choice and restructuring or takeover (Fusarelli, 2004; Hursh, 2007). In practice, this policy means that

even high achieving schools can be labeled failing if one subgroup of students does not meet the target (Fusarelli, 2004).

The passage of NCLB has been hailed by many as a positive step toward achieving more equitable outcomes for historically underachieving students. Supporters of NCLB's provisions feel that holding educators and schools accountable for the achievement of all students ensures that the achievement (or lack thereof) of historically disadvantaged students is highly visible and therefore attended to (Fusarelli, 2004; Hursh, 2007; Rustique-Forrester, 2005; Viteritti, 2004). NCLB also encourages states to attend to the alignment of their curricula and testing programs with standards (Fusarelli, 2004) and has been praised for taking a systemic approach to school reform that is based on outcomes rather than inputs, which may result in better outcomes than have been achieved using less systematic, input-based reforms (Fusarelli, 2004). Finally, supporters argue that the provision of school choice gives parents of children stuck in failing schools due to economic circumstances a way out (Viteritti, 2004).

On the other hand, many have criticized NCLB for its reliance on high-stakes, mandatory standardized testing, the potential narrowing of the curriculum to focus only on those areas tested (reading and mathematics) and emphasis on basic skills rather than higher order thinking (Rustique-Forrester, 2005), and limiting access to high quality teachers (Clotfelter, Ladd, Vigdor & Diaz, 2004; Ng,

2006) all of which can be shown to inequitably impact poor students and students of color.

Assumptions Underlying the Standards Movement

A number of assumptions are embedded in the use of standards and accountability as a lever to raise the achievement of students of color and students living in poverty. One assumption is that standardized tests in and of themselves are a valid and reliable means of assessing student learning (Hursh, 2007; Kornhaber, 2004). Another assumption is that student achievement will improve if educators are held accountable for doing their jobs (Duffy, Giordano, Farrell, Paneque & Crump, 2008; Fusarelli, 2004; Leonardo, 2007). Finally, a critical assumption underlying the standards and accountability movements is that race no longer holds systemic significance and therefore success and failure are solely based on individual merit (Leonardo, 2007).

Standardized Testing as a Proxy for Learning

Kornhaber (2004) discusses the implications of high-stakes testing and accountability for equity education. She points out that the result of high-stakes testing is not increased learning but rather increased emphasis on test-taking.

Kornhaber says:

Lower-scoring schools tend to have weaker educational resources alongside higher proportions of students of color and students from poverty. In these schools, improving test scores will be a salient concern among educators, and narrow drill and test preparation will be much more common. (p. 101)

She also points out that while retention is often heralded as a positive means of increasing standards, retention actually has the effect of decreasing educational attainment for students who are retained. Finally, Kornhaber points out that a single measure should never be used to make important decisions about schools or students.

The Achievement Gap, NCLB and the Instantiation of Whiteness

The gap in achievement between poor students of color and white, middle-class students has been so well publicized that it has taken on a mythical quality. Beverly Cross (2007) explains how the story is told:

There is one prominent educational achievement gap that is an internal threat to the imminent, competitive advantage of the United States of America, and it resides in urban school districts. The threat is so large that it places the nation in danger of losing its leadership position more so than other educational gaps. This gap, no this threat, is one between the low educational achievement (e.g., grades, test scores, dropout rates, graduation rates, and so on) of poor children in urban schools, many of whom are children of color and linguistically diverse, and their suburban white, middle class counterparts who are intelligent and high achieving. (p. 247-248)

Cross (2007) goes on to argue that this emphasis on the achievement gap has resulted in taking the conversation away from discussing the structural inequities that led to the gap and has moved it to blaming the children themselves for their failure to achieve. Ladson-Billings (2006) likewise raises concerns about the ubiquitous nature of the achievement gap, stating that such a focus distracts us from paying attention to the underlying causes of the problem. According to

Ladson-Billings, these causes include long-term historical, economic, sociopolitical and moral debts owed by those in power, namely middle and upper class whites, to minority students. She argues that the educational debt “represents a portion of the debt service that teachers and administrators pay each year against what they might rightfully invest in helping students advance academically” (p. 9) and therefore it must be addressed or things will never improve.

Cross (2007) suggests that the discussion about the black/white achievement gap and the constant reminders that subgroups of students (made up predominantly of students of color) are performing less well on tests than white students serve as a powerful metaphor that further instantiates deeply held beliefs about the superiority of whites and the inferiority of people of color. She argues that the achievement gap metaphor allows us to avoid discussing race as a reason for lower achievement while maintaining the idea that white culture is superior and that privilege held by whites is earned.

Leonardo (2007) advances a similar argument about Whiteness, this time relating it specifically to NCLB. He argues that NCLB explicitly fails to acknowledge the institutionalized patterns of racism that led to the existing educational outcomes for poor and minority students, instead engaging in color-blindness by insisting that differences are caused by something other than race. Leonardo says “by ostensibly giving public schools a chance to show progress,

NCLB gives whiteness the license to declare students of color failures under a presumed-to-be fair system” (p.269). Thus students of color who fail can be assumed to have failed due to their own lack of merit, and the continued success and privilege of White students is secured.

The Achievement Gap as a Function of Teacher Quality

Talbert-Johnson (2004) highlights poor teacher quality as a major contributor to the achievement gap between middle-class, white students and working class students of color who attend urban schools in large numbers. Lack of access to sufficient numbers of well-trained, permanent teachers translate into larger classes and lack of access to quality teaching strategies and high level courses for urban youth. Farkas (2003) also identifies lack of access to highly skilled teachers and higher teacher turnover in low-performing schools as significant contributors to the black/white achievement gap.

Accountability Policies and Inequitable Impact

In his discussion of racially motivated factors that might explain why differences in achievement between white and non-white students actually increase during the public school years rather than decrease, Farkas (2003) cites lack of access to high quality teachers, lower teacher expectations, higher teacher turnover and weaker academic climates in schools serving higher proportions of students of color as important. Since these factors have been shown to be problematic for the achievement of students of color and students

living in poverty, how do accountability policies affect access to high quality teachers, teacher perceptions of schools serving these students and teacher turnover in high-minority, high-poverty schools? How do accountability policies affect access to rigorous curriculum?

Access to High-Quality Teachers and High Teacher Expectations

Studies by Clotfelter, Ladd, Vigdor and Diaz (2004) and Ng (2006) demonstrate that accountability policies result in limiting access to high quality teachers for students of color and students living in poverty. Clotfelter et al (2004) studied teacher retention patterns in North Carolina schools under a state accountability program that preceded NCLB. They tracked and compared two cohorts of teachers, one that consisted of all teachers teaching in low-performing schools two years prior to the accountability system and one that consisted of all the teachers teaching in low performing schools during the first year of the accountability program. Both cohorts were tracked over seven years. The study found that the low-performing schools had higher attrition rates after the accountability system than before for both experienced and new teachers. Additionally, both experienced and new teachers were even more likely to leave a school if it was officially labeled “low-performing.” Therefore, the effect of the accountability system on low-performing schools was to increase the number of teachers needing to be hired each year. The study further found that these

vacancies were more likely to be filled with novice teachers than were vacancies in higher performing schools.

Ng (2006) studied pre-service teachers to find out how accountability policies affect their decisions about where to teach. The qualitative, interview study of twenty pre-service teachers, all of whom stated a desire to “make a difference,” found that the pre-service teachers “were reluctant to teach in urban schools where they anticipated the perpetual demands of standardized testing and high-stakes accountability would dominate the personification of their role” (p.370). The pre-service teachers perception of negative influences of NCLB on teachers in urban schools included less teacher decision making, too much emphasis on skills instruction, disregard for local context and a punitive and high-stakes atmosphere.

Access to High Quality Curriculum

Hursh (2007) outlines ways in which accountability policies have resulted in a narrowed and less rigorous curriculum for low-income students and students of color. In Texas, at schools previously recognized for high achievement among low-income students of color, the advent of accountability policies resulted in teachers abandoning successful, rigorous teaching practices in favor of teaching disadvantaged students basic skills that would ensure they passed the test. As Hursh (2007) points out, “learning to write five-sentence, five-paragraph essays does not transfer well to literacy required beyond the test and outside of school.

By expecting less of disadvantaged students, they fall further behind” (p.8).

Likewise, in his qualitative study of instructional practices in urban schools in Chicago, Diamond (2007) found that in the context of high stakes accountability, classes made up of predominantly African-American and low-income students received primarily teacher-led, lecture-type instruction dominated by lower level questioning, while students in white, middle class classrooms received more interactive instruction that included higher-level questioning and opportunities for student-to-student interaction.

Accountability policies have also resulted in the reallocation of curriculum budgets to purchase test preparation materials in place of materials necessary to implement more rigorous instruction (Hursh, 2007). Furthermore, accountability policies have resulted in the reduction or elimination of instruction in subjects not tested, such as the arts, social sciences and science (Hursh, 2007; Rothstein & Jacobsen, 2006). Rothstein and Jacobsen (2006) document the disparate impact of accountability policies on schools serving students of color and poor students, finding that principals in schools serving poor and minority students were more likely to have reduced time spent on subjects other than math and reading, and minority districts are far more likely to have instituted minimum-time requirements for tested subjects than are predominantly white districts. White, middle class students are more likely to receive instruction and exposure outside of school to

subjects not adequately addressed in school than their poor and minority counterparts, thereby further disadvantaging those students.

The Calculation of Adequate Yearly Progress

As Hursh (2007) points out, Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) under NCLB is calculated based on the percentage of students overall and in each subgroup who meet the state's minimum proficiency threshold. Therefore, even if students make gains during the course of the year, a school can be labeled as failing if those students started out far below the threshold. Likewise, a group of students could fall backward in achievement and the school might still make AYP, as long as the mean score for that group of students still meets the target. Schools formerly held up as Blue Ribbon schools for making exemplary progress in meeting the needs of all students have been labeled as failing due to the "all or nothing" approach of NCLB (Fusarelli, 2004).

According to Kim and Sunderman (2005), the combination of the requirement in NCLB to disaggregate test scores by subgroup and the requirement that all subgroups in each state meet the same proficiency target each year means that schools serving high-poverty and racially diverse populations are more likely to fail to make adequate yearly progress and face sanctions. Kim and Sunderman (2005) found that many schools with large populations of Black and Latino students also had large populations of students living in poverty, while predominantly white schools were relatively unlikely to

have a separate accountability target for economically disadvantaged students. The more homogeneous and white the population served, the less likely the school is to face sanctions under NCLB (Fusarelli, 2004). Fusarelli (2004) concludes, “the most feared sanction, withdrawal of federal Title I funding, will fall disproportionately on impoverished schools filled with students of color most at risk of failure. The inequity of this sanction is readily apparent and defies logic” (p.18).

Studies of the Effects of Accountability on Teacher Leadership

As a result of increased surveillance and pressure to produce specific results on standardized tests, teachers’ autonomy has been reduced, particularly in schools that are identified as “low-performing” or “underperforming” by the scrutiny of accountability (Daly, 2009b). Olsen and Sexton (2009) noted this phenomenon in their study of the effects of school-wide reform prompted by NCLB at Hawthorne High School. Hawthorne is a large, comprehensive rural school in Southern California identified as “underperforming.” In this study, teachers felt that changes in their practice were mandated by administration without their input, despite the administration’s professed desire for teacher buy-in and democratic practice. The six teachers studied experienced a decreased sense of professionalism as a result of top-down pressure to reform their practice. Teachers at Hawthorne resisted mandated changes by going through the

motions of reform while continuing to teach in customary ways when no one was watching.

The implication of increased surveillance is that teachers must be held accountable by external forces or else they will not do their jobs (Bushnell, 2003). Bushnell (2003) studied the effects of four types of surveillance on teachers' professional behavior in elementary schools in New York City. The technologies of surveillance studied were curricular standards, pedagogy, standardized tests and loudspeakers. Nine teachers were interviewed for this qualitative study. Teachers reported feeling constrained in their professional practice by all four technologies of surveillance. In one case, a teacher sought out positions in socially isolated situations, such as the resource room, in order to avoid scrutiny. Bushnell (2003) also points out that forms of organized resistance to surveillance, such as teachers unions, tend to take away from the notion that teachers are professionals who can monitor and discipline themselves, thereby justifying the existence of the accountability system.

Daly's (2009) mixed methods study compared a small sample of schools in Program Improvement (PI) under NCLB with schools not in Program Improvement. Program Improvement is the term used by NCLB to denote schools that have failed to meet the requirements of the policy. Daly (2009) found significant differences in the perceptions of teachers in PI schools versus non-PI schools. Teachers in the PI schools reported much higher incidence of top-down,

hierarchical decision-making processes, less personal agency and increased use of prescriptive curriculum than did their peers in schools not experiencing the scrutiny associated with sanctions.

Images of Teachers as Technicians

Discourse about the nature of teaching also constrains the practice of teacher leadership. The construal of teaching as a technical act, or trade, as opposed to a profession, tends to suppress the individual decision-making power of teachers through the enactment of so-called teacher-proof curricula. For example, in her case study of elementary school teachers in New York City, Bushnell (2003) found that “the oversurveillance of teachers and the lack of substantive decision-making autonomy...limits teachers’ sustained claims that theirs is a profession” (p.253).

Cochran-Smith and Lytle’s (2006) discourse analysis of policy language surrounding No Child Left Behind (NCLB) further supports the idea that the current policy context presents significant challenges for the ideals of third wave teacher leadership. While successful third wave teacher leadership relies on an image of teachers as competent, decision-making professionals, Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2006) found that the images of teachers and teaching presented by the policy language in NCLB effectively reduce teachers’ decision-making to a narrowly defined set of practices based on their effectiveness at raising standardized test scores. These authors argue that NCLB is changing the public

discourse on the nature of teachers and teaching, using its technologies of surveillance to limit the practice of teaching.

In a comparative case study of two novice teachers in California, Achinstein & Ogawa (2006) show how teacher resistance to what Bushnell (2003) would refer to as pedagogical surveillance plays out in a context of high-stakes accountability. In both cases, the novice teachers resisted a “teacher proof” curriculum (Open Court) in reading because of professional principles. Both teachers experienced alienation and left the district or the profession due to the lack of control that they experienced within their classrooms, despite being highly successful teachers by all accounts. Achinstein & Ogawa (2006) conclude that “an understanding of resistance takes on increasing salience as the control environment contributes to limiting discourse about the profession” (p. 59).

An Image of Teachers as Professionals

The literature suggests that an image of teachers as professionals who make decisions supports the exercise of teacher leadership. This image of teachers as professionals is put into practice in structures that allow for teacher self direction, risk taking and trusting relationships between and among teachers and administrators, even under the increased surveillance of accountability. Daly (2009) studied teachers in schools that were in Program Improvement status (PI) under the sanctions imposed by the No Child Left Behind Act and found, for example, that the effects of PI on teachers’ perception of threat (and the

accompanying negative effects of that perception) are mediated by trusting relationships between teachers and administrators. When teachers felt that their professional expertise was valued in PI schools, and that their participation was meaningful, the perception of threat as a result of program improvement status was less pronounced.

In their ethnographic study of urban teacher leaders, Beachum and Dentith (2004) likewise found that trusting relationships were a critical support for teacher leaders. The teacher leaders in this study were also supported by structures that provided for extensive collaboration. Furthermore these teachers had strong images of themselves as leaders that allowed them to take risks and make decisions without administrative approval. Although limited in number, these studies indicate that teacher leadership flourishes under conditions where teachers' professional knowledge and expertise is honored. In their study of accomplished teachers working in professional learning communities, Lieberman and Mace (2009) write:

Starting with teachers' knowledge dignifies the 'wisdom of practice' and helps open teachers' classrooms to inquiry, breaks the isolation that keeps teachers from becoming colleagues and forms the basis for a professional learning community. Peers then become a source of support, knowledge partners, and colleagues in a quest to know more, to do more, and to internalize the idea that teaching is a 'learning profession'. (p. 469)

Teacher Quality and Teacher Turnover in Urban Schools

Teachers with little to no experience are disproportionately assigned to high-poverty, low achieving schools (Darling-Hammond & Sclan, 1996). Turnover in these schools is also disproportionately high (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Howard, 2003; Ingersoll, 2001; Krei, 1998; Ng, 2003). Several researchers have attempted to explain what happens, why this happens and what might be done to improve the situation.

Lankford, Loeb & Wyckoff (2002) conducted a large scale, quantitative study of teacher quality across a variety of school settings in New York State. The study used a number of measures as proxies for teacher quality, including standardized exam scores, selectivity of the college attended, number of years experience and whether or not the teachers were certified in the area they taught. Overall, they found that teachers were unevenly distributed across school settings. Urban schools and those with nonwhite populations had less qualified teaching staffs than did suburban schools and schools serving white students. Lower-performing schools also had less qualified teachers than did higher performing schools.

Ng (2003) conducted a literature review of how traditional and alternative routes and organizational factors contribute to teacher shortages in urban schools. She argues that the solution to teacher shortages in urban schools is an organizational perspective, one that addresses the “power differentials, alienation,

inequitable resource allocation, hopelessness, and fear that may take a serious toll on efforts to recruit and retain the necessary number of qualified teachers for urban classrooms” (p. 394).

Another review of literature by Krei (1998) on teacher quality and teacher assignment inequities concludes that teacher assignment policies and practices exacerbate the problems of recruitment and retention that exist in urban schools. Krei also concludes that these policies and practices get little attention due to the political capital of those who benefit from the current policies and practices. This article argues that by shedding light on the factors that contribute to inequitable policies and practices, researchers can increase the attention that is paid to the inequitable distribution of teachers in schools.

Working Conditions and Teacher Turnover in High-Poverty, Urban Schools

Working conditions are frequently highlighted as a significant factor contributing to teacher turnover in urban schools (Haberman & Rickards, 1990, Howard, 2003). Teachers often cite poor working conditions as a reason for leaving urban schools in favor of other settings (Haberman & Rickards, 1990). Teachers who plan to continue teaching in urban schools often report positive working conditions, such as supportive leadership and collaboration with other teachers (Olsen and Andersen, 2007). Beginning teachers, who are employed in large numbers in urban schools, are more vulnerable than veterans to the effects of poor working conditions (Weiss, 1999).

In an analysis of data from the national Schools and Staffing Survey, Weiss (1999) found that first year teachers in the United States place central importance on working conditions such as school leadership and culture and teacher autonomy and discretion when it comes to decisions about their futures. Unfortunately, however, studies by Howard (2003) and Johnson et al (2004) indicate that teachers in urban schools rarely find the kind of working conditions that they are seeking. For example, Howard (2003) found that a lack of administrative support, perceived discipline problems and unsatisfactory organizational conditions contribute to the teacher shortage in urban schools. Johnson et al (2004) studied patterns of difference in teacher support in high - income versus low-income schools. The researchers found significantly less support from other teachers for teachers who work in low-income schools than they did for counterparts in higher socioeconomic settings.

The Mediating Effects of Positive School Cultures

A number of researchers have looked at the effects of school culture on teacher job satisfaction and retention (Brunetti, 2006; Derlin & Schneider, 1994; Kardos et al, 2001; Kardos, 2002; Olsen & Andersen, 2007; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). When teachers experience positive school cultures, including collaboration with colleagues and supportive administration, they are more likely to be satisfied with their jobs and stay in teaching (Kardos et al, 2001; Kardos, 2002; Olsen & Andersen, 2007; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). Brunetti (2006) studied

32 experienced urban high school teachers regarding the factors that helped them to persist despite what some would call difficult circumstances. His participants reported moderately high job satisfaction. Among these participants, Brunetti found that strong support from administration and from colleagues was a powerful factor keeping the teachers in the classroom. Derlin and Schneider (1994) found that teacher job satisfaction in urban schools was significantly affected by a school climate conducive to student learning and a work environment in which they feel successful.

Summary

Teachers in public schools are subject to increasing scrutiny and surveillance due to the accountability movement (Daly, 2009; Olsen & Sexton, 2009). This scrutiny and surveillance is more acute in schools found to be underperforming by accountability measures (Daly, 2009; Rothstein & Jacobsen, 2006). Schools labeled as underperforming also tend to be schools serving disproportionate numbers of children of color and children living in poverty (Hursh, 2007; Kim & Sunderman, 2005; Rothstein & Jacobsen, 2006). The Foucauldian theory of hierarchical power, panopticism and surveillance predicts that personal agency and capacity to lead is suppressed in an environment of constant surveillance (Foucault, 1977a, 1977b). There is a body of current research supporting this theory (Achinstein & Ogawa, 2006; Bushnell, 2003; Malen, 1999). Despite this theory and research, there is evidence that some teachers working

under such conditions do demonstrate personal agency by finding ways to innovate for the good of students (Beauchum & Dentith, 2004; Birky, Shelton & Headley, 2006; Daly, 2009; Little, 2003; Muijs & Harris, 2007; Scharmer, 2009; Sloan, 2006). The theory of the U helps to explain how this might occur (Scharmer, 2000, 2009b; Scharmer et al., 2000; Senge et al., 2005). In Chapter III, I will outline my research questions and explain my use of phenomenology as philosophy and method.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Questions

In order to explore teacher leaders' lived experiences of negotiating the constraints of accountability, I used phenomenology as both the philosophical perspective and methodology to answer the following questions:

- How do teacher leaders (TLs) perceive and describe their experience of teacher leadership?
- How do the pressures of accountability policies such as NCLB or Race to the Top figure in teacher leaders' lived experiences?
- What constraints on their leadership do teacher leaders perceive?
- What are teacher leaders' perceptions of supports/mediating factors that enable them to demonstrate leadership?
- What strategies do teacher leaders employ to negotiate structural constraints on teacher leadership?
- What similarities and/or differences are there in the experiences of TLs who have left the classroom versus those who have stayed?

Phenomenology

In contrast with Foucauldian imagery, in which light is used to illuminate the subject, leaving the subject unable to see the source of light, the word phenomenon means “to bring to light, to place in brightness, to show itself in itself, the totality of what lies before us in the light of day” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 26). Phenomenology gives the subject control over the light because the subject produces knowledge through his or her perception of what appears. In the Foucauldian view, subjects are often unaware of the structures that constrain them, while phenomenology “is the systematic attempt to uncover and describe the structures, the internal meaning structures, of lived experience” (van Manen, 1990, p. 10).

The choice of research method should be guided by the researcher’s theoretical perspective, strategies of inquiry that will inform the procedures and methods of data collection and analysis (Creswell, 2003). In this case, the use of phenomenology as philosophy and method privileged the role of the individual in knowledge production and countered the limitations present in the Foucauldian view that downplays personal agency and privileges collective ways of knowing and being. The use of phenomenological methods is furthermore consistent with the understandings of leadership underlying Theory U. The questions that guided my research center on the ways in which teacher leaders experience the phenomenon of working in low-performing schools facing sanctions under accountability policies. Because “phenomenology aims at gaining a deeper

understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday experiences” (van Manen, 1990, p. 9), it was an appropriate method to use in this study.

Phenomenology is a philosophical stance that assumes that knowledge is based on what is perceived by consciousness (Moustakas, 1994). Important philosophers in the field of transcendental phenomenology are Husserl and Merleau-Ponty (Glendinning, 2007; Moustakas, 1994; Pietersma, 2000). In contrast with realists, phenomenologist philosophers believe that knowledge exists in the experience of an object by an individual rather than in the object itself (Pietersma, 2000). Merleau-Ponty (1962) writes, “all my knowledge of the world, even my scientific knowledge, is gained from my own particular point of view, or from some experience of the world without which the symbols of science would be meaningless” (p. 4).

To phenomenological philosophers, truth lies within the individual's perceptions of phenomena or what appears in the consciousness (Moustakas, 1994). There is no objective meaning that can be observed externally, rather:

The phenomenological world is not pure being, but the sense which is revealed where the paths of my various experiences intersect, and also where my own and other people's intersect and engage each other like gears. It is thus inseparable from subjectivity and intersubjectivity, which find their unity when I either take up my past experiences in those of the presence, or other people in my own. (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 25)

In phenomenology, there is no reality outside of experience. According to Moustakas (1994) in phenomenology “only one source of certainty exists, what I think, what I feel, in substance, what I perceive” (p. 26).

The role of the phenomenological researcher, then, is to systematically study the lived experiences of individuals in order to gain knowledge of the world (van Manen, 1990). This is accomplished by gathering first-person reports of lived experiences (Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 1990). Through recounting their experiences participants reflect on those experiences and begin to make meaning of them (Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 1990). Because the meaning-making is as much or more the work of the participant as it is the work of the researcher, participants in phenomenological studies become co-researchers, rather than subjects of study.

According to Moustakas (1994) the phenomenological method has three core processes: the Epoche, the Transcendental-Phenomenological Reduction and the Imaginative Variation. In the Epoche, the researcher sets aside any preconceived notions about the world in order to focus only on what is revealed through experience and to encounter what is learned as if it were the first time (Moustakas, 1994). In the Transcendental-Phenomenological Reduction, the researcher examines and describes the experience, working to describe all of the various textural elements of the experience while simultaneously looking for what is essential to the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). In the Imaginative Variation, the researcher interprets the experiences, looking for possible meanings by

taking multiple perspectives and attempting to answer the question, “How did the experience of the phenomenon come to be what it was” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 98). Through these core processes, the researcher arrives at a “textural-structural synthesis of meanings and essences of the phenomenon or experience being investigated” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 36).

By gathering first-person reports of teacher leaders’ life experiences I sought to gain understanding of the meaning of the everyday experiences (van Manen, 1990) of identified teacher leaders. This understanding of teacher leaders’ lived experiences is important in illuminating what Scharmer (2009b, 2010) calls the “blind spot” in our understanding of leadership. According to Varela (1996) as quoted in Scharmer et al (2002, p. 7):

The problem is not that we don't know enough about the brain or about biology, the problem is that we don't know enough about experience. ...We have had a blind spot in the West for that kind of methodical approach, which I would now describe as a more straightforward phenomenological method. ... Everybody thinks they know about experience, I claim we don't.

Site of Research/Context

This study was conducted in the Piedmont Triad Region of North Carolina. The region includes two large urban school districts, Guilford County Schools (GCS) and Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools (WSFCS). Guilford County Schools (GCS) serves a population of more than 73,000 students in 124 schools (“GCS Fact Sheet,” 2012). In GCS, 62% of students are non-white and 57%

receive free or reduced price meals. Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools (WSFCS) serves a population of approximately 52,400 students in 80 schools ("Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools District Overview,"). In WFSFCS, 56% of the students are non-white and 51% receive free or reduced price meals (<http://www.ed.gov/labor-management-collaboration/conference/winston-salemforsyth-county-schools>).

Teacher leaders from schools designated as being in school improvement status are of interest because existing research indicates that the exercise of teacher leadership is often constrained by structural forces (Bushnell, 2003; Muijs & Harris, 2007; Olsen & Sexton, 2009; Silva et al., 2000; Smylie & Denny, 1990) and because those structural forces are increased by the pressure and increased surveillance associated with such a designation (Bushnell, 2003; Daly, 2009). Teachers who are successful in exercising teacher leadership from within the classroom for the benefit of students under these conditions will have experienced the phenomenon of interest. The high concentration of schools in school improvement status in GCS and WFSFCS make these two districts logical choices for the site of research.

From within the districts, a list of schools in school improvement status was generated using data available from the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (www.ncpublicschools.org). Schools were determined to be eligible if they appeared on the state's list of schools in school improvement status for at least one year between 2001 and 2011. WFSFCS has 33 schools that met these

criteria. GCS also has 33 schools that met the criteria, for a total of 66 eligible schools in the region.

Participant Selection

Purposeful sampling was used to select the participants in the study.

Purposeful sampling is necessary in a phenomenological study to ensure that all co-researchers have experienced the phenomenon of interest. Random sampling in this case would not have been appropriate because it might have resulted in the selection of participants who have not experienced teacher leadership from within the classroom for the benefit of students or participants who have not worked in underperforming schools.

Academic coaches and faculty members working in underperforming schools within the districts were asked to recommend teachers either currently working in underperforming schools or teachers who had worked in underperforming schools during the period 2001-2011 but who no longer teach in the classroom. Informants were asked to recommend teachers who had demonstrated teacher leadership from within the classroom for the benefit of students (Silva et al., 2000) whom they would select to teach their own children. Teachers who were recommended were contacted by the researcher and invited to participate. A targeted group of four teacher leaders who were still working in these schools and four who had left constituted the participants in this study.

Participants

Stayers

The four teacher leaders interviewed for this study who continued to serve as classroom teachers were all females in their late twenties to late forties with between six and twenty years of teaching experience. All taught in the Winston-Salem/Forsyth County School system. Each of the stayers was recommended by a coach working in their schools as a teacher whom they would want their own child to have, because they led from within the classroom for the benefit of students. The co-researchers were recruited through email. All teachers who were recommended were contacted. The names of all those who expressed interest were placed in a random selection program and prior to data collection, I obtained approval from the school system and IRB approval. At the beginning of the first interview with each stayer, I explained the purpose of the study, their rights as participants and the benefits and risks of the study. Each co-researcher agreed to participate by signing the consent form. Table 1 shows basic information about the participants. Detailed profiles for each of the stayers are provided in Chapter IV.

Leavers

The four teacher leaders interviewed for this study who had left classroom teaching were all working at the University as support coaches for beginning teachers. All four were females in their early thirties to late forties and of varying ethnicity and years of teaching experience. The leavers were selected through

purposeful sampling because all of them had been recommended and selected for their positions because of their excellent performance as classroom teachers who led for the benefit of students in low-performing and underperforming schools. It is important to note that I had a prior relationship with all four of the leavers, who worked with me at the university. Although I was serving as their supervisor at the time of the interviews, I did not have prior knowledge of their lived experiences of teacher leadership. My relationship with the leavers is discussed further in the Ethics section later in this chapter.

Prior to data collection, I obtained IRB approval. In order to mediate the effects of my role as supervisor, the leavers were recruited by my advisor through an in-person meeting. At the meeting, my advisor explained the purpose of the study, their rights as participants and the benefits and risks of the study. Each co-researcher agreed to participate by signing the consent form. From those who consented to participate, four names were randomly selected by my advisor. Table 1 shows basic information about each of the participants. Detailed profiles for each of the leavers are provided in Chapter IV.

Table 1

Participants in the Study

Participant	Stayer or Leaver?	Gender	Race/Ethnicity	School(s) (Level)
Camilla	Leaver	Female	African American	School D (Middle)
Casey	Stayer	Female	White/Not Hispanic	School C (Elementary)
Jessamyn	Leaver	Female	African American	School E (Elementary), School F (Elementary)
Lisbeth	Stayer	Female	White/Not Hispanic	School C (Elementary)
Mel	Leaver	Female	White/Not Hispanic	School H (Elementary), School B (Elementary), School F (Elementary)
Savannah	Stayer	Female	African American	School A (Elementary), School B (Elementary)
Valerie	Leaver	Female	African American	School G (High)
Vickie	Stayer	Female	White/Not Hispanic	School A (Elementary)

The Pilot Study

In the summer and fall of 2011, this study was piloted with two of the teacher leaders, Vickie and Savannah, using the same data collection procedures outlined later in this chapter. The data from the pilot study is included

in this study and was newly analyzed along with the data from the additional participants.

Sources and Methods of Data Collection

A series of three interviews was conducted with each participant using an interview guide approach (Spradley, 1979). Following the procedure for phenomenological interviewing advocated by Seidman (1991), each interview lasted between 60 and 90 minutes (see Appendix A for the interview guide). The first interview focused on the context of the participant's experience, including life history and previous experience of teacher leadership. The second interview focused on the teacher leaders' current experience of teacher leadership. The third interview focused on the meanings that the participants made of their experience of teacher leadership. All interviews were recorded and transcribed.

Methods of Data Analysis

For the initial analysis of the data I used open coding. Using the software program QSR NVivo 9, I read through each transcript and coded segments of text that appeared to represent elements of the teacher leaders' experiences. Once all data was gathered and coded using open coding, I used the method of phenomenological analysis presented by Moustakas (1994). Moustakas (1994) advocates for a structured method that begins with an open, descriptive coding. The second step involves identifying invariant constituents by eliminating codes that are not necessary and sufficient to understanding the experience. In the third step, the researcher clusters these invariant constituents into themes. Next, the

researcher checks the themes against the participant's entire case file, in order to determine about the themes, "(1) Are they expressed explicitly in the complete transcription? (2) Are they compatible if not explicitly expressed?" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 121). If the answers to these questions are negative, the researcher must throw out the theme as not relevant to the experience of the participant.

Using the software program QSR NVivo9, I began by reading the complete transcripts, doing open coding *in vivo* as I read, looking for significant statements and organizing them into nodes. Once I had grouped significant statements into these descriptive nodes, I read over the statements in each node to determine if they are in fact necessary in describing the experience. Using the research questions as a reference, I created a profile of each participant's experiences from her significant statements. From the profiles, I looked for themes common to the experiences of all participants, themes common to the experiences of those still teaching in high need schools, themes common to those who have left classroom teaching and themes present for some participants in each group but not all. These themes were then compared to the research questions and organized according to the questions.

Validity

Potential threats to the validity of this study include my own subjectivity stemming from my personal experience as a principal and teacher leader in schools facing sanctions under NCLB, reliance on a single source of data (the

participants themselves), the small number of participants and issues stemming from the participant selection process.

In order to address the validity threat posed by my own subjectivity, I used the phenomenological practice of bracketing (Creswell, 2007). In bracketing, phenomenological researchers make every effort to factor out their own experiences and perspective in order to examine the data from a fresh perspective (Creswell, 2007). In addition to bracketing, I had all interviews transcribed verbatim by a neutral party. During data analysis, I used a constant comparative method in order to look for discrepant evidence. Another way in which I addressed my own subjectivity is through the use of member checking (Creswell, 2007). Participants were asked to review the analysis of the data and my interpretation of the findings in order to ensure that their experiences were accurately described. All of the participants responded to the member check and indicated that the interpretations presented were consistent with their understanding of their own experiences.

A second potential validity threat lies in the reliance on the participants' own accounts for the data. While in many forms of qualitative research this could be seen as a major threat to validity, phenomenology relies on interviews in order to more thoroughly understand the lived experiences of the participants. In this case, interviews are the best source of evidence to answer the research questions having to do with the participants' perceptions of their lived experiences as teacher leaders. Related to this is also the threat posed by the

small number of participants in this study. The experiences of a few teacher leaders in a few schools in one part of the country may not be typical of the experiences of all teacher leaders, however generalizability is not the goal of the study. In phenomenology, the goal is to accurately describe the experiences of the co-researchers with the phenomenon.

Finally, participant selection poses a potential threat to validity in this study. If the participants selected for this study have not experienced the phenomenon of interest, any patterns of common experience found will be false patterns. In selecting participants, it was critically important to be sure that the teachers have in fact enacted classroom-based teacher leadership in the context of the threat of sanctions from No Child Left Behind. In order to ensure that the teachers have in fact experienced the phenomenon, the request to recommenders was carefully worded and included a specific definition of teacher leadership. This is consistent with procedures used by other phenomenological researchers (Birky, 2001).

Positionality

It is important in any qualitative study to note my own positionality as a researcher studying the lived experiences of teacher leaders working in low-performing schools. I was for many years a teacher and a principal working with teachers working in schools much like the ones I am researching. It is impossible to completely divorce my own lived experiences from those of the participants, but I include some of my own story here as a way of bracketing my experiences.

When I began my teaching career, North Carolina was just beginning to embark on a statewide school assessment and accountability system. As a teacher, I worked in a series of three high-poverty, high-minority population schools where low student achievement was an issue. Over the course of the eight years I worked as a teacher, I saw a dramatic increase in the pressure associated with poor student performance on standardized tests. Early on, the emphasis was on making sure that teachers were teaching the appropriate curriculum. This was monitored through requiring us to write state objectives in our lesson plans and on the blackboard for every lesson. By the time I left teaching to prepare to become a principal in 2000, schools in North Carolina were given grades each year and schools designated as low-performing were “taken over” and provided additional support by state assistance teams. After a leave of absence to pursue my Masters degree in school administration, in 2002 I was named principal of one of the three lowest performing schools in Guilford County. This turned out to be the first year of NCLB sanctions, and my school was one of the first in the state to face the possibility of sanctions for not meeting Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP).

I taught in the regular elementary school classroom for two years, both of them in low-performing schools. I then taught reading to young children at risk for failure at a third struggling school for three years. During my third year as a reading teacher, my school abandoned the highly-prescriptive basal reading program that had been used for many years in favor of a more teacher-directed,

balanced-literacy program. After watching my colleagues struggle to teach their students to read using this new program without the benefit of adequate professional development and support for half the year, I went to my principal and asked to be partially released from my teaching responsibilities so that I could work with my colleagues. I became a part-time reading teacher and part-time literacy facilitator, and eventually took on the facilitator role full time.

As a teacher leader working in an under-performing school before NCLB, I felt some pressure from state testing and the threat of a state takeover if student achievement did not improve, but I also felt supported and empowered by my principal and colleagues to do what was best for my students. When I approached my principal with my plan to assist fellow teachers with reading instruction, she trusted my expertise and professional judgment and was able to make the decision to implement my plan without consulting anyone else. There were no district-mandated reading programs at that time, and schools were allowed leeway to make instructional decisions. We rarely, if ever, saw district-level supervisors in the building. My colleagues were eager to work together to help students learn and our school made progress in raising student achievement, which encouraged us to continue working hard to meet the students' needs. I felt supported and encouraged to innovate for the good of my students.

Fast-forward a couple of years to my first principalship. The district had adopted a literacy program that everyone was expected to use. The

superintendent gave principals leeway to do something else, but with the caution that it “had better work...or else!” District oversight had increased dramatically, with instructional improvement officers assigned to each school and a team of instructional coaches to assist. Lists of “non-negotiables” were developed having to do with how much time must be allocated each day to given subjects, for example. District-level supervisors visited the schools regularly to monitor district-mandated initiatives. As a principal, I felt very constrained in my decision-making and leadership. I was told point blank that there was no time to get the teachers to “buy-in:” they would just have to do what they were told. My job was on the line if the school did not make AYP. I did my best to encourage and support my teachers as they worked to innovate for the benefit of students, but it was a constant struggle to negotiate the structures imposed from above.

From my own experience I would conclude that accountability policies do constrain teacher leadership, but also that good teachers, when given the opportunity, can find ways to both do what is best for students and achieve the outcomes that are required by accountability policies. The support and encouragement of principals and colleagues were critical for me in successfully implementing practices that benefitted my students.

Ethics

The primary ethical consideration in this study was the risk to participants of being identified. This risk was minimized by the use of pseudonyms for the teachers and for the schools. All data containing identifying information was kept

in a secure location by the researcher. There was no way, however, to completely eliminate risk to the participants, particularly since they were recommended for participation by others. Since the coaches and faculty were asked to recommend teachers who successfully led from within their classrooms, this posed a minimal risk to participants, and teachers who were concerned about such a risk had the opportunity to choose not to participate.

A second ethical consideration was related to the selection of co-researchers who were no longer classroom teachers. In my professional capacity at the university I supervise a number of former teachers who were participants in this research. In order to minimize any risk to participants related to my dual role as researcher and supervisor, it was important for me to emphasize to potential participants that their participation was entirely voluntary and that their choice to participate or not was in no way related to their employment. This was accomplished in part by the assistance of my advisor, who obtained informed consent from the participants who worked at the University so as to avoid any conflict of interest.

Summary

This chapter described the research methods used for this phenomenological study. The research questions, participants, data collection procedures and data analysis procedures were discussed. Ethical issues and the validity and reliability of the study were also addressed. Chapter IV examines the results of the study.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Profiles of the Participants

The Stayers

Vickie. Vickie grew up in a small town in upstate New York. She attended school in the same town from elementary school through high school. She commented, “When I grew up, it was...you knew your elementary school went to middle school went to high school and you stayed with your same friends. You built those relationships, then parents built the PTA” (Interview 1). She stated that she “wanted to become a teacher when I was in tenth grade in high school” (Interview 1). As a high school senior, she did an internship with the middle school physical education teacher in her school district, and this experience solidified her desire to become a physical education teacher. Vickie attended a two-year college in upstate New York and then transferred to a four-year institution in Pennsylvania where she obtained dual certification in physical education and health education, and also completed a minor in special education.

Vickie was an athlete and played sports growing up and softball in college. She credited her experience as an athlete for building her leadership skills, “I think that’s where a lot of my leadership came was through sports” (Interview 1).

She said that her experience playing sports helped prepare her to be a leader because “you have to work together for a goal and definitely in team sports where you see...you know you can’t do it all by yourself you have other people on your team that you need to rely on” (Interview 1) and also

being part of a team where you had to get along and you had your...your coach that you had to listen to and so I feel like you know if I worked harder I’d get more playing time or if I worked...if I stayed after and practiced I would get better skills. (Interview 1)

After college Vickie was immediately hired as a teacher in the middle of a school year. She taught in a middle school in upstate New York for two and a half years before returning to school to get a masters degree in health education. To support herself while she was back in school, Vickie worked as a substitute teacher, which she said “opened up my mind a lot with other classes” (Interview 1) because she was “able to see a lot more in the classrooms through substitute teaching” (Interview 1). When she completed her degree, Vickie continued to teach for several years in New York, but she wanted to move to North Carolina, because “it was something that I’ve always wanted to do, my family vacationed down here so I knew this was the place I wanted to end up” (Interview 1) and she also wanted “more of a challenge” (Interview 1).

Vickie flew down to North Carolina one weekend for an interview and was immediately hired at School A. She didn’t know much about the school when she accepted the job: “I didn’t know that they were a low performing school, I didn’t

even understand all that really we don't have" (Interview 1). Vickie contrasted School A and its district with the school district where she grew up, where "it's not by county it's by town so to have such [an] overwhelming, huge district was just... the opportunities I thought were huge and there are so many different other elementary teachers that I could feed off of" (Interview 1).

At the time of the interviews, Vickie had been teaching at School A for seven years. She was the only physical education teacher at the school. In addition to teaching full time at the elementary level, Vickie was also coaching high school basketball, field hockey and softball. Vickie served as a member of the school leadership team and was the chair of the team for several years. She was also a member of the hospitality committee and had served on the safety committee and as PTA teacher representative. Other formal leadership roles included being a member of the district-wide magnet school committee and the school Clean and Green committee.

Savannah. Savannah grew up in a small city in North Carolina. She "was very much interested in sports medicine" (Interview1) in high school and originally planned to major in Biology. In high school Savannah was "very involved in sports medicine training and participating in after school activities like football and basketball" (Interview 1). She stated that her parents "came to everything when I was younger, field day, awards day, whatever it was" (Interview 1).

Savannah ended up attending a small liberal arts college located in another small city in North Carolina. She recalled, "I started on the biology track and then I decided that wasn't for me" (Interview 1). Savannah majored in sociology. As part of her college experience, Savannah engaged in a service-learning project that included volunteering in a Kindergarten classroom. She recalls, "The kids were hilarious, they were really funny" (Interview 1). This volunteer experience ended up changing the course of Savannah's career:

One child is the reason that I changed my mind about going into education. There was one student where the home life was not the best. Mom was a single mom and the little girl always wanted her mom to be able to come to school to eat lunch with her. I don't know if there were other serious issues, drug abuse, I'm not quite sure, but one day, it was her birthday or a day that her mom told her that she was going to come and eat lunch with her and she was really excited about it and mom didn't show. I said, "Maybe your mom had something come up and she just wasn't able to make it. You can talk about it with her when you see her later," and she says, "No; I know she's at home. She's asleep. She's not going to come," and to hear that from a five-year-old, as a college student, I've never had experiences in that way. (Interview 1)

Savannah completed her degree in Sociology but decided to continue her education with the goal of becoming a teacher. She enrolled in a Master of Arts in Teaching program at the same college where she had completed her undergraduate degree. While working towards her master's degree, Savannah volunteered in a residential treatment program for adolescents. She had the opportunity to observe the counselors conducting live sessions with families there. She recalled:

They had so many issues that they didn't deal with or maybe didn't know how to deal with. Just being able to watch that live; it's one thing when someone tells you, "This is what happened," but when you get to actually see it yourself, it is awful. There wasn't anything physical going on, they don't allow any of that during those live sessions, regardless of what happened or the reason they're there but it was just amazing to watch that we have children who live lives that go home every day and they don't know what to expect when they get there. (Interview 1)

This experience, along with an internship that involved shadowing a guidance counselor at a public elementary school, were "two internships that I have always remembered in my process of wanting to become a teacher" (Interview 1). When asked how these experiences shaped her, Savannah said, "I think it helped me to understand where these students were coming from that I worked with" (Interview 1).

While working towards her master's degree and teacher certification, Savannah obtained a job as a teacher's assistant in a K/1 combination class at an elementary school in the district where she still worked. She was able to complete her student teaching experience in the classroom where she was employed as a teacher's assistant and then was hired to replace a first grade teacher who left at the same school. Savannah taught at this school (School A) for five years before transferring to School B to be part of a turnaround project. At the time of the interviews, Savannah had been teaching at School B for just over a year. She taught first grade for one year and then was moved to second grade. She was grade level chair and served on the school leadership team.

Casey. Casey did not always plan to be a teacher. She said, “Well, I kind of stumbled on it.” As a high school student, Casey described herself as a “social little butterfly” (Interview 3) and “slightly lazy” (Interview 3). She credits getting involved during her junior year with clubs and athletics as the turning point for her, saying, “the more I put on my plate, the more con-, I guess it’s like a control thing, it’s like the more control I felt over myself” (Interview 3). Casey attended a large, regional public university and intended to study nursing. When she was not accepted into the nursing program, she recalls thinking:

I’ll just take some Education classes and, I don’t know, it just, I mean, I personally believe in God and think it was a God thing. So, I think that I am a much better teacher than I probably would have been a nurse kind of thing. So, I’m glad it happened the way it did. (Interview 1)

Casey described her teacher preparation program as “really great” (Interview 1).

She was particularly grateful for the high expectations set by the program, saying:

My internship supervisor, sure was, she was strict. She expected things to be very on point and you know, she’s the type that made you nervous when she walked through the door, and I think that was good, but it just kind of made you want to work harder. (Interview 1)

After college, Casey taught for one year in the city where she attended school.

She described her first teaching job as “kind of a sink or swim year.” She was also offered a position in a suburban, higher-income school, but she chose to teach in a high poverty school where she had done a field experience and where

a classmate was also going to teach. Casey describes her experience as a first-year teacher this way:

You name the kind of child, I had it in there. And, so they say that you're going to have the worst class with the worst of resources, the worst classroom the worst, that's what I had, so, I think that kind of opened up some doors to make me realize how hard sometimes teaching can get. So I worked really hard and I worked closely with another teacher that was in her second year. (Interview 1)

As for her approach to teaching during that year, Casey said:

You know, I think back to that first year and I'm like, everything that I'm against now I was doing that year. Like, I'm really not a teacher who could pull out that basal and just do exactly what that says. And, when I think back to that year there wasn't much hands on, there wasn't -- I was just trying to get by, trying to figure out what on earth was going on. (Interview 1)

After one year, Casey's husband finished his Master's degree and accepted a job in another part of the state. Casey interviewed for jobs and once again received two offers. She recalls, "I chose the one where I am now and I actually, I knew my sister-in-law's mother teaches, or taught, there. So, I knew her" (Interview 1). At the time of the interviews, Casey had been teaching fourth grade at School C for eight years. She was serving as grade level chair and had been selected by the principal to be part of a team working on systems thinking.

Lisbeth. Lisbeth never had any doubts about what she wanted to do with her life. She recalls:

As a young child I always wanted to be a teacher and played teacher growing up and so there was never really any choice or... to me. I knew when I went to college that's what I wanted to major in was Education; I wanted to be a teacher. (Interview 1)

She described herself as “a very shy, quiet girl” (Interview 1). Lisbeth's teacher preparation experience was at a small, private college in North Carolina. She described her teacher preparation experience positively, stating:

One of the things that I really liked about that college experience was the fact that they did a one-year student teaching experience and I... since I've become an educator, I just really feel like that's one of the things that got me off to a really good start is that one year. (Interview 1)

Lisbeth majored in Elementary Education with a concentration in Academically Gifted. Her first teaching position was as an academically gifted resource teacher at a gifted and talented magnet school in a large city. She taught electives at this school for three years. She recalls:

We had a quiz bowl team; we had the Clickers at the elementary level; taught zoology; a class on the Stock Market; uh, just lots of different creative things that were anchors, and the students actually signed up for the electives. (Interview 1)

Lisbeth had a very positive experience as a beginning teacher, saying, “I just... I loved being there” (Interview 1). She describes one experience that was a highlight of her early career:

We had a workshop where you could design your own classroom and you know, you could have a loft and uh, centers and this guy came and he

gave us all these ideas. And we didn't know it but at the end of the workshop, that anybody that wanted to could put their name in a hat and we're going to draw one classroom out to remodel and I got picked. And I told my principal, I said, "Well, if we're going to do all this," it was mint green walls and it was a downtown old school, I said, "why can't you, you know, paint the rooms?" So she said she would pay for the paint so I got parents and my boyfriend who's now my husband on the weekend – they let us in the school – we painted the whole room and that's that year that I changed everything up every couple weeks. So I had my dream classroom – I had these centers; I had this little platform built out of the closet with a canopy over it; we bought fabric; my mom made cushions for these little stools that they... you know, it's all recycled materials and things. But we had the loft where kids could climb up the ladder, go read. I had a film strip projector under the loft. They took four desks, they would put the desks side-by-side and they made this wooden platform that covered all the desks. (Interview 1)

After three years, Lisbeth got married and moved to her current city. She took a job teaching math and reading to academically gifted students in a suburban school. She stayed at that school only one year. Lisbeth describes that year as "kind of a sad year" (Interview 1) because the school community experienced several tragedies during the year. She says, "when I look back at my years teaching I really don't think about that year very much at all. It's just... it was a year that happened and I just moved on" (Interview 1). At the end of the year, Lisbeth and her husband bought a house in another part of the county and she accepted a position close to her new home. The position was in a brand new suburban school that was just opening. Lisbeth taught third grade for a few years, and then moved back into a resource position teaching academically gifted. Lisbeth enjoyed her experience teaching at a brand new school. She said, "I loved being there. I loved that school because we all bonded" (Interview 1).

After several years of teaching at the new school, Lisbeth went out on maternity leave and stayed home with her children for six years. During that time, the family moved to another large city in North Carolina. When she returned to teaching third grade in the new city, she encountered some new challenges. Lisbeth recalls, "I had things to do. I really felt lost. I remember there were... the testing had changed" (Interview 1). Lisbeth recounted her first experience with the new testing program:

It was my first experience with the EOG testing that we now have. And I remember the first time I gave the test, I gave the wrong test on the wrong day. And I think it was back before you had all this mis-administration things that you would have to do now but I gave the long math on the short math day. And I remember looking out my window and I saw these classes going outside and a teacher came, "Are you done," and so you know, back then there was no huge discussion but now there certainly would be if you did that. So I know I've told teachers before, "I've lived to tell about it. You know, they didn't fire me so..." But I just thought the demands are a lot higher now; it's a lot more serious. (Interview 1)

Eventually Lisbeth and her family returned to her current city. She accepted a part-time position teaching reading to struggling students at School C. Lisbeth said that School C was "the first low performing school that I've ever really been at" (Interview 1). When Lisbeth decided she wanted a full-time position, she was offered the position of technology facilitator at School C. She said, "I felt somewhat comfortable and somewhat not comfortable in taking that position in that I knew I'd have a lot to learn but I always like a new challenge and trying new things" (Interview 1). Lisbeth "used to always use technology with my AG

students a lot” (Interview 1) so she felt comfortable with the teaching part of her new job, but had a lot to learn about the part of her job that involved keeping up the school’s hardware and software. At the time of the interviews, Lisbeth had been the technology facilitator at School C for three and a half years. She served as chair of the teacher advisory committee, co-chair of the media and technology committee and facilitated a daily news broadcast at the school.

The Leavers

Camilla. Camilla grew up in a home where, although her parents did not go to college after completing high school, it was understood that “You go to four year college or you need to find somewhere else to live” (Interview 3). Her parents stressed the importance of education from an early age. Camilla recalls, “We had study time every day for at least an hour. You do your homework, you study. If you don’t have homework, you read. If you don’t have anything to read, read the Bible” (Interview 3). She said, “I think I always knew I wanted to be a teacher (Interview 1),” but as it turned out she did not study education in college. She recalls:

I started out wanting to do early elementary and so someone suggested I do an internship on campus where they have like these little day care centers around and you can do internships there and after two weeks, I was like I do not like being kicked and wiping noses and kids using the bathroom not by themselves, like I don’t like that at all. So I decided that wasn’t for me and I loved to read and write at the time and so I decided to just become an English major and I did. (Interview 1)

While in college, Camilla worked in the restaurant business and eventually was asked to be the regional trainer. She said:

Whenever we opened a new restaurant, I would go to new stores and train people and I loved it...I loved it and I thought I love kids and I can do this with adults, I think it's just the runny noses that I don't like and so I decided that I wanted to teach. (Interview 1)

Camilla initially thought she wanted to teach high school, she recalled:

Because I love *To Kill a Mockingbird*; I love Maya Angelou; I love, you know, Shakespeare. So I want to go and teach kids who love to read and I want to teach honors and AP classes because those kids will be there because they want to be and if I have high school then they all want to graduate. (Interview 2)

Within two years of graduating from college, Camilla was offered a position teaching Language Arts in a middle school, School D. She said, "At the time I got a job I couldn't find a job in high school." At School D, Camilla was one of ten beginning teachers out of 14 total teachers on her grade level that year. Camilla recalled getting a lot of support, saying "the four that were not new really took me under their wing. I don't know if they took other teachers under the wing too but specifically me they did."

After teaching for several years at School D, Camilla decided to go with her Assistant Principal who was opening a new school in another part of the district. The decision to leave was also partly based on some changes in the pay structure at School D:

We would be paid for our test scores, paid a bonus, a huge bonus and I felt almost like a sense of I don't think it's betrayal but for lack of a better word, I had been there for those kids because I wanted to be and I didn't need anybody to pay me more money but you're going to go out and recruit teachers to come here and they're only here because of the money. (Interview 1)

The new school "was not a Title One school, it was not a, I guess it was a more middle class upper class school and I wanted to go and see what it was like to teach different kids" (Interview 1). Camilla stayed at the new school for only one year and then returned to School D. She recalled, "I'm glad I had that opportunity but I realized that the kids did not need me in the same way in that school that the kids at [School D] needed me" (Interview 1).

Camilla taught at School D the second time for a year or two, but things had changed. She said, "We had to assess constantly and I felt like it was, I mean just killing the kids almost and killing the beliefs of teachers" (Interview 1). So when an opportunity presented itself to become a curriculum coach at the district office, Camilla took the job. At the time of the interviews, Camilla was working as a coach supporting beginning teachers. She had been out of the classroom for several years.

Jessamyn. Jessamyn grew up in a close-knit community in the same city where she was living at the time of the interviews. About her neighborhood, she said, "they call them projects now, but that offends me because it wasn't project to us, like it was home" (Interview 1). Jessamyn says her parents took care to never make her or her siblings feel poor. She remembers, "They would be very

creative with it, so if we didn't get something or we got the other version, like the off-brand, it would just be a story to go with it" (Interview 1). Jessamyn has fond memories of time spent growing up in her community:

We stayed in a circular set of apartments and there was a field in the middle. So every afternoon all the kids finished their homework that's where we met up. And every Sunday, when everyone finished their family dinners, all the old folks would sit out in the gliders and we would play, and that's just what we knew. We knew we could ride our bikes but we couldn't cross the street. And it was just such a family atmosphere. (Interview 1)

Jessamyn's mother was very active in the school. She says, "My mom was like Miss PTA when I was in elementary school, so I was always in the school, like even when school was over I had to stay and like stay for PTA" (Interview 1). As Jessamyn got older, her mother started working at the school part time as a tutor and eventually as a teacher assistant. Even though Jessamyn spent so much time at the school with her mother, she resisted the idea of becoming a teacher. She said, "Well I didn't want to be a teacher; I wanted to be a lawyer" (Interview 1). While in high school, though, Jessamyn changed her mind. She decided, "Well, I don't want to go to college for seven or eight years to be a lawyer, so I'll be a teacher" (Interview 1).

Jessamyn studied elementary education at a large, public regional university in North Carolina. During college, she often returned home to complete field experiences at the school where her mother was working as a teacher's assistant. At graduation, she was offered two jobs, one at the school where she

student taught in the city where she went to college, and one at her mother's school back home. Jessamyn took the job at home and began teaching at School E. Because School E was located in the district where Jessamyn grew up, she had a built-in support system. She recalls that teachers around the system found out she was teaching and "everyone would send me things through courier like you know, support and it was just all of that was there" (Interview 1). She says, "I still have that support system, like I still talk to my old teachers from like 2nd grade and 1st grade" (Interview 1).

Jessamyn taught at School E for four years, and then the district announced some changes. The school was getting a new structure and a new principal and all of the teachers would be required to interview to keep their jobs. Jessamyn recounts being offended at receiving the designation of low-performing school:

We had high performance and high growth, but when the test score wasn't quite there it really offended us because we knew how hard we worked in the infrastructure. So getting like something from Raleigh saying "Well you didn't do well" or "You're low performing"; like, whatever. We're not low performing because we know what we do. We know how we love on them and we know that we're teaching them and that was always the thing, "Well why don't they look at where the kids were and how they grew." (Interview 1)

Jessamyn decided to take a teaching job in the city where she went to college rather than interview to stay at School E. The new position was in a more affluent school community, where parents had professional jobs in the city. Jessamyn

had to work to adjust to the new situation, but felt that the experience “helped me evolve to know why things happen in the classroom and how teaching really works” (Interview 1).

Around this time Jessamyn made a trip to New York and while she was there she visited a Montessori School. Jessamyn had worked at a Montessori school in college in the after-school program and was interested in the Montessori method. The school in New York ended up offering Jessamyn a teaching job. As she put it:

She offered me \$42,500 for like my 5th year. And what was I making in North Carolina, like \$30,000 maybe. So to me that was like “Why would I pass this up? I get to go to New York City and make all this money.” So I took that job. (Interview 1)

Jessamyn worked as a general education teacher paired with a Montessori teacher. She recalls, “There were four teachers, two lead teachers and two assistants in a class of like 25 to 30 students” (Interview 1). Jessamyn described the Montessori school as “very affluent” (Interview 1). She worked there for a little more than a year and “then I finally got in with the Board of Ed in New York, where I took a first grade position” (Interview 1). Jessamyn’s new teaching position was in the South Bronx. She said, “it’s mostly, Puerto Rican, because the Bronx is like heavily Puerto Rican, a few Dominicans. And we were maybe like 20% African American” (Interview 1). While she was in New York, Jessamyn says she “kind of became an advocate” (Interview 1) for parent involvement. She

became a consultant for two intervention programs working in her school, the Committee for Hispanic Children and Families and the YMCA. Jessamyn taught at that school for seven years. While in New York, Jessamyn completed a masters degree in school administration. When she decided to move back home to North Carolina, she was first offered a position as a testing coordinator and Title I consultant at School F, but she turned that down and stayed in New York a bit longer. After a few months, she decided she really did want to move home and accepted a part time position teaching reading at School F. Jessamyn let the principal know that “I really wanted something that would give me some administrative experience” (Interview 1). So when a curriculum coordinator position became available, Jessamyn moved into that position and stayed three years. At the time of the interviews, Jessamyn was working as a coach supporting beginning teachers.

Valerie. Valerie entered teaching as a second career, after working in the insurance industry for eleven years. For Valerie, the decision to teach was driven by two forces. First, she had children in school and she “really wanted to be on the same schedule with my kids” (Interview 2). Secondly, at work Valerie “found myself teaching other people how to do stuff” (Interview 2). She thought “maybe I could do this [teach]” (Interview 2) and set out to find out more about teaching high school through contacts in the community. She recalls:

My husband said, “I have this guy who, he’s a teacher” so I called him and then he turned me on to his principal’s wife who worked at [School G] but

at that time was... had the interim job at [another school] and then my dad's best friend who is my husband's barber knew the secretary for the principal at [School G's] boss. So it was like it was total connection. (Interview 2)

Valerie spent a day at School G to find out what it was like before she accepted a lateral entry position. After visiting for one day, she gave her notice at her insurance job and began teaching full time in February. Valerie described entering teaching via lateral entry as "a big shock because in the business world we have deadlines, you know – certain things we had to do but when I got into the school system people did not adhere to deadlines (laughs)" (Interview 1).

Since it was so late in the year, Valerie recalls:

The school year was almost over with so coming into that school basically I saw myself as a sub. There wasn't too much I could do since we were on the traditional schedule and not the block schedule. But it was a good experience because it allowed me prepare for the next year. (Interview 1)

As a lateral entry teacher with children in middle school, Valerie drew on life experience. She says:

My previous experience, I think even as a parent helped me, in the classroom because you know, if something happens many times you find yourself giving the kid that mama look. And I think a lot of them probably saw me closer to their mom's age or sometimes their grandma's age, you know. (Interview 1)

Valerie recalls some challenges in making the shift from the business world into teaching:

In the business world we had like a best practice, this is how you do this, this is how you do that, like a guideline, this is how you do everything so you don't have all the ambiguity that they have in the school system and the terminology that the school system uses, they don't explain it to you. Like I see on the news, optional workday, so I say ok well I opt not to go, you know because it's bad weather and my kids are at home. I had no idea that you had to use like an annual leave day or something. So coming from corporate into education it was a lot of ambiguity. What is effective teaching? Show me what that looks like. I guess I am a visual person and I need to know exactly what the rules are, what is expected to be very clear. (Interview 1)

Valerie taught in the classroom for seven years. During that time she served as department chair, webmaster and secretary of the leadership team. While Valerie was still teaching, her principal began asking her to take on additional responsibilities because of her familiarity with spreadsheets:

Some days like if a AYP report or something was due, she would pull me out of my class. Now, I am not even knowing I am going to be pulled out and my students didn't like it either to know that why were you not here, especially if they saw me on campus but I wasn't in class. So I really didn't like doing that either. You see me on campus but I am not in the classroom with you so I didn't really like doing that to them. It looked like I was skipping class, I didn't like that at all. So she just took me out period so I could work on data all the time. (Interview 1)

So Valerie left the classroom and became a curriculum facilitator at School G. She served in that role for five years. At the time of the interviews, Valerie had been out of the classroom for five and a half years and was working as a coach supporting beginning teachers.

Mel. Mel grew up in a rural area in North Carolina. She described herself as "a trailer park kid" (Interview 1). Her parents were teenagers when she was

born. Mel said about her parents, “I grew up with them growing up” (Interview 1). Mel describes her family as poor: “we ate and I had clothes, and I had a home, but very minimal, very minimal” (Interview 1). Mel’s community was predominantly white and not very tolerant of ethnic diversity:

I guess growing up with the school system, we had 10% African American students. I don’t even remember hardly any Hispanic students growing up in X County. There are now, but, but not then. And, s-, like I said, my parents were prejudiced, my grandparents extremely, so. So all I ever heard growing up were name-calling. (Interview 1)

Mel describes herself as driven “even as a little kid. If I made less than a B I was petrified, I mean, it was awful, you know, so I did one time. And I cried and cried and cried and cried and cried” (Interview 3). She loved school and felt safe there. She recalls:

Life was separated for me than it was at home. Like no one ever knew what I was going through at home. It was a different life. I was a good kid. I mean at school I was straight A student. I was the, and you know, always shined at school. You know, school was my safe haven (Interview 1).

Even though Mel’s home life was not the best, her parents were involved. She said, “if something were still going wrong at school my mom would have been there for a conference” (Interview 1). Mel’s difficulties at home were not evident at school because her mother kept up appearances:

Home was terrible, but nobody ever knew home was terrible. It just—I didn’t come to school looking like home was terrible. I didn’t, my mom

would have never cussed out the teacher. You know, she would have never...she was always very respectful of the school. (Interview 1)

Mel “always wanted to be a teacher” (Interview 1). Despite her circumstances growing up, Mel said, “There was never any question that I was going to go to college. And went straight through from elementary school to high school with that in mind. And went to college and did it” (Interview 1). Mel started out thinking that she would be a high school teacher, but she “had a roommate who was going into elementary ed” and got interested in her conversations about “how kids learn to read” (Interview 1). Mel said, “So I switched. I switched to elementary ed part way through” (Interview 1).

Mel student taught in an affluent school in a suburb of her current city. Her cooperating teacher “had actually done her first 15 years in low performing schools” (Interview 1). Mel recalls:

She was always the teacher who got the kids who were challenging there at the school because she was used to dealing with a certain population. And she handled it beautifully. And, so I got some experience with not just teaching affluent kids, but teaching kids who didn't fit the mold there. You know, they were the lower performing, who, came from poverty that just happened to go to school there. And I loved it. I loved working with those children. (Interview 1)

When Mel graduated in December, she took a part-time reading position for the remainder of the year at the school where she student taught. The principal hired her for the other half of the day to “to do whatever was needed in the school” (Interview 1). She substituted and helped in the office as needed to

make a full time job. As a reading teacher, Mel said, “part of my job was to tutor, and work in small groups with all the kids who were low performing” (Interview 1). In working with the small groups, Mel said, “I fell in love with working with those students. I found that I had a knack for it” (Interview 1). When a full time position became available teaching Kindergarten for the next year, Mel turned it down. She said, “I honestly am more of a third, fourth or fifth grade person, wanted upper grades” (Interview 1).

Mel was offered a position at School H, an inner city school about 40 minutes away from her home. The principal was from Mel’s hometown. Mel recalls, “She knew me. And didn’t even interview me. She just said, ‘I’ve got a position, you know, will you come?’” (Interview 1). Mel remembers her first visit to the school:

It was run down. I mean the building had—today it’s renovated—but it was a very rundown place. Chains on the doors. There was a sign that said something about, “Our children, please look out for our children. They’re exposed to...” and then it has things like drugs, violence. It’s like a community watch poster. And I was like, “Oh my goodness.” (Interview 1)

After meeting with some of the staff, Mel felt more comfortable, “they were open, and they made me feel right at home” (Interview 1). She accepted a position teaching third grade at School H.

Mel taught third grade and then fifth grade at School H for eight years. By her second year teaching, she was grade level chair and math committee chair.

When the school became a magnet, Mel was asked to become the magnet coordinator. She said, "I didn't want the school to become a magnet. I was the one person who said I didn't want it the loudest. I ended up being the magnet coordinator" (Interview 1). Mel was concerned that the magnet program would undo the progress that the school had made in recent years. She recalls:

Becoming a magnet and getting all this money meant a lot of change, and adding all these wonderful arts programs and technology and, you know, changing up just about everything we were doing. And we were doing really well. And I didn't want to see that go backwards. And so I was very much an advocate for not making these huge changes where we would, it would take away from the curriculum. (Interview 1)

Mel eventually became the Assistant Principal at School H. After having a child, Mel decided to leave administration and took a job as a curriculum coach at School B, where she stayed one year. Mel then worked as a curriculum coach at School F for just over a year. At the time of the interviews, Mel had been out of the classroom for about six and a half years. She was working as a support coach for beginning teachers.

Participants' Experience of Teacher Leadership

Vickie

Vickie's experience of teacher leadership was shaped by her experiences in sports:

I feel like when I played and when I coached you...you get these starts, these sparks where you see something good that happened and you... you know you make a point to notice it and that helps boost confidence in students, even in myself whenever something would go well or if I do something right or you know...to point out the positive always helps and it... it motivates others to do the same thing and I feel like that might transfer into all of my other things... what I see in in groups that we work with as adults now. (Interview 1)

Vickie's leadership experience was also influenced by her experiences teaching in smaller school systems in the Northeast. She commented, "I was on six different committees in New York and here they only ask you to be on one" (Interview 1). She commented that other teachers were surprised when she volunteered to take on additional responsibilities, "when I did two or three they were kind of shocked" (Interview 1).

Vickie was motivated to lead by a desire to stay informed and to get to know people better. She commented, "I see the benefit of knowing more and seeing what groups work well together" (Interview 1). For example, Vickie described how she got involved with the school leadership team:

My first year I remember there was a teacher who was our rep and she never gave me any information at all and I felt when they had those leadership meetings talking about scheduling or something that affected

me I didn't know about it and so I was like well forget this I'm going to go to these meetings and I...you could go to the meetings but you didn't...even if you weren't on the committee you could go so they just kept seeing me show up at the meetings and like you know you don't have to be here. And I'm like well I want to know! (Interview 1)

Vickie explained that she doesn't find it overwhelming to be involved in so many things in the school. In fact she felt more overwhelmed by not knowing what was going on:

I feel like communication is really, really important in those committees. So... but I just...I...I really feel like as some of the new teachers too knew to see that it's not that difficult... I know they're overwhelmed and sometimes they...they may over-exaggerate how much pressure they have on them or whatever but it's...it's also important to look at the other aspects of the school too and not just your twenty-five kids 'cause then you'll know more which won't stress you out as much if that makes sense. (Interview 1)

Vickie's enthusiastic and positive approach to leadership was rooted in her experience in team sports, where she learned the importance of praise. Because of this insight, Vickie said "if someone comes up with a good idea I...I make sure we praise that person or say something positive" (Interview 1). She gave this example from her work on the school leadership team:

I want to make sure everybody feels like they're contributing something or that what they are doing even if it's not what we choose to do as a school like we were coming up with our new theme and we were trying to come up with like a motto or something and everyone's throwing out different ideas and you know I could see you know a kindergarten teacher came up with this great idea but then everyone was kind of like no...no...no...no and I made sure to go see her afterwards and say you know you're doing a great job keep those ideas coming out cause you know it didn't work this

time but you'll get it next time or something I don't know just being a positive person I guess helps. (Interview 1)

For Vickie, being positive was not just about encouraging other teachers. She felt that her positivity with teachers led to more positivity about the students she served:

I don't try to you know tell them what to do, I'm not a classroom teacher they're doing as much as they possibly can so as a I guess as a leader I try not to interfere with that and just encourage them and tell them you know they're having a good day today or your class did a wonderful job in my class and they learned so much and they're so good behavior kids and it kind of makes the teacher feel good about their kids too. (Interview 3)

While relationships were important to Vickie, as the chair of the school leadership team, she saw her role differently: "I like to listen to people and communicate with people and I did that as often as I possibly could outside of that meeting but when it was in the meeting we had to get to certain agendas" (Interview 1). Vickie wanted things to get done, and she often felt that the best way to get things done was to do them herself. She said, "if it can't be done well if I feel like it's not going well then I'll involve myself so I can make sure that at least for myself or my specialists or whatever that I can help out that way" (Interview 1).

Vickie's ideas about leadership were evolving. She commented, "I guess that would be a fault of mine (laughs) I want everything like everything to be done right and I think I have to do it myself to do it right but that's not true" (Interview 2).

When asked about what it meant for her to be a teacher leader, Vickie said, “one of my goals this year is to kind of say no a little bit and let somebody else do some things” (Interview 3). She went on to explain:

By me saying no I’m feeling that there are others that are stepping up and being leaders, that’s how I feel it is. It’s not like... if it didn’t get done I would take it back on do you know what I mean like if some of these committees and stuff didn’t if some even didn’t happen I would walk in and be like are we doing this or I would ask Laura or or Elaine what’s going on with this but by being a leader I’m stepping back and letting and saying no. (Interview 3)

Above all else, the children Vickie worked with were at the heart of her leadership efforts:

I feel like really good about being a leader I don’t how people can just leave at three o’clock and not think about their children until eight o’clock the next morning it’s just... it’s just not what I do. (Interview 3)

Vickie summed up her understanding of teacher leadership in this way:

I think for a teacher leader it’s someone that takes control but is able to give control to others and let them work through things. It’s also someone who sees what needs to be done and leads it to a discussion and lets others try to take part in it or brainstorm you know it’s... it’s not somebody who just tells you what’s supposed to be done and that’s sometimes something that I... I want to make sure I don’t do, ‘cause sometimes you see a vision in your head and you try to push that on other people but what needs to happen is you need to have more input and more brainstorming so I think what taking in everybody else as well as getting my own ideas out there, it’s like a go getter it’s like someone who goes and gets things done. And then keeping the kids in mind, always keeping the kids in mind. That’s key, it’s not about yourself and where you can get yourself don’t ...you shouldn’t be in education if you’re trying to you know

move up the corporate ladder or whatever that's not what I'm here for.
(Interview 3)

Savannah

In contrast with Vickie, Savannah's experience of teacher leadership was based primarily within the classroom. Savannah described her understanding of leadership this way:

What being a leader in my classroom means for me, the way that all children learn is through modeling and so for myself, I have to model the kind of behavior and expectations that I want for my students to have. I think no matter what age the students you teach or whatever grade level you teach; I think children are very observant of things that go on. They're observant about their parents' behavior, how their teachers behave, and those kinds of things. (Interview 3)

Savannah saw herself as a role model for the children in her classroom. She said, "A lot of times I have to make sure that I remember that I am a role model and I think if anything, all teachers should know and remember that" (Interview 3).

Savannah's approach to leadership, even when involved in work outside of her own classroom, was focused on classroom practice and student outcomes. Ultimately, Savannah wanted to get things done that would improve the learning for children. She felt that what was most important was that teachers worked together for the benefit of students.

Every classroom is different so one of the things that you have to do as teachers is learn to work together and how we can benefit. It's not just my class and my kids. Her kids are my kids as well; they're all of our kids. At the end of the day when they look up and want our scores, it's not just

about whose class they were in, they look at the entire grade level.
(Interview 3)

Savannah's style was very businesslike. When she talked about working with other teachers, she focused on the work that they do, rather than on the interpersonal relationships. In describing the way she worked with other teachers, Savannah said:

We bounce ideas back and forth about different ways to teach things. I think the learning team is a great way for teachers to show leadership because you're taking initiative for what you're doing in your classroom as well as collaboration. We're talking about what's not working in the classroom because nobody gets everything right. Some teachers are stronger than other teachers in certain areas. One teacher may be better on reading, you may be better at math. (Interview 3)

Savannah stressed the importance of teamwork, but also the importance of finding solutions that work for students:

You're definitely not exhibiting any kind of leadership skills by just sitting there complaining about it. If you're not trying to figure out some solutions or things we can do better - we can all sit and complain about things that are wrong these days but we really make the effort at our school to find solutions to the problems and finding ways to help our kids. (Interview 3)

Casey

Casey was just beginning to see herself as a leader. She said, "The past few years, I've been kind of seeing my role changing a little bit more into becoming the leader around my grade level and stuff like that" (Interview 3).

While Casey did not set out to become a leader, she felt that leadership was a by-product of her efforts to improve her practice:

And it wasn't like I had a goal of being a leader in my mind at all. It was just I want best practices and, I think throughout the years, you know, when you practice things and you have a talent for it and some then some people see that and then they naturally gravitate and then they try to do what... Ask you what you're doing and they try out what you're doing and that kind of thing. For me I've never really considered myself necessarily a leader until maybe the past couple of years, where I feel like I've really gotten a hold of my job to certain extent because I've learned how to take it in my own hands and do some research and try out new things.
(Interview 3)

Like Savannah, Casey saw herself as a role model for her students and her colleagues. She said, "I believe a lot of our roles as teachers is to be models for each other. What attitude you bring to the table, can affect those around you. Not just for the adults but for the kids as well" (Interview 1). Casey strove to model the qualities she admired in other leaders. She spoke of emulating an administrator she admired, "I try to kind of be like that as well because of that trust and positiveness" (Interview 3). For example, Casey consciously modeled being positive for other teachers:

If I'm around that first year teacher on my grade level, sometimes I'm like if I want to say something negative, I'm like oops, let me stop that, because that's not fair to her. It's not gonna help her at all. And I think she, you know if she is looking to me as any sort of role model herself, I don't want her to see that part. You know, it's just not professional. (Interview 3)

Another quality that Casey tried to model was trustworthiness:

If you're a leader to me it's you do and say things that you... The things you say are the things you do. And those have been the best leaders that you don't have to sit there and worry about are they just saying that? Are they really meaning that? (Interview 3)

For Casey, teacher leadership meant doing her best for her students and hoping that others would see that what she was doing was working:

I'm kind of firm believer in, and I think this is where some of the leadership comes in, is people are going to see that something you're doing is working. And they're going to watch and they're going to listen and they might not say anything but they might, you know, they might come around and start asking about certain things. You don't have to go and make a huge announcement or that kind of "I'm doing this or I'm doing that" and that kind of thing. But people watch and they listen and they feel like you're making progress then it's going to, they're going to come to you and that kind of thing. (Interview 2)

Lisbeth

Lisbeth's experience of teacher leadership centered on the school as a community. Lisbeth's leadership activities focused on establishing and maintaining a positive climate for students and staff. For example, she said:

One of the things that I dearly love that I do that is part of the technology, is I lead the school announcements. And, we have a school broadcast and I try to involve as many different children at different grade levels. I involve staff, administration and it truly is a way to create this team approach to where everybody enjoys it. (Interview 2)

Lisbeth said about the school announcements, “It’s like you’re selling the school from within and it’s a very positive thing” (Interview 2).

Lisbeth also worked to ensure that teachers had a positive attitude toward the school. As part of her work on the hospitality committee, Lisbeth thought, “Wouldn’t it be great if everyone could go out to lunch” (Interview 2)? She recalled:

Well, I came up, and I did this on my own time, at home, I came up with a plan to where every teacher could go out, like if your planning period was first thing in the morning, your grade level could go out and have breakfast together. And, if your planning period was in the middle of the day you could have lunch together. And if your planning period was at the end of the day, you could go out and have an afternoon snack with your grade level. (Interview 2)

Lisbeth saw this type of activity as very important to the school climate:

And it was a huge change in environment around here. Everyone was so happy to be able to do it. And really in reality what it was doing was creating that bonding and that team for each group to get to go out and do that together and to know that they were valued enough to be able to do it. I feel pride in the fact that I got that going. (Interview 3)

Shaping the environment of the school was very important to Lisbeth:

I guess I work hard to create the environment that I want. And I have more control creating my environment in my classroom than I do creating that environment outside in that school, but I, I guess I try to push my desires in the environment that I want in my school, so I’m willing to work to create even outside of my classroom the kind of environment I want to be in. (Interview 3)

Lisbeth summed up her understanding of teacher leadership this way:

I think a teacher leader is someone who is willing to go to the bat for the team. You hear that cliché and yet it really is team approach as opposed to a me approach. And you have to be willing to do extra things that are beyond your assigned duties. And you do those things because you're thinking of the good of the whole entity. Your school. Your grade level. Your team that you're on. So, I think that's what teacher leaders do. They're also very willing to share. That's another quality of a teacher leader. Being willing to share, especially to maybe even take those new teachers under their wing. Share tips and tricks of the trade. (Interview 3)

Camilla

Camilla's experience of leadership was focused on her students and their learning:

And so that I think is really what made me the leader that I was, was putting kids first and so when it came down to testing and EOGs and things like that, I cared more about what my students needed than what the skill or standard was of the week. I also learned that learning how they needed me and what I could do for them would take care of the assessments or the end-of-grade tests or whatever because I was building relationships in order to be able to better serve them. So I think that's what helped me to be a leader. (Interview 1)

Camilla was put into formal leadership roles early in her career. She recalled, "By my second year of teaching I was already in these leadership roles" (Interview 3).

Camilla credited her principal for encouraging her to become a leader who advocates for students and solves problems:

I had a principal who would always say "Okay, so what's the solution? Don't come to me with a problem if you don't have an alternate solution because this is how I've thought it through and this is what I've come up

with. So if you don't like it I respect that but tell me what we can do instead. And so just having that, just learning that process of don't complain about, if there's something that I don't think that's best for [students] is happening. Trying to fix it, try to find a way and then come together as a team and then find solutions. So I think, yes, as—I think that was my journey of, of becoming a leader and being confident to stand up for and advocate for kids, for my students. (Interview 3)

Since Camilla was working with other teachers at the time of the interviews, she reflected on what she considered to be leadership qualities:

I think when you have teachers who, who are there until seven o'clock at night and don't complain about it. Not that there's, not that it's not okay to complain. It's okay to complain about working late but [the teachers] are there until seven o'clock at night because they want to be and they, because they want to be there so tomorrow is perfect. Or they want to be there because they promised their kids they'd have their test back tomorrow. To me those are leaders; those are teachers that are just so passionate about what they do. Those teachers that are sitting there until seven o'clock are up at four o'clock in the morning thinking about "How can I make this engaging for my kids? How can I keep their attention for 90 minutes tomorrow? How can I get them to buy in? How can I get them to learn? How can I make sure every kid has it?" Like those things that those teachers do just show that they are passionate about what they do. And I think that to me shows if you have that kind of passion about what you do then you will be a phenomenal leader in your area. I mean if you're able to transmit that passion to kids who are excited to get to class because they can't wait to work on whatever you didn't finish yesterday, then I think those are the teacher leaders. (Interview 3)

For Camilla, teacher leadership was about having a driving passion to meet students' needs. Camilla summed up her understanding of teacher leadership in this way:

Leading from within is meeting the goal that I talked about earlier of preparing our kids for what comes next for the real world or for college. It

means doing what I believe in. More than anything in this world. So, to me being a teacher leader means that every day I'm working towards helping kids to be successful, in whatever career or college, whatever road they take. (Interview 3)

Jessamyn

Jessamyn saw her leadership as an opportunity to expand her impact. She said, "Being a teacher leader for me has been enlightening and insightful. It's very exciting because you get to share lots of knowledge and impact so many different classrooms, just from your own experiences" (Interview 2). As a classroom teacher, Jessamyn looked for opportunities to work with the broader school community:

I think I was always involved and I think to an administrator that shows. It's like now the things that are on the teaching standards, "How much of a leader are you amongst your group? How involved are you in the things in the building?" I was always doing that. So I always took on what, you know, someone else didn't want to do. We were having play practice; I would take it upon myself to say "Well, let's look at the schedule. That makes sense for us to do it this day. We can do it this day or this day. I'll go ask." You know, and I'll go in with, you know it was never "When can we do it or what do you think?" I'd say 'You know, I was just looking at the schedule and if it's okay with you, I think it would make sense if we did it here, here, here. We can move our reading here and we're testing these...' like I would already have a plan and that's just how my mind works. (Interview 2)

Jessamyn believed that she had always been a leader, and that she came by it naturally:

And it just really is that some people are leaders and some people are followers and I guess I'm just a natural leader. Like, I never tried to be,

but I cannot be in a room and be in a situation where like it's not getting done, or being done effectively. I just take control. Is it bossy? No, or is it a leader? I think it's a leader, which is not always good in some circumstances, but it's just, I guess, a natural leadership ability. (Interview 3)

When asked what leadership meant to her, Jessamyn said that leadership is “anytime you can influence, good influence. And it's not necessarily on new teachers or younger teachers” (Interview 3). She was motivated to lead by a desire to expand her influence and affect larger numbers of people. In her current role as a coach supporting new teachers, Jessamyn believed that she had an opportunity to positively influence others:

And in this case I feel like I can impact not only the students but the teachers, you know, and I know that they shared some of the things that we've talked about with people on their grade level. So you just feel like you're helping so many more children and adults in this role. I mean, 'cause you can stay in your four walls all day and keep your door closed and be great but it's got to spread out. (Interview 2)

Valerie

Valerie's experience of leadership focused on relationships and collaboration. She spoke of needing “to find a way to get along and work together” (Interview 1) in order to accomplish her job. She said, “I found that by just giving people some responsibility or showing that you have professional respect helps alleviate any tension, especially when they are negative” (Interview 1). In order to cultivate collaboration and respect, Valerie adopted a leadership strategy of what she called planting seeds:

I kind of felt lately since I was tied down by doing so many responsibilities and there was information I wanted to share with teachers I could just kind of plant seeds, share information with them and then they could be the ones to disseminate it to other people because it's a lot more powerful if I give somebody something and they use it and somebody else sees it. Then it's a lot more powerful than me telling a group of people about it. So just find that one person that will be willing to try then I feel that—not that I'm trying to control it but that is something that I feel has been, has proven to work. (Interview 3)

Valerie had a strong belief in bringing about change from the ground up.

Her leadership efforts often focused on creating opportunities for teachers to collaborate to solve problems:

I think that what I meant was that, you know, somebody in a position of power can say "This is what I need you to do." And then people will do what was, what they were told to do. But I think that when people work together-- and, I'm using this word "fidelity", -- to create maybe minor changes with fidelity when it's best for the student, then I think that's a lot more powerful than somebody in a position saying "Turn in your lesson plans" whatever, whatever but people working together to impact student learning, whether they're studying what learning looks like, you know, working together, sharing resources, sharing strategies. That to me is a lot more powerful than a person in a position. (Interview 3)

Valerie summed up her definition of teacher leadership in terms of use of resources, collaboration and reflection:

So I don't think it's really about one person being an identifiable leader per se because I think that power is not necessarily in a position but it's more so in what you do with what you have. So I think I would say a teacher leader works with other people collaboratively, is aware of their strengths and weaknesses and the strengths of other people. (Interview 3)

Mel

Mel's experience of leadership evolved over time. As a classroom teacher, Mel was put in leadership roles and took on school-wide responsibilities early in her career:

Like I said, by my second year I was grade chair. I was math committee chair. I ended up creating vocabulary packets and word walls for the entire school, my second year of teaching. I, someone had introduced a bunch of ideas for vocabulary to us. I guess it was the district math coach or someone had given us a bunch of stuff. And so I ran with it. And by the time I was done with this project the entire school had color coded word walls with every vocabulary word for the whole standard course of study and all the visuals to go with them. And I had created the whole thing. I did big math competitions for the whole school, K-5. If anyone put an idea out, all it took was—and my principal learned this very quickly—all you had to do was just give me a little idea, and I would run with it. (Interview 1)

Looking back, however, Mel felt that she may have rushed into school-wide leadership. If she had it to do over again, Mel said:

Like as a teacher, I would have not, I would have put a lot more emphasis on my own classroom and my own teaching rather than trying to look at the whole school and the whole picture so soon. I enjoyed what I was doing. And I think I could have enjoyed it more if I would have just put my emphasis there and into my children because even over time anybody who tries to become the leader and, you know, look outside of your own classroom, you, you lose the focus of your own kids, of your children. I was still doing a good job, but I could have done a better job. (Interview 1)

Mel felt that she was not mature enough as a young teacher to understand some things about working with other teachers:

I think that a person can become a leader so quickly that you, maybe you're not ready. You're not maturely ready. You need to be a little bit older. And how people perceive you is big. And I think that they really perceived me as who does she think she is. You know, 27, 28 years old doing all these things. And we've been teaching forever. (Interview 1)

At the time of the interviews, Mel placed more importance on relationships with her colleagues and less importance on her own performance:

I was so driven to, to be a leader, to be, to do everything. To, be the person that, you know, shined I guess. And I think now I would relate to my colleagues in a way that I would build those relationships more, and I would work more on helping them build themselves than looking like I was trying to be the leader or trying to be the person who was the best. (Interview 1)

Looking back on her career path, Mel felt that she took too much on herself as an individual leader, which led to a sense of "burn out":

I see things differently now even as we help our, our teachers that, you know, I'd encourage more for people to go home earlier. [laughs] To take better care of themselves. I wasn't a very healthy person. I worked way too hard. I put way too much emphasis on the building itself, on the school. And I, I've learned that being whole is better than, being whole and being happy in what you do is better than to burn out doing things that, trying to fix everything. And trying to be the person who leads everything and fixes everything, so I definitely see, have a different perspective now. (Interview 1)

At this point in her career, Mel's understanding of leadership had shifted to a more collaborative approach:

And you don't really become a leader, to make sustainable change unless you, can work with the peop-, you can relate to the people you work with.

Work with them well and help create capacity in them too. And get that respect. (Interview 1)

Themes

Stayers.

Focus on students. For all four of the stayers, the meaning of their leadership came down to helping students. Vickie talked about “keeping the kids in mind” (Interview 3) and Savannah stressed “finding ways to help our kids” (Interview 3). Casey said, “It wasn’t like I had a goal of being a leader in my mind at all. It was just I want best practices” (Interview 3). Her leadership came from doing what she believed was best for students. Lisbeth engaged in the whole school leadership efforts that she did because “it’s such a positive thing for the students to be involved in. I mean, that’s the part I like the best” (Interview 2).

For these teacher leaders, focusing on the students they teach motivated them to continue to do the work, even when it was difficult. For example, when discussing her school’s poor performance on standardized tests, Vickie said, “I just don’t look at the scores I just, I look at the kids and you know how they’re working and how they’re learning and their behaviors” (Interview 1) Savannah worried about meeting the diverse needs of her students, saying, “You want to help this kid on the low level to get them to where they should be and of course, you want to get those kids who are high to continue to expand and challenge them” (Interview 2). Lisbeth said, “The thing I like the best about my job is when I see a child get something that they haven’t been able to get” (Interview 2).

Casey focused on her students' success, saying, "I want those kids to walk out of my classroom liking education and especially the kids I work with; I want them to see that they can be successful" (Interview 3). Savannah stressed the need to help other teachers meet the needs of diverse students, because "It's not just my class and my kids. Her kids are my kids as well; they're all of our kids" (Interview 3).

Leavers.

Developing capacity in others. A common theme for the leavers in the area of leadership was developing capacity in other teachers. For example, Camilla talked about a goal of making "sure that teachers in every content area are implementing literacy strategies" (Interview 2). Valerie put it this way:

I am passionate about students learning and that's why I like to help teachers because if the teachers don't get the help, the students are not going to learn. It's like, uh, a domino effect. I help them so they can help their students. Help them grow as professionals so they can be better teachers and the student can have a better experience. (Interview 3)

Jessamyn also expressed a desire to build capacity in others, saying, "I can't always fix all the layers and things that are being piled on them, but I can help them be really good teachers and touch children in a way that's remarkable and rememberable" (Interview 3). Mel's understanding of leadership had shifted over time from providing structures and supplies and information to more of a focus on developing skills. She said, "But this is different. This is being a true leader of providing support. This is very...the support that they really need" (Interview 3).

All.

Working together. While the teacher leaders' personal styles and approaches to leadership were different, all of the teacher leaders stressed the importance of working with other teachers. For Savannah, this work with other teachers was very focused on solving problems of classroom practice, for example:

What we're doing, we did it last year because me and another teacher who was with me in 2nd grade, we both taught 1st grade last year, we grouped our kids across the grade level because we found that it was very difficult for one teacher to have to try to target and get more than half of your kids that are low and then you've got three or four on grade level, it's very difficult because even your low kids can be at different levels.
(Interview 3)

Vickie also valued working with other teachers, though she was more focused on student and teacher motivation. She said:

I always try to take what's going on in the classrooms and help include that in my classes too so they're learning a certain area I try to piggy back on what they're doing so it's a lot of collaboration between teachers, getting them excited about what I'm doing and getting excited and helping what they're doing. (Interview 2)

Casey said, "I'm totally a teamwork player" (Interview 1). When implementing something new, Casey felt that it is important to have the support of at least one colleague. She said, "I don't want to go out alone though. I want to kind of have a partner in crime" (Interview 2). Lisbeth also valued being part of a team, saying, "We're all here, because we're all about educating these children and the more

we do together the more the children are going to learn” (Lisbeth, Interview 2).

Valerie felt that collaboration with others was an important leadership skill:

I think you have to have those interpersonal skills where you can work with other people, identify your strengths and your weaknesses and identify the strengths of other people so that you can work collaboratively with other people to bring about change or empower learning in the classroom. (Valerie, Interview 3)

Camilla expressed the importance of collaborating with others for her work, that “all of us coming together and pooling our strengths to create the professional development” (Interview 2) was important to her success in working with new teachers. Jessamyn recalled the importance of working with other teachers who shared her passion, “I’ve always been in situations where that was there, like the collaborative planning and the ideas and we just were all excited about teaching” (Jessamyn, Interview 1) while Mel had come to understand that “it’s not about how much I can get accomplished, it’s about how much the team can get accomplished together” (Mel, Interview 1).

Pressures of Accountability Policies

Vickie

Vickie felt the stigma of teaching in a school that had been designated “low-performing.” She said, “Well I think one of the discouraging things is knowing we are in a low performing school” (Interview 3). The designation of “low-performing” was something that Vickie tried to ignore in her daily work, on

the other hand, Vickie saw a negative effect of the “low-performing” label on the children she taught:

I think that’s the most discouraging is looking at the kids and already having the preconceived notion that they go to school here so more low performing and you’re part of it and I don’t feel like that way, like I try very hard not even to think of that and just look at the kids and have them grow and have them learn and have them read and you know count and, and do all things that they can do and be successful at what they can do. (Interview 3)

Vickie also expressed a sense of hopelessness about overcoming the “low-performing” designation:

I think the most discouraging is...is for me in this building is to know that we’re a low performing school and we have been for five years now, four years now and you know unless things really change I don’t know how it’s going to change. (Interview 3)

Savannah

Like Vickie, Savannah was disturbed by the negative reputation that her school and the children had because of poor performance on tests. She said, “I think the way that our nation has gone, it’s so consumed with testing we’ve lost focus on teaching our kids” (Interview 2). She shared that she and her fellow teachers were working hard to undo negative perceptions of the school. She said, “This school had a very negative reputation in the community and so we are in the process of changing that reputation” (Interview 1). The children at Savannah’s school also bore the burden of preconceived notions. “I’ve heard

horror stories about these children. They were stories; I don't know what's true and what's not, “ (Interview 2) she said.

The negative reputation of the school and the students, along with very low test scores, led the district to designate Savannah's school as a “turnaround school.” She explained:

This school is a turnaround school, which means that most or all of the staff were replaced. There's new administration and our school also has a three-year grant with the state. There's some incentives built in including an extended school day, with an extra 30 minutes every day, as well as we go an additional two weeks in June and August, for staff only. (Interview 1)

Savannah indicated that she felt some pressure about accountability outcomes for the school, saying, “We are now in year two of our school improvement grant and we did not exceed expected growth this last school year. We missed it by two targets but we made expectant growth, which was good“ (Interview 1).

Casey

Casey expressed both pressure and also to some extent motivation associated with accountability policies. On one hand, Casey indicated that the specter of poor performance served as a motivator for her and for her colleagues:

Well, I think as a whole we're a bunch of competitive people in our school. And we don't like to look bad. If we get bad scores or something, that fires us up. We, are, you know, we don't like that negative attention. We want that, we want our school to look good. (Interview 1)

On the other hand, Casey felt that the ever-rising expectations for performance were inequitable and that the system perpetuated performance gaps:

And I think we feel all the more pressure working in a Title 1 school because, you know, we've got a lot to go and then we meet that mark. Well, you know, that's satisfactory and then they raise it again and so we're automatic failures again. You know, it's like that gap just continues no matter what. Even if we get close to that mark then it's like, oh, there goes the standards up again, you know. That's just, I hope it gets better. (Interview 2)

Personally, Casey felt unwelcome pressure from accountability policies, particularly those that measure teacher effectiveness through test scores.

Although her students had been successful on tests in the past, she worried about what would happen if her students didn't do well in the future:

Testing stresses me out. I get, uh, this whole standards thing stresses me out. I'm like, nnh, I don't... If I get that "not effective" because my kids have not shown growth, even though I've worked my tail off for it, it'll probably hit me really hard. I don't... 'Cause me hearing that I'm not being effective will really knock me down, I think. But I guess we'll see what happens. And not knowing what this test is going to look like. I don't even know what I'm working them towards. (Interview 3)

Lisbeth

Lisbeth did not mention accountability, however she did indicate that she encountered different challenges working at a school designated as low-performing as opposed to other schools and students in her prior experience, saying "This is the first low-performing school that I've ever really been at, the

first time at one school. So it was a different experience for me going from the AG” (Interview 1).

Camilla

For Camilla, accountability and testing presented a double-edged sword. Student success on tests allowed Camilla a certain amount of freedom from instructional mandates, however like Casey, Camilla expressed feeling a great deal of pressure for her students to continue to perform well:

But then it was tremendous pressure for me, I’m on this pedestal; I have the scores, what happens if I don’t get them. So for the next couple of years, I kid you not, come EOG time, I taught the way I wanted to all year, I was not using their Test Pro books I was not conforming to the standardized way of teaching, I was teaching my own way and but I would start to doubt myself so much like the month before end-of-grade tests. I didn’t sleep, I was grouchy, I was stressed out and I just didn’t want to do that anymore. I didn’t want to continue to guide people in a way I didn’t necessarily believe in but also the pressure of what if my kids don’t do it this time then I’m going to be looked at, well maybe she doesn’t know what she’s doing. Or maybe her way isn’t the right way. (Interview 1)

Camilla worried about what would happen if she did not continue to get good results. She said that she knew “if I wasn’t producing scores then I would be, there would certainly be consequences” (Interview 3). This sense of pressure began to take a physical toll on Camilla:

When I say sleepless nights, it was like my husband was like, you need to see a doctor or something, like you’re anxious, you’re cranky and just I mean it’s hard for a lot of people who have been in that situation to see you would not like teaching because of testing and the pressure. Yeah, that was why. (Interview 1)

Camilla also expressed concern about the negative reputation of the school due to poor performance on tests and the impact of that reputation on teachers and students:

Sometimes teachers have low expectations of these kids because of where they come from or, the scores of the school. I've heard teachers say, "I don't give homework because they're not going to do it anyway," and to me, it's been a challenge to say... to have those conversations. (Interview 2)

For Camilla, the impact of accountability policies meant low expectations for students based on past performance and ever-rising expectations for teachers based on student performance.

Jessamyn

Like Camilla, Jessamyn's experience of accountability policies left her concerned for both teachers and students. Jessamyn commented on the additional pressure from surveillance felt by teachers working in low-performing schools, saying "There's enough stress teaching and in teaching in a low-performing school and then it's like an added stress, like someone's riding your back every day. I think that's one of the main things" (Interview 2). Jessamyn was also concerned about the effects of testing pressure on other aspects of teaching, such as meeting students' social and emotional needs:

And you know, "We don't have time to do that. We can only do it during the 25-minute lunch that they have; we don't have time. We've got to get these test scores up." So I don't know, it was just now here's the focus

again on test scores, test scores, test scores, but not really getting into your parents and your students and their basic needs. (Interview 1)

Jessamyn said that she would love to go back to teaching, but accountability pressures were keeping her away. When asked if she thought it was realistic to have everything she would need so that she would return to the classroom, she said:

Not in this day and age, not with all of the testing constraints and, like, we so rely on testing and assessments. Not in this day and age. I think it's maybe something that we will eventually evolve to again, but, not right now. There's too much pressure on merit pay and testing. (Interview 3)

Valerie

Valerie worried about the impact of test pressure on other aspects of schooling. In her experience, pressure to increase test scores in courses that are part of the accountability program (known as EOC courses) led to administrative neglect of other courses:

I think that attitude is prevalent in most schools, you know – EOC/non-EOC – cause we're only focusing on the output so stuff like that really irritates me because you know, as a parent I want my child to get the best in all their classes, whether it's tested or not tested and I just think that there should be value placed on all subjects because a lot of times in those subjects that you don't value, that's where they get to apply a lot of the skills that they learn in class. Example – the technology class – you know, that's where you have to do the math to actually... to do that stuff. And like in my business classes, you know you had to know how to calculate certain things in order to put it in the spreadsheet right. You know, you still have to know how to write properly to write a letter, so there's a lot of things that could go together but we just keep people in their silos. (Interview 2)

In Valerie's experience, teachers of EOC courses were subject to far more surveillance than the teachers of the non-EOC courses:

So that is what really bugs me because the only focus is on EOC teachers and those people are like white on rice in their classroom, I mean just like all the time, all the time. You are in there all the time but you are not anywhere else where some of those skills can develop to help them in these classes. (Interview 1)

Valerie also expressed dismay that the focus on testing results had caused School G to neglect the social development of students. She said, "I don't know if it was accountability. The focus becoming on the test scores and you know, you just kind of lose sight of the social deficiencies that exist, you know. The profanity, being late, stuff like that" (Interview 3). Valerie believed that the neglect of these social needs only exacerbated the negative reputation that School G had "of being like a Lean On Me school" (Interview 2).

Another aspect of accountability policies that concerned Valerie was the accompanying emphasis on everyone doing things the same way. She worried that administrators were making judgments about teachers based on incomplete or inaccurate information:

I think with the new accountability its just made things – although we say we focus on student learning – student learning is one of those ambiguous terms because you come in my class and you see this – do you know for sure that my students are learning. How do you know? That's why I tell teachers to keep artifacts, use data and stuff like that. You have so many incompetent people that are in roles that can cause people issues on their job. It's hard dealing with something like that, especially when someone comes in your class and I can't think of anything off the top of my head

where somebody will go in there. You can't – and I have even said this to [the principal] – You can't walk in my class and see the same thing you are going to see in your class. Our students are totally different and I think as long as we are kind of giving the same information or teaching the same thing we can do it differently – but they want to see the same thing all the time. How can you differentiate? My class may not have gotten it the day before. Lesson plans have to be updated every day. (Interview 1)

Mel

For Mel, the greatest concerns about accountability policies were related to efforts by districts to ensure positive results by putting multiple programs in place and enforcing their use through top-down control:

The way I've seen things change is the way accountability. You know, yes, it was easier then with testing and, but the accountability from top down had gotten out of control. Where you have to put on a dog and pony show to do all these, to check off all these things that are expected of you, but it's not sustainable change. It's just for the moment. Like how many 10,000 things can you put teachers through, and you don't even know if half of them work. You know even know if, you know, what you did that worked because you did so many things. And then you burn out the teachers. And then the next year you start all over again with 50% new. (Interview 1)

Mel had doubts about the long-term success of this approach to school leadership. She felt that the focus on checking off lists of program elements led to teacher and administrator turnover and ultimately continued low achievement:

No they put a new administrator in or, you know, maybe the administrator has been there a few years, and then think that we make this list of 10,000 things, and look at all the stuff we did. The teachers are burnt out, all this turnover, the administrator is leaving, and the school didn't—it may have, test scores may have rocketed for, skyrocketed for one or two years, and

then the next year it plummeted again, so that's a pet peeve of mine.
(Interview 2)

Themes

Stayers.

Negative reputation. The stayers in this study, with the exception of Lisbeth, indicated that they feel stress and discomfort based on the negative public image of the schools in which they teach. Savannah, Vickie and Casey expressed a desire to change perceptions of their schools. Savannah was more hopeful than Vickie, talking about the school making “expectant growth” (Interview 1) while Vickie was discouraged about the test scores and wondered “how it’s going to change” (Interview 3) Casey simply said that “we don’t like that negative attention.”

Leavers.

Top-down pressure. For the leavers, a theme in their experience of accountability was a sense of negative pressure from testing. Camilla said, “part of the pressure that I felt was the constant testing; testing, testing and I think that other teachers probably felt the same thing” (Interview 1). Certainly the other leavers felt the same thing, because Valerie said, “right now I think the focus is on outputs, EOC scores” (Interview 1), Jessamyn said “here’s the focus again on test scores, test scores, test scores” (Interview 1), and Mel said, “the accountability from top down had gotten out of control” (Interview 1). For the

leavers, top-down pressure and emphasis on test scores associated with accountability was a significant issue.

All.

Concern for students. The main concern that the teacher leaders in this study had about accountability policies was that the policies negatively impacted their students. The leavers expressed a sense of narrowing of focus at the expense of important aspects of teaching, such as social needs and having high expectations. For example, Valerie said, “The focus becoming on the test scores and you know, you just kind of lose sight of the social deficiencies that exist, you know. The profanity, being late, stuff like that” (Interview 3). Camilla was concerned that “teachers have low expectations of these kids because of where they come from or the scores of the school” (Interview 2).

Jessamyn, Valerie and Mel all expressed concern that real student learning was lost when teachers and schools focused too much on test scores. For example, Jessamyn said:

And it’s just so top heavy that sometimes I think that we as educators get so self absorbed in meeting a quota or getting a test score that we kind of miss the loop of what’s really needed by the students and I think sometimes because you get this funding and this money and this help, you’re just, you’re putting everything into place but everything isn’t working. So sometimes you’re doing so much you don’t really know at the end of the year what worked and what didn’t. (Interview 2)

Mel also worried that schools didn’t know what was actually working. She said, “Like how many 10,000 things can you put teachers through, and you don’t even

know if half of them work. You know even know if, you know, what you did that worked because you did so many things” (Interview 1). Valerie was concerned that administrators were so focused on tested areas that they did not pay attention to other subjects, and students in those courses missed out. She said, “as a parent I want my one child to get the best in all of their classes, not just the tested areas” (Interview 1).

The stayers also expressed concern about the impact of accountability on students. Vickie was disturbed by the “preconceived notion” (Interview 3) people had about students because of test scores, Savannah felt that “we have lost focus on teaching our kids” (Interview 2) and Casey was concerned that “that [achievement] gap just continues no matter what” (Interview 2).

Constraints on Teacher Leadership

Vickie

One constraint that Vickie identified was communication with parents. She expressed a desire to communicate more with the parents of the students she worked with, but found it to be difficult to do so:

Another hard thing is the parents. I don't see them that very often so that becomes hard, when they do see me sometimes it's more of a negative or when they hear from me it's more of a negative and I think I need to step up and do a little more positive phone calls or notes home that aren't negative I don't normally write negative letters but it's just be nice to see them more, even like on field days the positive day to you know go outside and you know even those open houses I like to... to meet with them, there's not a lot of them so... but the ones that are there I... I try to take advantage of and so that's kind of hard the communication with the parents. (Interview 2)

One reason that parent communication was a problem for Vickie was that many of her parents spoke only Spanish, and Vickie did not speak Spanish. She said:

You have to have someone translate for you when you call a parent about like your child fell down in gym class skinned his knee, just want to let you know. I can't do that in five minutes, I have to get someone to do it for me and so I...I...that's kind of a barrier that I...I should as a teacher I should do a little better with that, I think we all should. (Interview 1)

The language barrier faced by many of the families at School A was a factor in another constraint Vickie raised. She spoke often about her concern with how often the children she works with change schools, and she wondered if the language issues were a contributing factor in the moves:

Half of the parents speak Spanish and the other half don't...they can't communicate either so I feel like there's a lot of barriers put up between families and maybe that's why they transfer so much? just finding out where their friends go or where their...you know where they can make a friend and...and they want to stay with them or something but that's a...that's a huge difference. (Interview 1)

Students were not the only ones who left School A frequently, Vickie noted. "We have [lots] of transition even with our teachers at [School A]. I've had three administrators in...in six...six years so you kind of have to let go each summer and start again fresh with a new group" (Interview 1). She had to struggle to get past all the movement, as she noted, "I used to take it real personally when people would leave [the school] and I couldn't understand why" (Interview 1).

Some of the teachers who stayed made things harder for Vickie, however. She said she found it “hard just to approach other colleagues that are negative” (Interview 2). When asked to talk about what makes being a teacher leader hard, Vickie said:

I'd say one of the hardest things... one of the hard things is dealing with negative people or people who don't really care that are... we try we... we... we try not be like... like yell at the kids in the hallway for stepping out of line or in the mornings like if you're eating breakfast you should be in the cafeteria if you're not eating breakfast you're in the gym and I feel like sometimes we just... there are people who are not made to... if you're walking on the left side of the hall instead of the right side they'll just yell and it's... it's almost... it's hard to watch them be so like heavy... I don't even know like how to say it but it's like every day they do the same thing and every day they yell at the same kids and every day it's like don't you get tired of that like try something different or I want to tap them on the shoulder and say why don't you go take a break and I'll... I'll monitor the hallway here or something. I think its hard to approach people that are negative and let them know that that they're being negative sometimes they don't feel like that's my role. (Interview 2)

Vickie gave another example of a time when it was hard to deal with another teacher:

The kindergarten group met and... there were five teachers and four of them were high energy, focused and then there was one who was... was not willing to do anything their way... well in the group for some reason she didn't mesh with them and when she would like... they were talking about teaching a certain unit and they were all on like Thanksgiving and how they go through about Indians and things and they have like a potluck where you know they bring in their food, [she said] “we don't do that, like we don't bring in food” so like when there's a whole... there's a whole class that's just isolated from that whole experience and she's like no we don't do that. It was so like I was like she's kidding like it was almost like you're not ...that's not right ... it wasn't just like Thanksgiving it was you know well how do we teach math counting with cubes or something and

she like oh we don't count cubes we count you know sticks or something like everything was like a battle with her... and she left early for a meeting and afterwards I remember those four ladies I said to them, what's with that? Like does...how does that work and she said they all felt...they felt really bad for the children. Their communication was off with her and just she wasn't budging she was a veteran teacher, she...she knew better you know she just felt like this...this is the way I've been doing things so I'm not going to change and unfortunately that...that's just like I felt...I felt awful for that class that kid that class of kids. ... and unfortunately it hurt those children you know it just and she never broke away she's no longer at [the school] but it... it's weird how some of these personal feelings can affect the group which can affect the child and so I think that's... seeing that dynamic and someone just not budging even when I went and tried like I tried to be like that mediator it's better off not getting involved sometimes and that's sad, that's sad when it comes to that. (Interview 2)

Savannah

One concern that Savannah expressed frequently was a lack of parent support. While Savannah understood that there are a number of reasons why parents might not participate in school events, she still found it to be frustrating.

She said:

Working in schools that are low socioeconomic, some parents found it difficult to come in to see you if there was a parent conference. The parent support was not very great which made it difficult. We would have curriculum nights. One night we'd have reading and then in a couple of months, we might focus on math and of course, your teachers came after school and they had whatever info they wanted to convey to the parents but you would have little or no parents at all come back for those things but yet they came to our carnival and they came to other fun events that may have happened at school but it seemed that when it came to academics, as teachers a lot of us felt as if they weren't concerned. We know that some parents were working, just depends on what job they had. Some I think didn't care to come back. They didn't have transportation to come back or they were working but that is a reason for low attendance. If there was food, they would find a way to come. A lot of times at that school, if we were selling pizzas or something, eating spaghetti or

whatever, they would come. If there wasn't any food involved, and they knew there wasn't any food involved, you wouldn't see them come.
(Interview 1)

Savannah's frustration with the lack of parent support seemed to be related to the amount of work that she and her fellow teachers put into events that were designed to attract parents who then didn't come, and also in part from a comparison with what teachers at more affluent schools have:

Parent support usually, and even in the school I'm in now, is just not great. The PTA exists but it's not the same as what more affluent schools have. As I said before, transportation was a huge issue for some people. They wanted to come back but they didn't have a way to come back, as well as the attitudes of parents who didn't care to come back. (Interview 1)

Another issue that Savannah encountered was the parents' limited level of education, which hindered communication between home and school. She gave the following example:

Some of my parents don't even read those things; they just sign things and fill it out and not even realizing what it means. At the other school, most times, I felt like they read my stuff or they would call and ask if they weren't sure. This group of parents, they just sign stuff and one parent, her child is very capable of doing pretty well but she signed a paper that the district sends out that gives parents options to opt out if they prefer for their child to not be tested. She signed it. Well, the paper went home over a week ago but she sends it back and we had already done one day of testing. She sends it back the next day, a week later, saying, "Oh, I just got it yesterday." I sent that a week ago. She signs it. I texted the coordinator and I said, "I don't think this is right because I'm thinking she just signed it but she didn't read what it said. It said if you do not." It's in plain English. It's not using the words "if you decide to opt out" which we would've understood what that meant and she signed it and the coordinator calls and she said, "We just wanted to make sure. We already

did one day of testing but here it is the next day and what do you want me to do now?" and she said she wanted her to be tested and it's not just that. There are other things that they just sign and fill it out and return it. A lot of times they have no idea what it means or what they just signed. (Interview 3)

Savannah's focus on making sure that her students had every opportunity to learn led to frustration over a lack of resources. She wanted to provide her students with experiences like field trips, but she ran into barriers:

The one thing that is beneficial for these students is field trips because they are not exposed too much beyond their neighborhood. It means the world to go to Wal-Mart. Being able to expose them to other places is very important and of course, the resources to take some trips aren't always there. It's a problem. (Interview 1)

Savannah indicated that the problem with resources was getting worse due to district budget cuts:

The demands of a classroom teacher have become so great. A lot of them, I think, are partly due to budget cuts. You don't have as many people in your building as there once was and so teachers have found themselves picking up more weight on their end and I believe it's been distributed in all areas because of less people. (Interview 2)

Savannah said that one of the ways the budget cuts impacted teachers was through class size. Savannah's school had a grant that was supposed to insure that they had small class size. She said, "Right now, currently in my school, in K-2, we're somewhere around 16 to 18 students and through grade 5 you can have

as many as no more than 20 or 21” (Interview 2). She saw that as an advantage to teaching at School B.

One of the big issues with being a teacher is the class sizes. We even see it getting big with a Title I grant. You would think that you would have those smaller classes but it's almost not even there anymore. You try to stick to that ratio but sometimes it isn't happening. (Interview 2)

For example,

This year, we started with three Kindergarten classes and that was pretty much based on enrollment at the end of last school year. They had room for the three teachers that were there but again, when parents wait until the last minute, you have people that move and so the first month or so of school, the Kindergarten classes ended up being about 25 or 26 kids per teacher. I was never able to go in and see how their setup was with all these kids because I knew they didn't have enough room. They had kids everywhere. We finally were able to get another teacher. He's been there probably 2 or 3 weeks now but they divided those three classes. Our principal was trying to see if the district would let us have another teacher to come and cut the classes even smaller, about 14 or 15, but the district wouldn't allow it. I think there's a rule, within those first 10 days of school so they had to wait and they had to tough it out. It was very stressful on those teachers just seeing them every day, you could tell. Making sure everyone was there and accounted for, you have children who are in school for the first time and having some kind of experience and that's a lot even for a teacher and her assistant to have 26 to 30 kids. They've got their class sizes down a little bit but I think now they're going to go up to 20. Again, I don't know if they'll bring in another teacher but I know that's quite a bit for Kindergarten classroom. (Interview 2)

The budget cuts had also affected the amount of time during the day that Savannah had to plan and work with other teachers. She said, “We don't have a lot of planning time. There isn't a lot of planning time. A lot of your planning time

takes place after school” (Interview 2). When administrators tried to incorporate planning time during the day, it didn’t always work out well:

Last year, when we did LTM meetings, which stands for Learning Team Meetings, we did them during the school day but the problem we had, that we ran into frequently, was the fact that assistants usually cover it in the classes and an assistant was out. They had to combine classes and it was a consistent problem off and on. (Interview 2)

In the previous year, School B had two curriculum coordinators, one for K-2 and one for 3-5. The budget cuts meant that only one coordinator was funded for the next year. Savannah felt that this had a significant impact on her work:

It definitely puts more leadership on the teachers because the idea when we came down to one curriculum coordinator, they have a curriculum team now, ... and it consists of the grade levels but they in turn are to come back to their teams. They're supposed to meet every other week because it'd be the off week of our staff meetings and they are to come back and report things that are going on and they meet for like an hour and a half; changes that may be coming and things, testing and those kinds of things – anything that goes with curriculum... It's put more pressure and more weight even on teachers. We really rely on email. Our curriculum coordinator, she got very sick last week and she was out the entire week...when you don't have as many resources as you're used to, it does put more of a strain on the people in the building because somewhere, somebody's got to pick up the slack or do something. (Interview 3)

Adding to this sense of having fewer resources to do the work was a major new professional development initiative in the district:

Like I said, teachers' time is very limited and they're asking us to do more with less and I don't mean just the fact that we haven't gotten a raise in three years but with less people, less time and now what we have just

learned about two or three weeks ago, our county had not started on training for Common Core with our teachers. Here in our county, elementary teachers have to complete these 58 hours of training. Of course, your question when you hear something like that is, "Where are we going to have time to do this? What money do we have to continue doing these trainings because we know that next school year, there's going to be another \$12,000,000 in budget cuts." (Interview 2)

Savannah was feeling pressured by the expectation (her own as well as others') that she continue to improve learning for her students with larger classes, less help, and less time. This reduction in available resources was a major stressor for Savannah.

Another issue that Savannah raised was student transience in and out of her classroom, not just from one year to the next but even during the year:

Our class sizes were about 16 or 17, a revolving door. It's more a revolving door school than the one I came from. I've never seen so many students come and go. When I finished the school year last year, I probably had maybe half the kids that I started with. (Interview 1)

Savannah commented that this was a difference between School A and School B, "They seem more mobile than my Hispanic families and when they leave a Title I school, they go to another Title I school so it's not like they're going from here to across town to a non-Title I school" (Interview 1).

Savannah expressed concern about the effect that so much movement has on her students:

The turnover with these students is amazing. One child never showed, he got dropped off my list and I found out later he's at another school. He

comes back to my school maybe about three months later. He's here most of the school year, he leaves again. He goes to another school. Not the same school he started out with in the beginning of the year. He's been to three schools now in one school year. In second grade, he's on my roll again. When he came back to my school, I didn't get him. Another teacher got him. He's on my roll again this year. He was not the most well-behaved child and he was also low, very low. Not reading on grade level at all, anywhere near it, but if you think about the situation behind it, he moves around a lot. How is he supposed to have some kind of stability when you keep moving around every place? (Interview 1)

Savannah felt stymied in her efforts to help this child read on grade level, because she couldn't teach him if he was not in her class.

Students moving in and out all the time contributed to another constraint that Savannah noted, student behavior problems:

We have quite a few new students that are new here to our school this year who weren't here last year and that's been a challenge because once we got the kids last year, we try to set a tone as to what our expectations were because this was not the old school that they went to. It was a new start for everyone. (Interview 1)

Savannah worked hard to set clear expectations for student behavior in her class and having students come and go all the time made this more difficult. As an example, Savannah told the following story about a new student in her room:

We have a hard time keeping our hands to ourselves. We have a hard time saying polite things to others. He tells kids to shut up. He calls them stupid. He doesn't really have any friends in the classroom as you can imagine. They don't really care to be around him because of the way he behaves ... one of the other students in the classroom came up and told the guidance counselor, "Our new student doesn't follow the rules and he's not very nice to anyone in the class." It speaks volumes about what

the kids' expectations are and what they know about how to behave in a classroom. (Interview 3)

Savannah felt that having extra adults in the classroom was one key to dealing with student behavior issues, and she lamented the loss of extra help in the form of teacher assistants:

I know if you go into these schools that have these low scores, you ask them and nine times out of ten, it's behavior that they can't get under control. That's one biggie so if you don't have any help coming in, especially in the upper grades, and you have a ton of behaviors, there's no way to relieve you for like two minutes for you to breathe. They're important. They're vital to have extra bodies. We have volunteers that come. It's not the same as having an assistant because volunteers are great, don't get me wrong, to have someone come in. A lot of times they're usually working with the ones who are low but we try to work with what we have to the best we can and hopefully the 3rd and 4th grade will get an assistant. (Interview 3)

The lack of extra adults in the classroom was a problem for Savannah because she was less able to meet the individual needs of her students. Sometimes the needs were behavior related, as in this story:

I had a student last year, she came from an alternative school program for kids who have psychological issues and behavior problems. She came about February. If she didn't get what she wanted, she would throw a tantrum. You really wouldn't have to do anything or say anything wrong to her for her to go off, she just would. You wouldn't know why sometimes, that's just how she was. (Interview 1)

Sometimes the needs were academic. Savannah worried about being able to give adequate time and attention to each of her students:

It's stressful in the classroom, especially the demands, being able to serve all of your students equally because all of our students are very different. You have your high students, you have your students on the grade level and of course you have students who are below grade level so a lot of times, it's hard to reach all areas. You want to help this kid on the low level to get them to where they should be and of course, you want to get those kids who are high to continue to expand and challenge them. (Interview 2)

Savannah noted that another thing that makes it hard is a sense that people making decisions are not teachers and do not understand what teachers go through each day. She said:

As teachers, we feel like the decisions that are being made by the powers that be have been so detached from the classroom that it's just they make these decisions and they don't fully think about how that not only affects the kids, how that affects the teachers because if we're supposed to deliver content to students, we don't have any kind of support and sometimes funding to get that done. That makes it very difficult. I've heard many teachers say, "I just wish one day people from the top would come in and you take my class, my whole day, so they understand what it's like." Not just in a Title I school because at this point, we're all facing the same issues. (Interview 2)

When the people making decisions that affect teachers don't understand the issues that teachers face, Savannah felt that it leads to unreasonable demands, such as too much paperwork that takes teachers' time and attention away from the needs of students:

Also, I think paperwork has just become so mountainous. I know some of it is accountability and it's a paper trail that they do but sometimes, you wonder if my focus is on getting all this paperwork done or are we more concerned with teachers putting more into their instruction? (Interview 2)

The constraints that Savannah identified are all things that she perceived interfered with her ability to meet the learning needs of her students.

Casey

A major constraint for Casey was time. For a variety of reasons, Casey felt that she did not have enough time to take care of all of the things she needed to do. One factor impacting Casey's time was an increase in the number of meetings she is required to attend:

I think that's gotten worse over the past few years, planning time, and meetings and LTMs and or TLCs as a lot of people call it. I think, just, there are meetings all the time. The other week I had a meeting every day after school, after or before school. Not to mention your normal LTM time and your normal grade level planning time, and you know, that's two days that you don't get that time free, so you 've got three days left, and if you have to have an IEP conference or a 504 conference, then, then, you know, that times gets, it's very sacred. (Interview 1)

Casey's concern was not just that there were a lot of meetings, but she was also bothered that the meetings didn't focus on what she perceived as most important, planning. She said, "I feel this year where being, our time is being taken away, our planning time's being taken away rather, and I'm not focusing more on what's, what matters and that's the lesson part of it" (Interview 1).

Time also became a factor for Casey in dealing with another constraint, lack of resources. She commented, "Unfortunately I feel like materials are lacking for, especially for the social studies curriculum" (Interview 2). The issue of

resources and time to find them came up frequently in Casey's experience, for example:

So it's, you know, I guess it's all the unknowns right now in education of not really knowing where to go or having the, I think proper resources, just like I said, you can't find stuff on certain, uh, math concepts that they want it that way or you know, there's very little out that I feel like really truly supports Common Core, right now. And, I really simply don't have the time right now between grad school and kids to be able to spend that time creating my own materials like I did in the past when I didn't have kids. (Interview 3)

At the time of the interviews, Casey was struggling to strike a balance between work and raising two small children. Time was mentioned again as a factor with that issue. She said, "And, you know, before I could go home and keep working, but now I've got kids and I'm in grad school and you know, I kind of have to balance as much as I can" (Interview 1). Casey felt that the requirements of teaching at a low-performing school took up more time than teaching in other schools, and that extra time was difficult to find with two kids at home:

So I think that's another reason that it's hard to stay in the Title I schools because they do require a lot of extra time. And I feel like my life style is almost not matching up with that anymore, because I do have children at home that they're up 'til 8:30 at night. And I'm a person that needs a lot of sleep and I need to go to bed at 9:30 if I want to function the next day. So I think that's been a little tough for me this year, too, especially now having two children. This is my first year teaching with two children; that's been a little tough. (Interview 3)

Casey's sense of not having enough time was exacerbated by requirements placed on her from above. Casey felt a mismatch between the priorities set by the district leadership and her own priorities as a teacher:

I think another huge frustration is the time. I just, it's really hard to be a teacher and a parent. And I've got an extra thing of having grad school on top of it. I just, I wish we had more time to focus on our lessons and less on paperwork, we're really, really heavy in data right now. I feel like I focus more on data and RTI than I do on lesson plans. I don't know if higher ups really understand how much we have on us right now from things that they want us to do and how that's affecting the things we need to do the most. And who knows with our new superintendent if that will get any better or what's going to happen. (Interview 2)

Casey worried about the potential negative impact of the pressure that was being placed on teachers from above:

I think that's a huge frustration that I feel like sometimes with all these new ideas coming from the government and the legislation, it's like we've got to really stop and think about how much pressure we're putting on the teachers cause it scares me that they're going to chase people away. And we're going to be left with when sometimes people barking up the wrong tree, it's not just, that's my personal opinion. (Interview 2)

Casey felt a strong sense of responsibility for student learning, but with many low-performing students in her class, she worried about failing to meet her own expectations and those of others:

I have a lot of kids this year that are... I have all but three that are not on grade level and that's been hard this year because it's like constant failures because they can't keep up with the curriculum because their, their foundational knowledge is so lacking. That's been hard. Because you know, when your kids don't pass a test, you... I take it personally.

You know, I'm like that's a reflection on my teaching. Why aren't they getting it? And that's been a little hard. (Interview 3)

Having many students in her class who were below grade level exacerbated other constraints, such as lack of resources:

Because a lot of my students can't independently read, like a social studies book or most of the materials, little booklets that come with it. The vocabulary is just too much for them. And experiences are lacking as well. (Interview 2)

Another constraint for Casey "is the lack of the parental involvement" (Interview 2). Casey understood that the parents she worked with were "defensive because they haven't had positive situations in schools themselves" but she felt that it was important that the parents be involved in their children's education. Casey worked to change parents' negative views about teachers and school in hopes that parent involvement would positively impact student performance:

But, I just always try to tell those parents that it's, I'm there for those kids. I'm not anti their children. I have a feeling a lot of them feel like you're anti their children, that you're singling them out or something like that when you do have to report negative things. And I think that's a big challenge is trying to get parents' attitudes changed about things. And just even getting them involved in their academic success and getting their kids motivated from them. I've read some research where the kids don't care much about pleasing their teachers. They want to please their peers and their parents. And I think that's a huge thing we're missing in education is the parental involvement. (Interview 2)

Like Savannah, Casey mentioned student behavior as a constraint she had often encountered at School C:

And it's tough, the behavior is tough. Talk about another thing that's hard is, I think this is the first year that I really haven't had any severe behavior issues. I'd say every other year I've had really hard kids behavior wise. You could do just about anything and everything, every trick under the sun, it's just, it's not going to do any good. There's just too much going on in them to be able to reach them kind of thing. And I think that's, that, those behavior issues take away from academic time. You know we have an issue out on the playground, what are you doing for the next 15 minutes? Trying to resolve what's been going on. You cannot waste any time with these kids because you need every single second to try and catch them up. (Interview 2)

Casey was most concerned about the impact of student behavior on time for learning, but she also recognized that dealing with student behavior took a toll on her as a teacher. While in the year of the interviews Casey had a well-behaved class with a lot of academic needs, in previous years she had more behavior issues:

So, I think in the years past, I've had a great year this year and it's almost opened my eyes to how great it is to have a normal, you know, a normal class. Not to have those handful of, you know, severely defiant children. (Interview 2)

On the other hand, Casey was confident about her ability to positively impact student behavior. She gave this example of how students behave differently for her:

When I left last year, I left in December and had my baby and my classroom fell apart after I left. And you know I didn't feel like I had huge behavior problems. I had one really, really big behavior problem, and he ended up going to alternative school after I left but, you know, I had other ones just fall apart and they were experienced veteran teachers in there. Went through four substitutes that year just from December on and I don't know. I think the kids know I care about them and so some kids they have potential to be poorly behaved children but it's like they don't do it to me. (Interview 2)

Overall, Casey's greatest concern was student learning. The constraints that she identified were all things that she perceived took away from her ability to help students learn.

Lisbeth

Lisbeth identified two major constraints to her work as a teacher leader. Like Casey, Lisbeth was concerned about not having enough time to do everything that needed to be done. She was also concerned about top-down decision making and the accompanying implied lack of respect for teachers.

When asked about things that were hard for her as a teacher leader, Lisbeth said, "The thing I like the least is when typically it's a top down administration mandate and it's when maybe someone wasn't following the rules correctly and so to fix that one person, is they mandate something school-wide" (Interview 2). She went on to give an example from her own experience:

We have a system, a little yellow fob to check in every day. And last year you had to sign in. We used to sign in on a sheet of paper. But now we have this fob and we fob in. So there's a little sensor in the front office in the glass, and we swipe this over the little magnetic thing and it tells what time you arrive. Well, recently, within the past two weeks, we're not

having to sign out every day. So, they said the teacher work day is from 8:00 until 4:00. So you have to get your 8 hours in. And everybody's having a hard time with it because we're salaried employees; teachers work a lot on the weekends and doing report cards at home and grading papers on their own personal time, but that can't be, you can't measure that on this sign in sign out system. So, that committee meeting that I just came from, one of the items on our agenda was these teachers that are going to be here until 6:00 tonight for this meeting, do they get to accrue extra time for that and how does that factor into their 8 hours for tomorrow? Could they leave 30 minutes early tomorrow? What happens when you have a dentist appointment? I think it's a two-edged sword. You want to be accountable, and you want to do your job, and you're salaried, you're not hourly, but then they kind of put you on this hourly thing. So that's frustrating to me and I don't think that's professional. I can see both sides because I think some people might abuse the time if you're not having to sign in. Maybe they're going to come in a little late and leave a little early. But I still think a lot of teachers spend a whole lot more than 8 hours a day doing their job. So that's frustrating to me. Any time there's like a mandate and it makes you feel less than professional. (Interview 2)

As a technology specialist, Lisbeth was responsible for teaching full time as well as maintaining equipment in the school. She said, "my job is pretty much two jobs in one, in that I teach full time, and I have all this tech support. I have...we have a lot of old equipment that tends to need repair on a regular basis" (Interview 2). Lisbeth identified time as a major constraint affecting her work:

Time. To me time is the biggest factor because of how much time you have in a given day, how many classes I teach, and I have all these things that I want to do in my brain and on my to do list, and the more time I have the more successful I am the more I am able to accomplish. As far as time that I get to pick what I'm going to do as opposed to teaching time. That teaching time is given, and I have x amount number of classes, but it's that other time, and how I can juggle that time to make other things happen. So I'd say time is my biggest factor. (Interview 3)

Having two jobs to do in a limited amount of time meant that Lisbeth was often confronted by conflicting priorities:

So, is my priority teaching my students? I love that part of my job. Is my priority doing the tech equipment and keeping teachers supported where they can do their job? I love that part of the job. But it really is two jobs. It really is. (Interview 2)

At the time of the interviews, Lisbeth had received a large quantity of new equipment to set up. She explained why this left her feeling particularly stressed:

And while I'm working all that, all my regular tickets are just kind of building up because that, you know the old equipment breaking and different things that happen, that never stops. And yet I need to be planning effective lessons and teaching my students and chairing my committees and I have a lady coming tomorrow that's like auditing the Title I stuff to see if we've tagged and labeled everything correctly. And this is the first time that I've ever met a person to come in and do this. So, that's why I'm stressed. (Interview 2)

Lisbeth struggled to reconcile her view of herself as a professional who has to prioritize and make good decisions about how to use limited time with the view of administrators who didn't always seem to trust her professionalism.

Camilla

One constraint that Camilla identified was a mismatch between her values and the expectations of administration. As a successful teacher leader, Camilla was asked to convey expectations to others that she didn't necessarily agree with:

Because even though we had grade level meetings, sometimes [the principal] would come and sometimes she wouldn't but she would say this is what needs to be discussed, this is the agenda, add whatever you need to and so I felt like I was delivering a message that I didn't necessarily believe in when it came to the way that we graded students or the way that we assessed students. (Interview 1)

One time in particular Camilla disagreed strongly with a grading policy that she was asked to disseminate:

There were times when I disagreed with some things that I was asked to tell the staff or whoever I worked with, either by grade level or content, and she was telling all of us, including me we're going to not give zeros anymore. That was very difficult for me because for a lot of reasons, I felt like the school that I had worked at for the year, they would never say that. The expectation would be the kids do their work and if they get a zero, they get it. But those kids also weren't necessarily going to get a zero; they had the support systems to make sure they didn't. I felt like we were enabling our students by not giving zeros, by giving 60's or even time after time opportunities. That was probably one of the most challenging things that I had to do and I think because she was saying to me at that point, I don't care how you do it, like the way you teach is the way you teach but you're not giving zeros anymore, nobody is and you're going to deliver the message. I'm not going to, you are. (Interview 1)

In this case, Camilla was particularly dismayed because she felt that the policy exacerbated low expectations for her students:

So that was hard as an African American teacher to lower the expectation for African American students to me was very difficult for me. And then to have to tell the staff, or my grade level and my content area, this is what we're doing and to do it with a smile and support something that I didn't really support. So that was one time she didn't care how I did things, it was this is something you're going to do my way. (Interview 1)

Another time when Camilla's values did not match her administrator's expectations was when Camilla was put forward as a model for other teachers because of her test scores:

You were, it was a scale based on your scores and so she was a big celebrator and she celebrated me and the other highest scoring math teacher and just kind of put us on a pedestal that was like you should be doing this, you should be doing this and you know, Camilla is going to come and co-teach or come and observe, you come and observe her and you follow her, there were teachers that had taught longer than me that were told to do things like that which kind of put me in a position that I didn't necessarily want to be in as a leader. (Interview 1)

Another area in which Camilla and her principal did not always agree was assessment:

We had to assess constantly and I felt like it was, I mean just killing the kids almost and killing the beliefs of teachers and for me, because I had good test scores, it was like well, I'm not really going to harp on you I do want you to assess often but I'm not going to harass you about what you're doing. She would come in every day or whenever and very frequently but then for me, I'm delivering the message you need to be doing this, you know when kids come in the door you need to be doing this, you need to be testing, this is what your scores need to look like. If your scores aren't this they need to be this, this and this. (Interview 1)

Camilla's principal was willing to let her teach the way she wanted to because she got good results, but at the same time she expected Camilla to tell other teachers to do something different, something that Camilla did not necessarily think was best.

In her current role as a support coach for new teachers, Camilla still struggled to find a balance between wanting teachers to have high expectations for all students and ensuring that the teachers provide adequate support so that students can meet the expectations:

So I think that those are my two biggest challenges – that we have to have high expectations for these kids or we're doing an injustice to them and then that we can't just throw our hands up and say, "It's their choice to do it or not." So I think those are the two biggest challenges that I face with high school. (Interview 2)

Like many of the other teacher leaders, Camilla identified meetings and paperwork as constraints that often get in the way of teacher leadership:

I think when people come in to teaching they don't know that there's so many meetings. There's so much paperwork. There's so many last minute things that you have to do and now you don't have a planning period and you thought you did or here's a parent that you weren't expecting. Or just, the copier doesn't work and things fall apart. They don't understand that it's not as perfect as it looks on TV or maybe even as perfect as they imagined it. (Interview 3)

Jessamyn

Like Camilla, Jessamyn noted a mismatch between her values and the expectations of those above her. Jessamyn was primarily concerned with making sure that her students learned the material, while school leaders were primarily concerned with sticking to a pacing guide:

I think I began to notice it in New York. And I was in the classroom and I would get very upset when I didn't have time to teach it all. You know,

there's the math coach saying "Well we're giving an assessment on this on Friday. We've got to get this and this and this in, so you can only teach that for a day." And then you're teaching it that day and they don't understand it, and you know, I would go back. And she'd come in my room and she's like "Well you're not where you're supposed to be, you're supposed to be on this lesson" and I'm like "Well they didn't understand it." "Well I know but you just have to keep moving." "No, I'm not going to keep moving. If they don't know how to add numbers I'm not going to do word problems because they need the foundation." So that's when I begin to say "you know, this is not right" and you complain, but what can you do when there's deadlines and there are assessments and we have to get them ready for the testing grades. (Interview 1)

Another value of Jessamyn's that she noted did not match the new context was meeting the needs of the whole child:

You know, they came in late now here it is they come in late and they're hungry, but you don't have time for them to sit on the side and have a snack. You know, which I still did because that's what was instilled in me. And I would argue that point, and I was one who would just say "Well he's not going to sit there and do his work if he's hungry, so I told him he could eat his crackers and do his work at the same time. And that's kind of how I got away with it. But I think that's when I began to see the change. And now it's like incredible how much it's changed. I mean in our meeting this week we were talking about all the assessments and tests that are coming out of Common Core and it's like "How long is this gonna last? Like who's going to put a stop to it?" Because it's no more teaching; it's all you know "Teach the test, teach the test. We got to get high scores." Instead of "What's going on with this child; what do they need," you know. "Where are they lacking" or "What's going on at home" or "How can I help them"; there's no more of that and it's very frustrating. (Interview 1)

Jessamyn found that her values of meeting the needs of her students, whether they were learning needs, social needs, emotional needs or physical needs were no longer aligned with the expectations of the school. This was a major constraint for her as a classroom teacher.

In her current role as a support coach for beginning teachers in low-performing schools, Jessamyn was often frustrated by a lack of communication and coordination of efforts. She noticed that there were a lot of people who were supposed to be providing support, but they didn't always work together or support one another's efforts. Since Jessamyn did not work for the school sometimes she wasn't able to provide something a teacher needed, but she also wasn't able to rely on other personnel to take care of the need. For example:

Sometimes it's because the small workings that need to be happening aren't. There's so much going on in some of these schools that you wonder what's really slipping in the cracks. There's so many people there, so much support and so many coaches but then small things aren't being done. And then it's hard when a teacher asks you for help in certain areas and you have to go further to get it because it's a school thing and they never do it so it makes the teacher think that you didn't follow through. So that sometimes is difficult. (Interview 2)

Another constraint that Jessamyn identified was a lack of parent accountability. Jessamyn expressed a sense that district expectations for parent involvement have changed over time, and not for the better:

Districts not holding parents accountable any more. You know, when I look back at a year and realize out of 22 children I maybe met 8 of my parents in a whole year, was that nine months that I'm with your child for six and a half, seven hours a day, for nine months and you never came to see my face? Like I could have passed you in the grocery store and you don't know that I'm the person like taking care of your child? And, there's nothing on the school level or district level that can be done about that. There's nothing that can be mandatory about parents coming in or being involved or coming to a conference or, you know, if there's behavioral issues showing up, like, we've made it so easy for parents to just put kids on the bus and that's it. If they misbehave and we can't get the parent or

the parent can't come in or doesn't come in, we take the child home, you know, we have parent liaisons who'll drive the child.... I just think as a society we've made it very easy for parents not to be accountable. (Interview 3)

Jessamyn expressed dismay at what she perceived as a misplaced lack of respect for teachers, when she felt that parents should be held more accountable. Lack of respect was another constraint for Jessamyn. She gave an example of a time when she felt disrespected as a professional:

When I was at the Montessori school and ...we had to go observe a public school one day. And, a friend of mine, we went to a public school by our house, like in the city, off Riverside, and it was her friend's...her friend taught there. And I didn't really have any connections in New York at the time, so the school that I said I was going to fell through and she called me and she said you can go with me to this school. Long story short, I guess it got back to the director that I didn't show up. So, when I filled out the paperwork, she told me that I forged the paperwork and we had this huge blowout. And all I remember saying to her was, "I'm an adult. If I didn't go and observe a school, I didn't go. And I would just tell you that. What's the worst thing you can do? Dock me for a day?" But, as a professional, if this is what I said I observed, and this is where I said I went, and this is the teacher I observed, and I had like, you have to write scenarios of what happened in the classroom. Like it really offended me. Because if there's one thing I'm going to do, I'm going to do my job. Either I'm going to do my job, or I'm just going to say, look, I didn't go yesterday, you can, you know, take the day away from me, but I'm not going to lie and say that I went somewhere that I didn't go. Not when it comes to my career. And that's what I told her. You know, you may have hired people to work here who just drove off the block who needed a job. This is my career. And, I'm not going to tamper my career for a day off. I'll just tell you I need a day off. So, after that, we didn't see eye to eye too much anymore, but I mean, I just, I really take offense to that. (Interview 3)

Jessamyn felt strongly that her work as a teacher should speak for itself and when her professionalism was questioned it became a huge constraint for her.

Valerie

One constraint that Valerie identified in her work in a large high school was isolation and a lack of collaboration. This ran counter to Valerie's understanding of what was best for students, as well as counter to her view of teacher leadership, which focused on collaboration and drawing on strengths:

And it seems like...and this is one thing I hate about my experience at School G and it is still that way, everything is so departmentalized. Being at a High Schools That Work Conference you see that people should work together, across the curriculum. But that is not how it is set up in schools. You know I am in this department and we don't teach English, we do this and that. It's almost like a sorority or a fraternity thing, which I hate because we all teach the same kids so why can't we all work together. Because I am always trying to get an English teacher with a CTE teacher, and share your writing rubric so the kids can have the same thing across the curriculum. I have tried stuff like that but we are so departmentalized and that is what I don't like about the school and our school was so big, proximity wise it was so hard to get to know people. (Interview 1)

Valerie really wanted to see adults working together to support student learning, but she only found that situation in the case of ninth grade:

And you know, and it's all departmentalized – biology or science, social studies. You know people are associated with their, with their content, with their subjects except for ninth grade who have teams which I think is really good because all the adults are working together for this particular group of kids. That's what frustrates me. (Interview 2)

Like many of the other teacher leaders, Valerie found testing and accountability to be constraints. At School G, Valerie felt that administration was “so focused on outputs that they don't really do things with fidelity to ensure the

students get the best too” (Interview 1). Often the focus on outputs resulted in students’ needs not being met, Valerie said, “I just hate it and sometimes that environment is so oppressing you have to get out, especially when you see stuff and you know the kids are not getting what they need” (Interview 1).

Like Jessamyn, Valerie was bothered by a lack of respect from administrators. In Valerie’s case, the issue arose most often with assistant principals:

You would have an assistant principal come in trying to make a name for themselves and I call them a Tsunami, because you come in here and you do all this stuff and you destroy morale and then you leave and get another job. But the damage you caused here is hard to repair. (Interview 1)

Valerie frequently felt constrained by these assistant principals who interfered with the autonomy previously given to her by the principal and tried to exercise control over areas of leadership where Valerie had experience and professional knowledge. Valerie said that her problem with these assistant principals was that they didn’t “value the experience or the knowledge teachers have” (Interview 1):

Well, I don’t have good experience with APs. And I think it is more so women APs. I don’t think they even understood what my role was. And I can speak from my experience and how I have seen them operate. I had been CFing for years and I worked directly with the principal, I do what he tells me to do. So then he ... put an AP over two of the tasks, new teachers and Title I. So I am working with this person on that, but then you get to the point that you think, and mind you those two are just a small part of the pie of my whole job. Because a lot of times I had so many responsibilities I had to work by deadlines but people are always first. If something comes up with a teacher, or a student, you’ve got to stop

everything to work on that. So then this lady [was] going to manage me, you know, “why haven’t you done that”? I am thinking to myself I do have like 15 other jobs that I am doing too. So anyway that did not work out, she had me turn in a task list to her every Friday at 4 o’clock, which I never did because I asked [the principal], do you want me to shut everything down at 3 o’clock and work on this task list for her. And then my whole thing with new teachers is that I don’t need an AP involved because I don’t want them to associate me with you. This is me a teacher, basically working with them and I need to establish a relationship with them and I can’t do it if there is an AP over my shoulder or I am reporting to AP, which I never did. Eventually he took her off of that. The next year, he tried it again, he gave me another AP over Title I. That didn’t last but about a month. Because it is a lot easier when he and I can work together, you know. (Interview 1)

Respect for people’s professional knowledge was an important value for Valerie, and she found that many assistant principals did not share this value. She commented, “But to come in and not value the knowledge and experience other people have is disheartening to teachers” (Interview 1). After a while, the disrespect took its toll on Valerie:

So I got to the point where we had these meetings every week called coaches meetings we had to talk about the professional development, what we were going to do with the staff. And it got to the point where I shut down in those meetings and I didn’t feel like I could advocate for teachers because you shut me down every time I say something or you just do away with it. Then I said what is the point in being here if I can’t do anything. It made me sad and depressed. (Interview 1)

Like others, Valerie noted meetings as a constraint, not because of the time necessarily but because of the top-down way that they were run by the assistant principals:

Yeah, they were called PLCs – they were meetings. Meetings with an agenda, that is not a PLC, not when you have one person heading it. And then the way people are sitting is not a PLC and I am doing all the talking telling you what you are going to be doing – that’s not a PLC. (Interview 1)

Mel

Mel’s experience of constraints on teacher leadership was focused on her current role as a coach supporting beginning teachers, perhaps because she had been out of the classroom for so long. Mel understood her role as a teacher leader to build capacity in other teachers. The constraints that she faced as a coach were things that interfered with her ability to help teachers and therefore benefit students.

One major constraint that Mel identified was pressure from above to do everything at once with the hope of quick improvement in test scores:

That’s how it’s changed I guess. It used to be that, yeah, you had some turnover, but maybe it wasn’t so, it wasn’t so strenuous for the school to make quick change, quick growth all of a sudden in mandate, mandated. So you had time to grow, and you didn’t do 10,000 things. You just focused on some things. And you added the next year and the next year. And, yes, before you know it, you’re doing a lot, but it wasn’t BAM! Now. Get it done. And I feel like now teachers go through, jump from this program to this model to this program. Now let’s try this ‘cause that didn’t work. Or we don’t know if that worked let’s just try this because it looks good. Or this other school is doing this and/or somebody, a consultant came in and they told us this. So let’s try this and let’s try that. And we didn’t used to do that. We used to have a program. [laughs] (Interview 1)

For Mel, what was important was finding things that work and doing them well, as opposed to trying lots of things in the hope that something will work. She felt that

teachers were being overloaded by doing too many things at once. Along with all the programs, Mel said, “I think that we’ve added as leaders we’ve added even more paperwork and even more responsibilities outside the classroom to teachers” (Interview 2). This increased the load even more.

Like Savannah and Casey, Mel identified student behavior as a constraint in her current role of supporting beginning teachers. She said, “But it’s even more challenging with the children. The children have become more difficult, more—the community itself has become more difficult, and the schools that we work in” (Interview 2). Even though Mel said, “I used to always think that I was a good classroom manager and I always dealt with struggling kids really well” (Interview 3) she found it challenging to help beginning teachers deal with the behavior they encountered:

And, so, it’s been a challenge for me to help a teacher who has such severe, uh, children, children who have, uh, out of the typical, ordinary, uh, issues—not the children who if you just put some structure in the classroom and some rules and some team building activities, we tried all that—but children who have severe anger management issues and severe out of control like punch somebody, you know, at the age of six or seven. And the kids who I really feel like maybe need to be referred for something like [an alternative learning program] in one group just seems incredible, so that’s been a challenge. (Interview 2)

The severe behavior of the students was a constraint on Mel’s ability to build capacity in the beginning teachers she was working with, which is how she defined teacher leadership.

Like Jessamyn, Mel found it challenging as a coach supporting new teachers to deal with a lack of communication and coordination of programs in the schools. Because she often only heard one side of a story, Mel worked to keep a neutral position until she could get more information:

I also think that the challenge is because I'm not at the school all day, I don't hear everything that they hear at a meeting or in a faculty meeting and their conversations to me can get misconstrued, because—so I always have to look at things very, very open minded because, teachers, sometimes teachers only again see their world in their classroom or their world in their grade level. And so when they're asked to do things, maybe given like there's these—for instance at the school now there's these committees that have been formed that they have to stay afterschool for. Well they have told me that they can't believe they have to stay afterschool for all these extra committees and all these hours and blah-blah-blah, going on and on. And I'm sitting here thinking is that really, you know, what it is, or is it that somebody mentioned them staying after school a few days, you know, to complete, I think it's a school improvement plan or something. You know, they want some feedback. But to them it's been blown up into all these days and hours and all this work they've got to do, and I'm not sure that it really is all that, so I always have to go find my answers from somebody else. So that's a challenge. It's a challenges when you're not an employee of a school to really get all the information, and then when I hear them saying it, sometimes I get upset because I'm like they better not be, you know, having them stay all these hours and be on all these committees. They're beginning teachers. And then I have to back track and say well wait a minute is that really what was said? You know, they just, like sometimes they, to me, I'm their venting person, and so they just blow things up. So that's a challenge [laughs] for me. (Interview 2)

Mel's status as an outsider to the school community left her feeling constrained in her ability to build capacity in other teachers because she could not always tell which issues really needed her attention.

Another area in which Mel felt challenged when supporting her beginning teachers was content knowledge in social studies and science:

Another challenge is areas of content that I'm not the strongest in. I really have to work harder. For instance, science and social studies have pretty much for years blown out of the water as far as, we didn't do them very much because they weren't tested. And now all of a sudden it's come back. [laughs] And it's not an area that I've taught much. We just weren't, we basically were told in a lot of ways not to teach it. They wouldn't say that, but the whole schedule had reading and math and then science/social studies was like either not on the schedule [laughs] or it was on the schedule in tiny little 15/20 minute blocks of whenever you can get it in. So I've had to work at finding those kinds of resources because now the teachers are all of a sudden told, "You got to get in the science. You got to get in the social studies." And, so that's been somewhat of a challenge. (Interview 2)

This challenge that Mel dealt with as a coach was significant because it was a result of the narrowing of the curriculum that Mel experienced as a teacher working in low-performing schools under accountability policies.

Mel faced a somewhat unique constraint as a teacher leader who became an administrator and then returned to being a teacher leader. In her efforts to build capacity in the teachers she was supporting, Mel felt that she was constrained by her previous relationships with the administrative team. Mel had to work hard at maintaining an appropriate distance from the building administrators so that her teachers would not feel threatened:

I just deal with the teachers, you know, whatever's going on with the teachers. But, you know, I know that at School B I know that I have to be extremely careful because [the principal] has a team. And that team, they meet continually like all the time. [laughs] And so they're always talking,

so you have to be really careful like even if it's the teacher's mentor or the coach or the curriculum coordinator, not to say anything about that teacher. One of the coaches was in one of my teacher's rooms the other day observing. It's also her mentor, doing her peer observation when all that craziness was going on with the teachers. So I know, you know, the principal knows about it, because that's part of her team. Not that it came from me, but I know that she knows about it, and, but I'm still not going to go talk with her about it because it will turn into what Mel said or what, you know, Mel, yeah, said. And then the principal will take it seriously because she thinks whatever I say is like the gospel or the bible. And so then she'll go get on, you know, with the teacher "Why haven't you told us about this?" and blah-blah-blah. So I have to be very careful, there. (Interview 2)

Themes

Stayers.

Time. The stayers all expressed that time is a major constraint for them. Lisbeth said, "To me time is the biggest factor" (Interview 3), Casey said, "the time is lacking" (Interview 2), and Savannah said "teachers' time is very limited" (Interview 2). Time was also a constraint for Vickie in doing the things she felt were important, like calling parents who don't speak English. She commented, "I can't do that in five minutes" (Interview 1).

Leavers. There were no themes that emerged for the leavers in the constraints they faced that did not also emerge for the stayers.

All.

Conflicting values. All of the teachers in this study experienced conflicting values as a constraint. For Vickie, the conflict in values was with other teachers who "yell at the kids in the hallway" (Interview 2) or don't "think about

how your kids would feel” (Interview 2). Vickie said that when she saw things like this it upset her because, “unfortunately it hurt those children” (Interview 2).

Savannah and Casey both experienced a conflict in values when structures were put in place that interfered with their attention to instruction and meeting students’ needs. Savannah lamented that the “focus is on getting all this paperwork done” (Interview 2) rather than on “teachers putting more into their instruction” (Interview 2) and Casey felt that meetings are interfering with “what matters and that’s the lesson part of it” (Interview 1).

Lisbeth, Jessamyn and Valerie all expressed a conflict in values with administrators who didn’t treat teachers as professionals. Lisbeth says “it’s kind of insulting to me” (Interview 2) when principals mandated things like using a time clock or turning in lesson plans. She said, “I don’t think that’s professional” (Interview 2). Jessamyn had conflict with an administrator who questioned her professionalism, and Valerie had conflict with administrators who did “not value the knowledge and experience” (Interview 1) that she and other teachers had.

Camilla, Jessamyn, Valerie and Mel all experienced a conflict between their values about teaching and the expectations placed on them by their schools and districts, which may have impacted their decisions to leave the classroom. For example, Camilla said, “there were times when I disagreed with some things that I was asked to tell the staff or whoever I worked with” (Interview 1) and Valerie found it “oppressing” (Interview 1) to see that “kids are not getting what they need” (Interview 1). Jessamyn expressed dismay “because it’s no more

teaching; it's all you know 'teach the test, teach the test. We got to get high scores.' Instead of 'what's going on with this child?'" (Interview 1). For Mel, the conflict was with schools focusing on checking off items on lists rather than focusing on meeting the needs of the kids:

I think that that's a shame that it's much more quantity over quality. But it seems like that's what, I'm not sure, but it seems like that's what people from the state or district want to hear is them to brag about all the different things that are going on. (Interview 2)

All of the teacher leaders in this study dealt with conflict between their values and the values of other people and the institutions they worked in which constrained their efforts to lead from within the classroom for the benefit of students. Conflicts between the values of the leavers and the institutional values of their schools may have ultimately contributed to their decisions to leave the classroom.

Supports for Teacher Leadership

Vickie

One of the main things that Vickie talked about as a support for her teacher leadership is the fact that she gets to start over every school year. The cyclical nature of the traditional school calendar gave Vickie a period of rest and renewal and helped her to maintain her positive energy:

I think I just take each year brand new...make sure you...you drop everything before you leave...when you leave and start fresh at its... its... it's like the kids when they come in with their new sneakers, it's like they're starting new too, so that's the one way I think I've survived mostly down here. (Interview 1)

Another way that Vickie found support was through her relationships with people at the school. Relationships with other teachers were an important support for Vickie. She said, "I think talking to other... other teachers that are my colleagues are very helpful" (Interview 3). In describing the relationship that she had with the other specialists at her school, Vickie said:

If I had to work on something in my classroom I could call up anyone of them and they would do my duty for me you know it's a give and take and it's really good that way...to create that bond. (Interview 2)

Vickie had several administrators during her tenure at School A, but she frequently mentioned her principals as supporting her and helping her to be a leader. One principal in particular stood out for Vickie as encouraging her to lead. She said:

It never felt overwhelming he never did... he never asked anything of me that was so difficult or too much I felt good that we had that, so he could... he could come to me, you know he'd just call me in his office or if I was having a bad day or something I felt even personal enough to be like things are going really tough at home or whatever I'm just having a tough time you know I'm sorry I'm not myself but he's like that's fine you know I whatever I can do to help. (Interview 2)

Vickie also felt very positive about her relationship with her current principal:

We have a great principal so you know anytime I come up ideas or she has something she wants to run off on me and... and that way we... we have great communication with the principal. I do and I think the colleagues and the students do. (Interview 3)

In addition to relationships with other professionals in the school, Vickie also mentioned her relationships with students as a support.

Another is to just like engulf yourself with the kids and and create a bond individually, like find out more information about them and create and connection with the children even like on nights like tonight like meeting some of their parents and if I'm out at Wal-Mart and I see a child I'll always introduce myself to the parent so you create like a connection something different. (Interview 3)

Because Vickie worked so hard to build relationships with her students, another motivating factor for her was seeing her students grow and succeed.

Like graduation day at [the high school] and seeing those kids and... or being at the middle school graduation or something like that and just seeing those kids again that I mean that to me is success, seeing the kids in here, it would be nice to make growth and it would be nice to... to do well on a state test and stuff like that but just continuing to keep encouraging the kids 'cause it's not easy for them so but I... I think it look... it would... it would be seeing the success of the kids it would be seeing them at graduation ...'cause I think I'm getting close now to my class of fifth graders being seniors...six years...seven years so I'm getting there, close to there in the high school. ... I don't know it's coming back year after year and knowing that I'm making a difference. (Interview 3)

Vickie's background as an athlete probably influenced another positive that she identified. When she spoke about her decision to move to North Carolina, she indicated that she was looking for a challenge, and she seemed to have found what she was looking for. She said, "I really enjoy it, I enjoy the challenge sometimes they give you" (Interview 1).

Savannah

Support for Savannah came from working with colleagues who shared her values. She said:

I enjoy working with my teammates, the people that are at my school. I think that's one of the important things about where you work because you have very positive schools and then you have schools that are just filled with negativity so I think a teacher always wants to be in a place where she feels supported and she works with colleagues who are supportive and who are friendly, who don't like to keep to themselves and don't like to share ideas. (Interview 2)

Savannah enjoyed working with her colleagues because they shared her belief in the students' ability to learn. She said:

We are very willing and wanting to be at this school and learn about the students. That's one thing I can say about this staff at our school is they want to be there because they want to know and understand where these children come from and how to respond to those children and why they respond the way that they do. They believe that these kids can learn too, regardless of their personal lives. I like working with the teachers that are here. They are dedicated and we put in more of the required hours. A lot of us aren't walking out the door at 3:45. (Interview 1)

It was important to Savannah that she worked with people who also wanted to do what was best for the students:

They're a school that really wants the best for the students and we try to think of ways and we make decisions to get things done and do our best to base our decisions around our students and what's best for them and what's best to keep us in the classroom because we've all worked in places where, even now it feels like we're always in meetings, being pulled out for this and pulled out for that, but we really try to maintain and keep a positive outlook about our school building. (Interview 2)

Savannah and her colleagues were supported in their work by structures and by support staff who assisted them in utilizing the structures.

We have a literacy coach, a math coach and many others who are making sure that the teachers have extra support. If you don't have any support and you don't support your teachers, you can't get anything done, especially when you have needs like at this school. (Interview 1)

The coaches at School B worked with teachers in learning team meetings, where they focused on using data to make instructional decisions. Savannah appreciated this structure and the support of the coaches.

Here at the school I'm in now, the learning team seems to be more structured because you're being forced to look at the data and how your kids are growing. It's not always data in every meeting. We typically do that right around the quarter end – quarter testing or benchmarking. We do it with Dibels so it's not just math. We look at what activities or things that we're doing. We look at where they are and where they're supposed to be and we don't look at it for next quarter, we have to think like at the end, "This is where these kids are supposed to be." If they're here, what are we doing to get them here? If they're supposed to be reading 90 words a minute by the end of the school year and they're only reading 20 words, what are things that we're putting in place now? Realistically for someone that knows your kids, are they going to hit that 90? (Interview 3)

Along with the support of the coaches and the administration, another aspect of School B's structure that Savannah appreciated was that the staff had established common goals and expectations for the students:

We have new expectations. We expect for you to have respect for yourselves and others, and to use kind words. It seemed like by the end of the year, you could definitely tell the kids had changed; they weren't the same kids that they were last school year when the year started. That first

year was a good year, it was an important year. At the end of the year when we sat down at the last staff meeting and we were reflecting about things that we saw the kids doing, we didn't see them doing the same things anymore. The kids' attitudes were beginning to change. Support was given to teachers by instructional coaches and/or administration for instruction and classroom management. (Interview 1)

The collaboration, support staff and structures had all contributed to Savannah's sense of seeing success in her students. This success served as another form of support for Savannah's efforts:

We saw the children become different children than they were last year. I think that has been a positive thing for all of the staff to have seen the changes and growth that the kids have made from when they walked in the door last school year. Last year was a hard year. They always say in turnaround schools your first year is the hard one. They are learning to behave and handle things in a different manner than before and learned about respect, not just respect for themselves but for other people. (Interview 2)

Savannah didn't necessarily mind the hard work, however. She said:

It's been a rewarding experience for me and I enjoy working at this school. I think it's made me a better person and a better teacher because it challenges me to have to think of new ways to help a child. Every child is different and every year you get a different group of kids. (Interview 1)

Casey

One support that Casey identified was administration. Casey felt fortunate in that:

I've always had very supportive administration to be able to, you know, do what I feel is best for the kids instead of just having to expect a program

out of me or something. I guess that's probably not the case everywhere, but, in my case I've always had a lot of flexibility in what I wanted to do. (Interview 1)

For Casey, having a positive relationship with an administrator she trusts was an important support:

Relationships are very important to me and when a principal knows me and makes an effort to talk to me, that makes a great impact on my happiness at that school. You know when I think of like principals or assistant principals, it's really those interactions as a whole with people. Like are you who you are with everybody? You know, or are you switching up your personality when you're with different people. And, and I think those are the people that I trust, where I know if you're with this person and then you're over here, you're still the same person and, you practice what you preach, too. (Interview 3)

Casey gave an example of one particular principal:

I felt like he really valued my opinion and that was the, and he would just take his time out for me. I had questions about my daughter going to Kindergarten and, you know, he sat me down for like 45 minutes and he was looking through the school's data and stuff like that and showing me kind of, he was almost like a father figure, too, because he would kind of give me advice with, you know, this is what I did with one of my kids, I wanted her to have an opportunity, so I had sent her to this kind of school. And I know not everybody got that from him, but he was very supportive of me. (Interview 1)

Another administrator that stood out was an assistant principal who served as a role model for Casey:

There was an assistant principal that I would follow her wherever she went. She's kind of the person that I would want to be like as an educator. As an assistant principal she just knew all the students; she knew what they

walked in like that day. If you came up to her and said so-and-so is really having a rough day, she was like, yeah, I saw that getting off the bus today. You know, that kind of thing, and she really never, I never really felt like she judged you if you were having difficulty in some area, she would just help you troubleshoot and it was very, like, she would never think bad of you for coming to her for help kind of thing. So, I've had a couple of really good people that I've rubbed off on me I think along the way, given the opportunity. (Interview 1)

In addition to her administration, Casey also felt supported by other professionals in the building. These other teachers helped her to deliver the kind of small group instruction she felt was necessary for her students' success:

I'm really lucky that I have a PRT (Part-time Reading Teacher). That pulls out a small group. So I'm left with about 12 kids in the classroom afterwards and with pull outs during my reading block for speech and I have one student that goes to resource. He's in EC class during that time. So then I'm down to 11 and then I have two kids pulled out on Tuesdays and Thursdays. And two kids pulled out Wednesday, Mondays and Wednesdays for speech. Then I'm down to like eight kids and so we, I have them split off. I have the PRT work with the middle of the, you know, the double kids and just kind of, she's working with novels with them. And I have the other students, I kind of have them separated into two groups and I meet with the lower group two times a week and so it's more of a—I don't want to say it's exactly guided reading. It's kind of a modified guided reading. (Interview 2)

These other professionals also supported Casey by reinforcing the curriculum with her students in other settings:

Our speech teacher is really, really good in connecting the curriculum. She's awesome. I've never seen a speech—she's fairly new. She mixes our curriculum into the speech sessions which I don't know if I've ever been approached by a speech teacher before doing that, so. I think we've got a piece of gold right there. (Interview 2)

Casey's colleagues on her grade level served as a sounding board and helped her come up with new ideas:

I think I've had a good, good teams for the most part throughout the years. I've always had at least one person. I always meet at least one person to kind of brainstorm and you know, just that one person you can trust and go to when stuff... I was, you know I've always had at least one person on my team that I really felt like, okay, you know frustrations I can vent with you or if it's ideas I need, I can come to you kind of thing. (Interview 3)

Casey's main source of support from other teachers, however, came from her graduate school cohort:

And I also really like grad school because everybody in that room is striving, like they want to be there. They're striving to be better teachers. They're so willing to share ideas and listen to what you're doing. It's just like the passions in that room, you know and I think it's, it's a little different than being at work. You know, so I really like grad school. It is one place that all grade levels can have an educated discussion about areas in elementary education. It keeps you up to speed on what other grades are doing. (Interview 2)

Casey appreciated the opportunity to interact with other teachers who shared her passion for teaching and learning:

I think it's that motivation from the teachers and just excited, just how everybody's, everybody's motivated. Everybody's, even though it's nine o'clock at night everybody is still trying to do their best on the projects that we have to do and our instructor is very positive and encouraging. She's one of the most people I think I would have loved to work with her because she knows you. She knows when you're tired. She goes "I can see all over your faces that you all are tired." That kind of thing, you know. She's been our professor the whole time which has been great. She's

going to be our professor for the summer as well. I think I just have learned so much. (Interview 2)

Graduate school also served as a resource for Casey and helped her to become more reflective and sure of herself:

I love grad school. I never really was a huge school person myself but I have really loved my grad school program because it's kind of just taught me how to really do that proper research and to really find out why I do the things I do and it's kind of like I'm almost discovering myself as a professional. Like "Oh, well maybe that's why I do what I do." And even just going through the philosophies and stuff like that. I don't know. It's strange but I really have enjoyed it. The topics that they have us read articles about, you know, you get to kind of choose what articles you want based off of a topic and I always find something that I think is so cool that I can take back or take that thinking back with me and a few times I've actually given articles to a couple—I've given an article to my old principal before that I had found that was really good on the Common Core. I don't know if he ever actually read it but [laughs]... (Interview 2)

Casey had a spouse who was supportive of her career and was willing to listen when she needed someone to talk to:

I have a very understanding husband when it comes to teaching and he will listen to me. His momma was a teacher and he understands that it's a tough job and he's very encouraging. And I think that's helped, too, throughout the years. (Interview 3)

Finally, Casey was supported by her relationships with students and the positive impact that she knew she had on them:

There's a substitute teacher that works at our school and I had her son a few years ago. And she came up to me a couple months ago and said, "Joe was tal-..." He was... He's in like seventh grade now and he was so

upset because... And he said, "The only person that ever believed in me was [Casey]. And you don't even believe in me, Mom," and you know that kind of thing. And I didn't even know. I had to get on that kid a lot, you know to keep going. He's a smart kid and didn't want to work to his potential. I kept on him and on him. I thought oh, this kid's going to hate me because I'm constantly on him. And I didn't even know that my name would even come out of his mouth again after he left me or something. But it does. It did, so you just... I guess you don't ever know. It's like that first year of teaching I had this one child who she knew I was moving out this way and she was upset that last day of school. And she would not leave my side, to the point where it almost crept me out because it's my first year of teaching. I didn't know what to do. And she's like "I'm never going to see you again." I didn't even know that I had any influence on this child at all. Like I, once again I thought this is a kid that I'm just going to, you know be out of her mind when the school year is over with. But she would not leave my side that last day. So I guess experiences like that throughout the years and you really don't know what you did or anything like that. So if anything, I guess I stay there because of the kids. And I know that there's a void I can fill to a certain extent for at least some of them. (Interview 3)

Lisbeth

Like Casey, Lisbeth was supported by colleagues in professional networks.

As a technology specialist, Lisbeth had to leave the building to form these networks, but they were an important source of support to her:

I have a monthly tech facilitator meeting that I go to and I network with other tech people at that meeting. I've made several connections to where, like when our whole system was down last Friday, I knew whose number I had in my cellphone that I could call. I go to a yearly tech conference in Raleigh, the NC TIE's conference, and you can get other ideas from other tech people from around the state. But I will say the monthly tech meetings that kind of pulls us all together. We're all living this stressful life where we kind of have these two jobs all wrapped up into one and that's been very good in getting to know...and talking to other people about how they solve problems and their solutions to things that are very similar to me. Because no one else in this building's going to have that like I do. (Interview 2)

Lisbeth enjoyed these professional meetings in part because they gave her an opportunity to learn new things and get ideas:

I just went to the North Carolina Technology Conference in Raleigh – just got back from that – and I always learn new things uh, when I’m there and I have monthly meetings with the technology.... I mean I like to pick some of it up on my own but I’m a busy mom and I do what I can outside of school, and on the weekends but, I mean I love to learn new things. I get bored doing the same old things all the time so I’m constantly looking for something new to do. I don’t think I’m the best but I think I do try so ...
(Interview 1)

Relationships with other teachers in the school building were another source of support for Lisbeth. She enjoyed helping other teachers:

I like being able to help teachers to make their life easier when they are having...I know technology’s very frustrating for a lot of people. And I’m not saying that I’m the best, because I still learn a lot on any given day. But, if I can show something to someone to help them, I make these little cards for my teachers that’s all their little passwords and how to log in to different sites because it’s hard for them to remember. You can tell them things like that, but I go in classrooms and they have it taped right beside their computers. That makes their life easier. I like doing things like that.
(Interview 2)

Feeling like she was a contributing member of a team was important to Lisbeth:

If I—if I did the reverse. If I take the me approach, that’s me and my four walls with my students and no one else. And you can do that, but in essence you’re working harder and not smarter. I’ve always found that when you have that team approach, you’re on your grade level. Or you, you’re like my connection team—everybody has duties to do, but you almost get smarter because if you work together everyone divides up the tasks. The job that we have to do is too large anyway, the job is bigger than really any one person can do. And if you will divide and conquer on your grade level, on your team, to copy papers, call parents, whatever

you're doing, it's always going to be better if that team works together and divides the work. Otherwise everyone in every single room is doing their own thing, and you're actually going to save school money when you're running copies, if you run 150 all at one time it's cheaper than each teacher going and running 25. And I think that creates a sense of community by doing that. (Interview 3)

Lisbeth recognized the importance of administrators in creating a positive environment for teachers:

I think administrators play a big role as well. If your administrator is approachable to where you know that you can be there face-to-face ask them questions. Send them an email. They'll reply. C'mon in here. That you—so that you could ask them via in an email, in the hallway, and as long as they are responsive to you, I think that makes a big difference because you feel like you're valued as an employee, and that, you know, they'll take the time to see that your needs are met, in a timely manner too. (Interview 3)

She felt that when it came to administrator support, she had “been very lucky in multiple schools” (Interview 3). At School C, Lisbeth said:

I felt valued here when I came in. And I felt valued at many other schools, and I think that it makes a big difference. If you feel a connection with administration and leadership, and you feel that they value you, then I think that you're more apt to stay. And, then continue doing the job, trying to get the job done. (Interview 3)

In addition to relationships with colleagues and administration, Lisbeth also felt supported by her relationships with students. When asked about what supports her, Lisbeth said, “The children. I really do like my job. I really do like teaching” (Interview 2). She was motivated by the interactions that she had with

students across the school, saying, “They’ll hug you. They’ll wave at you in the hall” (Interview 2). More than anything else, though, Lisbeth was supported by her students’ successes:

The thing I like the best about my job is when I see a child get something that they haven’t been able to get. That they, “Ms. [Lisbeth] I did it!” or they’re able to see their work or their document produced. They love to print what they’ve done so that they can take it home. I don’t print a whole lot because we’re charged per page, so I try to make it special. I love doing that. I love seeing children happy, engaged. I think that’s why I love the announcements in that it’s such a positive thing for the students to be involved in. I mean, that’s the part I like the best. I like doing things for the staff like the lunch out because people will get excited. I like for people to be excited and happy. I’m a pleaser by nature, so, I guess I love seeing people happy. Be it the teachers are happy, the students are happy, that’s what I like about my job the best. (Interview 2)

Camilla

Like many other teacher leaders, Camilla identified colleagues as a main source of support. Early in her career, Camilla was fortunate to have the support of more experienced colleagues who served as role models:

So working with [Anne] as a mentor and the other veteran teachers really helped to shape my ideas as a teacher and we decided to plan together so we planned at my house or Anne’s house or another teacher’s house, her name was Lisa. So we would plan our units together and so they taught me how to build units and the curriculum side of things and always keeping at the forefront the relationships with students really I think helped to shape who I am today. (Interview 1)

Another support for Camilla was her curriculum facilitator:

I also had a curriculum facilitator who really when she said I'm there for you, she really was. I'm supposed to teach this, can you give me some guidance and she's say oh, I can model it for you first period and then you do it the rest of the day. And so she would come and model for me and she would show me and she would say do you want me to stay second period while you do it? And sometimes I would say yes and sometimes I would say no, but again, it was the entire support system of having those veteran teachers embrace me, having a supportive administration and then having a curriculum facilitator who would, if she says I'm there for you, she's there for you (Interview 1)

As a lateral entry teacher, Camilla really benefitted from having a mentor who would model strategies for her:

Something else Anne would do with me is pull our classes together and then we would co-teach because our classes were fairly, I mean they were like maybe 19 or 20, so we would have 40 kids in the class, which is a lot, but she would bring her kids to my class or I would take my kids over to her class, we'd co-teach and she taught me how to use stations and how to have half of the class do one thing and half doing the other, which is very intimidating if you're by yourself. But if you have somebody there with you, so that is how I learned it all I think. I don't think that I would have survived without that support system lateral entry or not, I just don't. (Interview 1)

Camilla identified administrators as another source of support for her teacher leadership. Early in her career, Camilla benefitted from having a principal who made herself available:

I really think it was the support also my principal at the time who...had an open door policy of just come talk to me. If you have an issue or question or a problem and so I remember e-mailing her one night it was probably like 2:00 am and I was just so overwhelmed with my class that I had a

particular student that I had that I just felt like I couldn't reach and he was slipping through the cracks and no support from home and we tried everything and so she told me to come see her the next day. She sat me down in her office and she said we have to, while we're here do the best we can with our students and you are doing the very best that you can with the student and I'm seeing this and you know, you just have to believe every day that you're making a difference. And so just her telling me to believe every day that I would make a difference helped me to really reevaluate I think the way that I was addressing that but also I felt like she had confidence in me to make the right decisions, by her telling me I see you doing the best that you can every day and just realizing that you're making a difference. (Interview 1)

Camilla also had an assistant principal who supported her teaching methods and her leadership efforts:

My assistant principal who had been a huge, I mean just it was because of her I went back to get my masters degree, it was because of her I decided to do my National Boards, my assistant principal just really shaped me almost as a mentor to be the teacher that I was. I mean, she would come down to my classroom and I would have like kids on the floor in the room out in the hallway because I was in a hallway by myself and I would look out in the hallway and she's down on her knees with the kids working on a project or talking to them about a project and she was really somebody who gave 120% to the school and to the kids. So part of my decision to go was to go with her because she was such an instructional leader and just a good administrator in general. (Interview 1)

At this stage of her career, working in a teacher leadership role outside the classroom, Camilla found support in helping other teachers in the way that she was helped, and in seeing those teachers grow. Although Camilla is no longer leading from within the classroom, her focus is still on the benefit of students, and she is supported by the knowledge that her work helps teachers have a positive impact on students:

I think that the biggest... the thing I most enjoy is seeing them grow. So right now I'm doing class observations and I'm in these classrooms where teachers were okay at the beginning of the year, but now it's like, wow, like this is... this transition, this change that's happened over this time has been so amazing and I don't know if they're just doing it because I'm in there and they know I'm coming or what, but it is just a huge transformation. And so then to sit down with them and the first questions that I ask are, "What was... what do you think the best part of the lesson was; what do you think... what would you change?" And in every feedback conference I've had, the thing that they said they would change is the thing that I said that I would change -- you know if there were one thing I would change or one thing I would do differently. So they are so reflective and, and they're passionate. And even those that feel like you know, "I'm not going to have high expectations of doing homework," or, "I'm not going to have high expectations of... you know, if they do it, they do it; if they don't, they don't." Even those teachers are passionate about what they do. They work really hard for the kids and they really give their everything to them. And so I think that's probably the most rewarding when I go into a classroom and even if it's a classroom that has classroom management issues or, just a tough class, the teachers are there giving their everything. And so to know that our kids have teachers that are trying their very best, is probably the most rewarding thing. And it's rewarding to hear a thank you and I appreciate you and things like that that they say to me but it's more rewarding to see them grow, see the passion that they have and see that they're becoming more reflective of their practices and that they want to be in a school like this and make a difference. So, I think that's probably the best part. (Interview 2)

In addition to the support that Camilla found outside of herself, she identified one support that came from within:

I think I found it in my passion for teaching. I knew when I first started teaching that, I couldn't imagine not being in education, not having the opportunity to make an impact on, the time, the literate lives of kids because I was so passionate about that. So I think I found it in the passion but then again in the support systems. (Interview 3)

Jessamyn

Jessamyn expressed a strong sense that support from colleagues early in her career shaped her into the teacher leader that she was now:

So I think the fact that I had all of these like awesome people around me and all of these supportive walls and you know the support was in the office, the support was in the hallway, everyone wanted you to do well and you just were lifted up in so many different ways that you couldn't help but love on kids and help kids, and that's what it was about. You know, we didn't fuss about staying until 9:00 to get ready for a PTA performance the next day. Or we didn't fuss if the custodian was sick so we had to clean our own room. Because we knew that it's okay because this was like our home, and this is their home, so we have to make it right for them. (Interview 1)

In addition to the support Jessamyn found inside her school building, like Savannah, she experienced support by the community:

We knew that we had all these partners, we had like United Way would give us things. We had this one company, I don't remember the name, but every Thanksgiving and Christmas they would give our families a \$50 gift card to Food Lion to buy groceries. I mean we just had so much support. (Interview 1)

Finally, like her colleagues, Jessamyn felt supported by her administration. She said, "I've just always had good relationships with all my principals" (Interview 2). Her first principal stood out in particular:

And that's one thing I remember about my first teaching experience, is, like, we just were able to teach, and we did our thing. And if a parent came in, I mean, [the principal] went to bat for us. It was never like... and I've heard horror stories of principals who take parent sides over their teachers. (Interview 2)

Jessamyn's teacher leadership was supported from the very beginning of her career by colleagues, community and administration.

Valerie

Valerie found support from colleagues to be very important, "Especially when you are at the same school, because you have the same students, the same culture" (Interview 1). Like many of the others, as a beginning teacher Valerie was supported by veteran teachers who were willing to offer their expertise. She recalls, "My first year, full year that's when the district had the TOSA – the teacher on special assignment and then the curriculum facilitator, they would pop in to help me which was very helpful" (Interview 1). Because of her experience of support from colleagues, Valerie encouraged beginning teachers to work together:

That's why I think it important that new teachers learn from each other. Because although they feel like oh you know I am not a good teacher because I am struggling here well you know somebody else is struggling here too but this is what they tried. (Interview 1)

Valerie also found support in knowing that she was helping other teachers. She commented, "And I think when they open up and tell me stuff, they open up and tell me so... That is encouraging to know that they are open to my feedback and sharing what's bothering them. That's very encouraging." (Interview 2)

Mel

Mel also experienced support from other teachers, particularly as a beginning teacher:

My mentor, she was a very calm person. She was extremely quiet spoken. I mean never raised her voice, ever. Tiny. Tiny person. She was a dance teacher. And she was at retirement age. She went on after she left to work for, I think, a university or something. She retired. But she was very quiet. Very calm person, but she still got results. And I thought that was amazing because all my other people I was around... ..screamed and yelled all the time, and they got results too, but it was a different kind of results. She was white. And she was tiny and petite and, but could get kids to focus and calm down, and I thought that was amazing. So, like I said, she taught me some of those tactics. I mean she would, the lower your voice gets the more they listen to you. Things like the reflection. She loved doing dance because she was a dance teacher. So she would do a physical activity with them where she would get them to do movement, but quiet movement. So they would actually be, it would get the jitters out, but yet focus. And once she got them focused then she could start teaching. I just think it was the most amazing thing. (Interview 1)

In addition to strategies for dealing with student behavior, Mel's mentor offered emotional support and encouragement at a time when Mel really needed it:

But, she was a very sweet, very caring person, but she meant what she said. And she, she was very encouraging. Like she was the kind of person who she would always pick out the positive things you were doing. She would always, you know, no matter how bad the day was or how you knew how bad it was, she would pick out something good that happened today. You know she, she could always pick out the positive things. And I think she was just mature. You know, she was the kind of person who's been there done that. And she saw what I was going through as just a phase. And I thought it was the end of the world. And [laughs] and so she was ju-, she was support. (Interview 1)

Another support that Mel mentioned was the school's schedule:

Anyway, so because of the year-round school the benefit was we went to school for nine weeks and then we had three weeks off in-between. So I would have three weeks to recoup and try to come up with how to start over again. (Interview 1)

Mel was encouraged and supported in her teacher leadership by her principal:

So by the end of the year, I was feeling okay because my principal, who had come in...she had done some observations, and what she realized was that I had a lot of potential because anything and everything that was ever shared in facility meetings or in professional development, I would do them. You know I was one of those that would follow everything to the tee. And so my observations would turn out to be pretty good. So she would encourage me. (Interview 1)

Mel had a unique relationship with this principal, who became a mentor for Mel's whole career. While Mel was struggling to understand differences in culture between her home community and the school community, her principal served as a culture coach:

Right, so another thing is that the more that I be-, the more that I developed a relationship with my principal, who was black...African American, that helped me. Because she was—her job was to make me a administrator. I mean, I have [laughs] that was her whole—that what was in her mind was her job. She was going to create a leader out of me. So, she, she told me a lot about how to deal with [laughs], African American culture as we developed a relationship. (Interview 1)

Themes

Stayers.

Relationships with students. All of the teachers who have stayed in the classroom were motivated by their love of the students and a desire to see them succeed. Vickie talked about the impact that she hoped to have on students, and expressed a desire to continue teaching so that she could see that impact come to fruition:

That's what is positive you know seeing them succeed and having their own families come here and I imagined that someday I'll get to that and I'm looking forward to that I mean older but that's (laughs) that would be the long term I think the short term wise it's year to year and its success story by story and it's seeing the memories and ones that I've seen since kindergarten that are now third and fourth graders and you know it just kind of encouraging them every year and making sure they come back and you know it's... it's year to year so it's successes. (Interview 3)

For Savannah, it was the day-to-day successes and the knowledge that students needed her that kept her going:

With everything that goes on, you still have to have that passion for teaching kids. At the end of the day, you can reflect and think about what went well, what didn't go well and these children are here because they want to learn and they need to be taught. (Interview 2)

Casey said, "I guess I stay there because of the kids. And I know that there's a void I can fill to a certain extent" (Interview 3) and Lisbeth told this story about the support she got from seeing students experience success:

And there's some students who have a real hard time in the classroom academically and I can think of a little boy today that he... a lot of times he won't complete an activity that we're doing in the computer lab. Well today he was able to get finished and he was able to print his... they were doing constellations and we had taken the, the Big Dipper and it was the first grade, so he had to reproduce the Big Dipper and write Big Dipper, put his name on it and have other stars on there. And he was able to print. Huge smile when he got it off the printer 'cause I let them get up and walk and go get it themselves. And I give them a thumbs up and he just smiled and he feels good about himself. That's something that he felt good about today whereas he might not have successes all day long. But that's one thing that he got to do so he got to walk out of there with his paper today and sometimes he doesn't get his paper. But I like moments like that and I think they know that I enjoy seeing them succeed. (Interview 1)

All of these teachers were supported by the knowledge that they were making a difference for their students.

Leavers. There were no new or different themes in supports for leavers that did not also emerge for stayers.

All.

Colleagues. All of the teachers interviewed relied on their colleagues for support. Vickie said, "I think that's one of the positive parts is to lean on each other" (Interview 3) and Savannah echoed, "For me, it would be the kids I work with and the staff that I work with" (Interview 2). Camilla felt supported by "having people that feel the exact same way you do and supporting these teachers and advocating for them" (Interview 2) and Valerie said, "I've had to depend on a lot of people to get me where I am. I've had to depend on their expertise, to know that it's okay to depend on other people" (Interview 3). Jessamyn reflected on the importance of colleagues as a source of support,

saying, “I think having a supportive staff at School E, because we were like, such a family. I mean nothing went down and you weren’t there for each other” (Interview 1). Mel did not always rely on colleagues for support but over time she learned the importance of “working as a team” (Interview 1).

Administration. While in some cases administration was mentioned as a constraint to teacher leadership, all of the teacher leaders experienced support from administration at some point in their careers, if not always. For example, Casey felt that her administration was supportive of her taking instructional risks such as implementing Guided Math, saying “I think all the administration I’ve had has been very encouraging” (Interview 1) and Vickie said “my principal has been really supportive of me [coaching]” (Interview 1).

Camilla found support from her principal “just kind of having faith and confidence in me in situations where I might not have had confidence in myself” (Interview 1). Valerie was appreciative of having a principal who “would allow me to be creative working my list” (Interview 1) and Jessamyn felt supported by principals “seeing that leadership ability in me, and then just kind of letting me go with it” (Interview 3). Savannah was appreciative of the support that her principals offered in terms of understanding the extra effort that it takes to work in low-performing schools. She said, “I haven’t worked for a principal that didn’t support the teacher who felt like it was too much because they understand” (Interview 1).

Lisbeth identified one thing that administrators do that she finds to be particularly supportive:

If your administrator is approachable to where you know that you can be there face-to-face ask them questions. Send them an email. They'll reply. C'mon in here. That you—so that you could ask them via in an email, in the hallway, and as long as they are responsive to you, I think that makes a big difference because you feel like you're valued as an employee, and that, you know, they'll take the time to see that your needs are met, in a timely manner too. (Interview 3)

Mel, in particular, had a principal who nurtured her leadership skills:

I was like the person the principal saw as her person that she could grow into a leader. And so she went with a lot of my ideas. She saw me as a potential leader, made me grade chair, committee chairs.... (Interview 1)

Strategies for Negotiating Constraints

Vickie

One strategy that Vickie spoke of often was staying positive. Vickie spoke of explicitly making an effort to maintain a positive attitude, particularly when dealing with the things she perceived as constraints. For example, when dealing with difficult colleagues, Vickie said, "I just try to be really positive around them" (Interview 2). In discussing the turnover of staff, Vickie spoke of using her positive energy to influence others:

I love what I do and every day I wake up and I'm positive about it so I feel like that just kind of rubs off on other people you know and especially energy in our building I'm going to work on that especially with all the changes in the new people that are coming in, they need to feel that

positive energy too so I'm going to do my best to... to take that on and keep... keep my energy up you know. (Interview 2)

Vickie also spoke about using her positivity to deal with the negative influence of the low-performing designation, saying "I'm... I'm just staying positive and encouraging the kids and encouraging the teachers and I love my school like, I'm like, I'm not leaving because it's low performing" (Interview 3).

One thing that helped Vickie with maintaining her positive energy was being able to get a fresh start each year. Taking the summer to get refreshed was a deliberate strategy that Vickie talked about:

Here it's like you've...you kind of like cleansed yourself over the summer and you rebuild again and as a teacher I still try to pull everybody in and try to keep everybody working, but once the summer comes you don't know what you're going to get next year, like I still don't know if all the teachers are coming back next year, you know? I don't even want to know, I just want to go in and ...and be excited and fresh and new so that's different and that's nice. You know you don't have that expectations, you just do what you can do for those kids that you have so that's a...that's a definite...I feel like that's a positive 'cause it's new year... year, something new. (Interview 1)

Another strategy that Vickie talked about was focusing on her students and the relationships that she had with them:

I see all 650 kids if I left it would be like someone leaving in their family. I'm gonna be there, I want them to know that next year I will see you here. And I like that stability that they know they give me, even if it is only 75% of the kids the other 25 will see how that 75 treat me and they'll just loc..latch on and do the same thing. (Interview 1)

Knowing that her students appreciated her and that she made a difference in their lives helped Vickie deal with difficulties:

Honestly they love my class and they do what they can for the 45 minutes I have them. But occasionally there are those...you know I just want to make sure that everything's okay here or something like that but it...it...there's 650 of them and you just try to ah give the hugs and the love and make them feel...make them feel like they're...they're important you know for the five hours we have them at school. (Interview 1)

Empathy for what her students had to deal with outside of school was another strategy that Vickie relied on. She told a story about being invited to a student's home for the first time:

I never imagined this sweet energetic you know wants to be in a jump-rope club is fabulous in class always the first one to pick up how this person could live in this and still be this amazing, sweet, kind individual and not be beat down by all this. It could have been that she was only in you know third grade and just hadn't seen anything else but that...that moment when we got back in the car I was...I cried, like I could cry right now and that child like that...that what I try to picture with all these kids that was my "ah-ha" moment that was my moment when I said you can't judge, you can't ...you can't argue the fact they are what they are and they get what they get and they're going to be children. (Interview 1)

Vickie acknowledged that she relied on this memory as a strategy to help her when she got frustrated with the children. She said, "I use that as vision I use that as...don't judge anybody you know...very emotional" (Interview 1).

Another strategy that Vickie spoke about was striving to get better and make things better. When Vickie saw a problem, she looked for a way that she

could improve the situation. For example, Vickie shared her plan for dealing with the language barrier with Spanish-speaking students and families:

My goal this year is to start doing better on that especially with our global communications...if the technology will let me Skype a class in you know Dominican Republic and they're speaking Spanish to their kids if I just immerse myself I think I'll do better so I'm...that's my own head I just want to get better for them too so...but it's...it's a fresh year every year and that can be exciting. (Interview 1)

Vickie got involved because she wanted to make things better. She said, "I think that I'll stay focused on what I'm doing but try to...try to improve things for other people" (Interview 2).

Another strategy that Vickie articulated was building relationships with other people to help negotiate difficulties. For example, she said:

You know being a specialist and not having that experience in the classroom, teachers think you don't respect them in their class enough and it's hard to have that dialogue sometimes where you feel kinda isolated and the classroom teachers are separate from the specialists, but I do my very best to make sure they know that I respect what they do and help them out as much as possible and that I'm interested in what they're teaching them so I can pull it into my classes. (Interview 1)

Vickie didn't limit her efforts to build relationships to other teachers. She said:

What's lost is like office staff and administration even custodians and teaching assistants so it might like be the first week of school or even maybe the first month but I make sure that I get with...each...each of those people too and just kind of touch base and make sure I see that they're okay like is there anything I can help you with kind of thing. (Interview 2)

Making this kind of effort helped her working relationships with other teachers and staff members, but she also used the same strategy of trying to build relationships to deal with the communication barrier she worried about with parents:

Communicating with some of the parents, just in the mornings we do car duty where you open up the cars and the kids come walking out some of the things...some of the cars that pull up some of the parents that are you know all the windows are tight and they're smoking their cigarette and the child is in the backseat and you just wanna be...open that window you know but you know I'll say good morning to the parents and the parents would say good morning to me, I feel like there's that communication. (Interview 1)

Of course Vickie also strove to build relationships with and between her students.

Vickie told me about one way she did this early in the year:

I always like to start off the new year with something exciting and do...like to know about the kids you always want to ...I always want to know more about their experiences so I always to include something that has...they have to pull from themselves and bring it out. I usually do like to do teams stuff like team building with the kids and you can do that so...with...at such a little age you know if it's you know building a little house with your friends or you know just something that I feel like shows their own leadership and their own styles and then with older kids you can do things you know that not... but it shows everybody's different but they can all help contribute. (Interview 2)

Savannah

Savannah's prior experiences working with students in non-school settings influenced her approach to negotiating the constraints on being a teacher leader.

She said, "I think my experience has helped me to be a better teacher, to figure

out what kids like” (Interview 1). One strategy that Savannah employed to address the difficulties that she encountered in her classroom was to get to know her students. In this example, she was talking about a student who had recently come into her classroom mid-year:

He prefers to sit by himself so I'll let him sit by himself because he can get his things done there. He's one of those students that I'm still learning about. I don't know him fully yet but he likes praise and when he's doing something, he's one of those kids that you have to go by and say something to them to keep him going, to keep him motivated. (Interview 1)

Savannah's internship in college at the children's home helped her to learn the importance of this strategy:

At the children's home, I believe that all of the kids were good kids, no matter what they were there for. Whether they did something, fighting or whatever, they were all kids once they got there. They had dreams and feelings like anybody else did. I was able to sit down and talk to them and once they got to know me, they would open up about how their day was and "I didn't like this class because this teacher does this," or, "Someone's bothering me," and sometimes, I got to talk to them and give them advice on how to handle peer pressure and how to handle being around people that they didn't get along with and make good choices. Some of them were there for not making good choices. Although they were older their lives in some ways were not very different from the children that I work with. (Interview 1)

In her current role, Savannah strove to get to know her students and understand where they were coming from and the situations that they dealt with:

You and I probably would have never had to deal with years ago the weight that they carry on their shoulders. The school that I'm in now, the students' neighborhood drama is sometimes brought into the classroom.

They come in upset because of something at home and it's nothing that you did. You may not understand that at first when they come in upset and they get an attitude with you or something, it's not because of anything you did. There are outside issues and I think one of the problems that you have, especially when you look at test scores in low performing schools, is that these kids' thinking is not always primarily on getting an "A" in this class or learning how to read, it's, "What am I going home to when I leave here? Will I be cold again tonight? Will I have something to eat?" – those kinds of things. (Interview 1)

Savannah summed up her use of this strategy by saying, "Well, every child is different and you just have to learn and figure out what they need" (Interview 1).

Another strategy that Savannah spoke of frequently was "making sure that your expectations are clear and your students understand them" (Interview 2).

She noted that "if you're in a Title I school, a lot of times you also deal with behavior as one of the things that sometimes you may be dealt or faced with as a teacher, so your classroom management is key" (Interview 2). Savannah's approach to managing her classroom relied heavily on "modeling for them how they should behave in a classroom and watching how they handle themselves when they're in a group with other people" (Interview 2).

Dealing with student behavior issues was one of the constraints that Savannah noted, but she had developed a system for dealing with this issue in her classroom through setting clear expectations and modeling:

Even the smallest things, for instance in the morning, the kids eat breakfast in the classroom and so even the smallest things of telling them to pick up their trash. If it's yours, clean it up. If you spill something, we're not going to cry about it and we're not going to leave it on the table, we're going to go and get a paper towel and wipe it up. Even the small things

that some people may assume these kids would know how to do, some of them don't know how to do because either they haven't been told to do it or someone does it for them. In my classroom, I think going back to where we talked about leadership and the importance of encouraging students to be leaders will help in that and point out those kids that are those leaders in that classroom and kind of give them more responsibility. When I do small groups and I don't do it every day, I just try to do it a few times a week specifically with math, we talked about noise volume and we kind of model how we behave in smaller groups and they know there's a consequence if they can't do it in a small group and they can sit by themselves. (Interview 3)

Another strategy that Savannah employed was to take responsibility for her students' learning. While it might have been tempting to make excuses based on the difficulties that she faced, she said:

I think as teachers you have to know and realize that we can sit here and point the finger and blame the parents for not doing this but when they come into you, they're ours and we have to make sure that we're doing all that we can for them, the best that we can do for them and more. (Interview 3)

Savannah's approach to dealing with working in a low-performing school came down to a sense of personal responsibility for her students' success. She said, "It's up to you as a teacher to get out of your comfort zone and get out of your box to do something to help someone else" (Interview 1).

Casey

Casey was very focused on meeting the needs of her students, and this focus helped her to deal with the constraints that she faced. Casey met curricular requirements with a desire to help her students learn and enjoy school:

And also, you know, yes we were kind of required to do guided reading, but, yeah, if I'm required to do something I make it my own. I just don't -- I'm going to find the best that I can out of that program kind of thing. I'm going to tweak it to how it will make it interesting for the kids and that kind of thing. (Interview 1)

Casey's approach involved modeling enthusiasm for whatever she was teaching:

Writing, I guess we've had a lot, you know, you had the writing test for a long time so we did have to kind of stick to a certain format. But, I just found that through a lot of modeling they love to hear the stories, especially my personal stories, when we're doing the personal narratives, they love listening to the story that happened to me when I was a kid kind of thing. And then, you know, we do a lot of class stories together and I'd give them the freedom to be able to add stuff to our class story and stuff like that, and, I know that's nothing unique or different, but, you know, taking something that's a little bit could be on the boring side if you let it and just kind of put your own twist on it. And I think a lot of it has to do with the teacher's attitude as well. The kids are going to know if you're bored with it or if you're not into it, they're going to catch on to that really quick. So, I think it really has to do a lot with an attitude. And I'm a big old fat goober and I'll get up in front of that classroom and be a big old goober in front of those kids, and you know, that, you can take anything boring and make it fun, you know. (Interview 1)

Casey organized her instruction based on what her students needed to be successful:

If I didn't do some of the things that I do now, my kids wouldn't be as successful as they have been because it's almost like when you're thinking about children's reading and the way they learn how to read. If you're not meeting the decoding and you're going straight to trying to work on comprehension, you're not meeting them where their needs are. I think, in my room it's total organized chaos all the time because I've got small groups. I've got kids going on and off computers. I've got, you know, a small group working over here, I've got a small group working over there, and I just found that every kid is at a total different point and you can't just teach one class in my opinion when kids are on so many different levels. (Interview 1)

She was driven to try new things and worked to continually improve her practice for the benefit of her students:

I mean I don't even look at my lesson plans from the year before because I know I have a whole bunch of new kids, different personalities. I remember the good lessons. I remember the bad lessons, but of course they have to be adapted according to the kids who are in the room. But that, I think that's just my nature and it comes out as that. I'm not going to settle. I hope I never get rid of that, to be honest with you. I hope when I get older I don't just say, okay, I'm doing the best I can; that's good enough. It's never... Like my, I always even though I know I try my best, I always keep trying. It's a perfectionist thing in me I think. I'm always going to keep trying to do bigger and better than what I did before. Sometimes the things that frustrate me the most, are the things I work on changing. (Interview 2)

While Casey remained focused on meeting the needs of her students, she consciously worked to stay within the boundaries of the established rules and policies:

And for me, you know, I don't want to, I don't like to get in trouble, I don't want to be called in the office, so I'm going to do what I'm expected to do, you know. I'm, even though I might not like it and it is time consuming, and I can't say my, you know, personally, like only I'm going to really know

that I don't really care to do it, but I'm going to do it anyways because it's expected of me, you know. I guess I'm a goody-goody. (Interview 1)

When facing new programs or mandates, Casey maintained an open mind and tried to find the good in whatever she faced, in this case, data walls:

I guess what other people see as being pushed on us maybe, like I said, I'm going to give it a shot, then I'll form my own opinions kind of thing. And, I mean, I can see the value in those data walls, even though sometimes yes, it is time consuming, and, but I can see the importance of it. (Interview 1)

Casey didn't like it when other teachers complained about new initiatives before they had tried them:

I'm not one to buck at all, like, I'm really, I kind of, one of my pet peeves is when somebody doesn't even give something a try and they just buck the system right away, you know? I'll give whatever you need me to do a shot and then I'll form my own opinions about and then I'll go with it, you know. That's kind of one of my pet peeves about things sometimes, when, you know, teachers just, you're told to do something and right off the bat is, "I'm not doing that." (Interview 1)

Another strategy that Casey employed was to stay positive and focus on finding solutions:

I'm just not; I'm not going to get into the drama. It's not, I'm just not gonna. I'm not going to do it and I think people know I have, I'm going to stick with that positive attitude. You know how you were, when you're around negative people you tend to be more negative. And when you're around positive people you tend to be more positive and I really honestly try to be a positive people. As you can see I dodge a lot of the negative issues too cause I just don't like to dwell on those things. You're not going to do anything by complaining about it. You're, you just got to keep it like, just

like the kids. You can't sit there and complain about how low they are. You've got to do something about it. You can complain all day about it but it's not going to change anything by complaining. What are you going to do about it instead? So, I guess that's what it is. (Interview 1)

In addition to staying positive with colleagues, Casey strove to model positivity for her students:

All the time in the classroom. I really think a person's classroom reflects the modeling that they do up in front of those kids every day. If you see a chaotic classroom, often times somehow that teacher is chaotic in some sort of way, whether it's through yelling, or you know, cussing or whatever. I know for even my own girls, they ref-... Their attitu-... My personal girls, reflect if I'm having a bad day or something, it's even worse for them. It's like they do the same thing and I've found the days that I walk in and I'm having a rough day at school, those kids are like double hyper or whatever and I'm having twice as many problems as I normally do. And I think it's that modeling that, you know sometimes you have to step back as a teacher and say, okay, you know, push back all that crud and just, you know show them how to act because I don't think they have those role models at home with especially how to act properly in public or how to respond politely to somebody back when you're having issues, you know. I think we have a responsibility of, to show those kids the social skills as well. And, and then also, you know there's teachers that maybe they're not, maybe they're not showing proper things towards the kids, you know or that they're very negative around the children or something. You know you can as a role model kind of twist around their words and change it into positive, or you know that kind of thing, so... I know I've done that with several people this year. [laughs] (Interview 2)

A huge constraint for Casey was time, so a strategy that she employed was to make the most of the time she had by staying on task and not socializing:

Really I try to use every second that I'm there cause I can't take it home. You know, between grad school and my kids I have to use my home time for other stuff. So this year especially I kind of find myself "Okay, let's, if it's just going to be..." I talk more personally on my grade level cause I

trust a lot, I trust my grade level. And other people I do, it makes it sounds like I don't ever talk to people but I do, but in passing and stuff like that. But, I don't know. Somehow I get to know people because I do know people. [laughs] (Interview 1)

Lisbeth

One strategy that Lisbeth employed was to accept change and adapt to the conditions she encountered. She said, "The longer you're in education you realize that curriculum's going to change. Textbooks are going to change. There's going to be new plans and policies every year. And you learn how to adapt to that" (Interview 3). For example:

Learn the new curriculum. Learn the new program. I guess that's what I mean by adapt. When you—I remember one year a new reading series was being adopted, and I was already there teaching third grade. I took new manuals home over the summer, and as—during the summer I just went through and wrote lesson plans and made notes, and I just pretty much went through the book creating my own little guide of my little lessons and tried to create ownership within the program. [coughs] (Interview 3)

Lisbeth said, "It's scariest when you don't know. When you haven't learned it yet. But once you learn it, then you can implement and go for it" (Interview 3). She felt strongly that "you don't really have a choice as to whether you're going to do those or not because your administration and your county says this is what you're going to do, and there's no need in fighting it" (Interview 3). Instead of fighting, Lisbeth found ways to be part of the decision making process:

I just do it, nothing, you know, I—I'm a pleaser. I think that's my personality. It's not that I don't think that I wouldn't stand up for what I believe in, but education is a huge machine, and I'm a tiny little cog wheel in my little classroom, and yet what I do has an impact on these students and in my school, but when you get to the big picture programs and philosophies of school systems and things, I think the only way you have impact on that is if you join a committee and you have your voice in the planning.

Another strategy that Lisbeth employed when dealing with change was to focus on meeting the needs of students:

And then you get new curriculum and new textbooks and Common Core, and you feel like things have totally changed, and yet you still have to hang on. And you have to grab it. We have to keep trying and wrap your brain around all that there is to do, and you're still in the business of teaching children. And you still have this job. You still want what's best. And you still want them to achieve their goals, so all those other things can change, and yet there's a lot of similarities that stay the same too. (Interview 3)

In order to meet the needs of her students, Lisbeth adjusted her instruction over time:

I think I became much more organized in my uh, instruction and I think I'm much more detailed in my instruction now. I think I realized for me to get what I want from my students that I have to really spell it out exactly and if I am extremely clear and detailed in my instructions, then odds are most of the time I'm going to get exactly what I want. (Interview 1)

Lisbeth got what she wanted from students by creating a very structured classroom environment. This structured environment was a strategy that Lisbeth

employed to provide students with more learning time and more hands-on experience and to negotiate the constraint of poor student behavior:

I'm very structured. The kids come in; they come in like this with their hands together because I give them all a squirt of hand sanitizer cause they're all touching the keyboards and they come in and they sit four students to a row on the carpet and they line up. And they all know exactly what to do. Any time I have a sub, the sub goes, "Wow, they just come right in and do." They come right in and they sit; you do your lesson and you get them on the computer. And my goal has always been I want them to have as much time on the computer as possible so I try to keep my presentation as short as possible cause I want them to have that hands-on experience that some of them don't ever get. (Interview 1)

Lisbeth was very deliberate about creating a positive environment for herself as well as for her students. This strategy of manipulating the school environment to be more positive and collaborative helped Lisbeth to negotiate some of the constraints she faced, such as feeling disrespected as a professional:

I really feel like...I feel like that's a personality trait of mine, and I feel like even when I look back at being a younger teacher to a certain point there was some of that. And the longer I've taught the more I feel like I've definitely strengthened that and my skills in trying to create the environment that I want. Plus it's different here in that I'm a connection teacher as opposed to the other school where I was an AIG resource teacher. And yet I didn't work with the whole student body, but I had my groups, different grade levels and, you know, was able to do some whole school type of activities. I was in charge of the science fair and the geography bee. And, you know, was doing the school-wide type of planning. And I, you know, if I was in charge of it, then I can create the environment the way that I want it to be (Interview 3)

Lisbeth negotiated the constraints she encountered on leading from within the classroom by embracing change, getting involved and working to create the conditions that she and her students needed to be successful.

Camilla

Camilla was committed to meeting students' needs without crossing any boundaries that had been established by her principal or district as one strategy for negotiating constraints on teacher leadership:

I'm a real rule follower. Believe it or not. I just really feel like if I'm told to do something I should do it and I try to instill that into my teachers too that you don't want to get in trouble for not doing what you're supposed to do. At the same time do what you're supposed to do but also do what, what's needs to be done for the kids. (Interview 3)

Camilla said that she found "creative ways to follow the rules without it being one more thing, I guess, and then at the same time making it meaningful for kids" (Interview 3). Even though she wanted to follow the rules, she was willing to push the boundaries when necessary in her pursuit of student learning:

I think that sometimes we have to do things in spite of what, what's in place. In spite of the rules or the pacing guide or the, we have to do what it takes for our kids to, to be successful and sometimes a pacing guide doesn't make a kid successful or, you know, I don't think we have to, focus on this, on the rules of what's scripted all the time when we see an immediate need for our kid that isn't part of the script, if that makes sense. I think sometimes we have to go unscripted. (Interview 3)

Like Casey, Camilla dealt with constraints on her leadership by keeping an open mind when confronted with something new. She said, "I always try to put myself

and view things from other people's perspective" (Interview 3). When Camilla disagreed with something she had been asked to do, one strategy she used to negotiate the constraint was to communicate about her concerns:

So even if I'm told something I don't want to do or think is the right thing to do, I try to think about why I'm being told that or why that person who is giving the directive feels that way and I've learned a lot about communicating when I, when I have questions or don't agree with policies or the way that, you know, things are supposed to be done. And, so I think just having, like I said, that boss who said "Okay, I completely agree this isn't the best solution. It's my solution but how can we, what else do you have?" I think that was very beneficial in helping me to be able to reconcile with things. (Interview 3)

Partly because of her experience with that principal, Camilla said, "I'm able to communicate and I'm not irrational and so if I do have an issue then, I'm able to talk and work through it with whoever" (Interview 3). Camilla's strategy of talking through her concerns with her supervisors assisted her in finding ways to negotiate the constraints that she perceived on her leadership.

Camilla learned early in her career to put meeting her students' needs ahead of everything else. She credited her mentor with helping her understand the importance of serving her students regardless of the structural constraints she faced:

So taking Anne's advice and really at the beginning of the year getting to know my students and focusing on what they needed from me, she told me that if you get to know them, you'll be able to understand how you can best serve them. And so that I think is really what made me the leader that I was, was putting kids first and so when it came down to testing and EOGs and things like that, I cared more about what my students needed

than what the skill or standard was of the week. I also learned that learning how they needed me and what I could do for them would take care of the assessments or the end-of-grade tests or whatever because I was building relationships in order to be able to better serve them. So I think that's what helped me to be a leader. (Interview 1)

Camilla put the needs of her students at the center of everything she did. This focus served as a support as she navigated the various constraints that she faced as a teacher leader working in low-performing schools.

Jessamyn

Like Camilla, Jessamyn talked about the importance of meeting student needs, even if it meant confronting her administrator, as a strategy to negotiate constraints on teacher leadership. She said, "I was not one of those people who was like, scared of administration. I'm like "Huh-uh, this is what they [the students] need and this is what I'm going to do" (Interview 2). She gave this example:

I remember when I was teaching in New York like I could not stand the "We're teaching 7.8 today, 7.9, 7.10, 7.11. We're testing on Friday." "Well what if they don't get 7.9?" "Well it doesn't matter we're going to test anyway." I'd test on Monday and I got in trouble a lot. I mean not in trouble but you know, the math coach would walk in and she would say "I need your scores." I'm like "We'll be done. I'll give them to you Tuesday." "You didn't do it on Friday?" "Huh-uh, I absolutely could not test these children. They had no idea. They do not understand it. I'm not doing that to them. I'll be on point. I'll catch up next week but no. I'm not doing that." I'd get a dirty look and if the principal would ask me I'll explain. "What is it hurting? I'm still going to be ready to give the final benchmark or whatever on this date. I'll catch it up. I'll take their recess. We'll get it there but huh-uh. I'm not going to give them a test on something they didn't understand. That doesn't make sense." (Interview 2)

Jessamyn felt this strategy worked for her because she was able to communicate with her principals and give a justification for her actions. She said, “I could always defend it” (Interview 2), crediting her “gift of gab” (Interview 2).

Another strategy that Jessamyn employed to negotiate constraints as a teacher leader was focusing on the things she could control instead of the things she couldn't. Rather than opposing the procedures and structures that were imposed on her, Jessamyn focused on making sure that she employed the procedures well so that her students' needs were met:

So, I can't fix all that stuff, but I can make sure my classroom is straight. I can make sure I do exactly what I need to do in here. And the demands of the change in the curriculum and the observations, those aren't hard demands. I mean, those are procedures to make sure your lesson is being taught efficiently. If you know what you need to do, then you don't ever have to worry about an observation, you know, because you shouldn't put on a show when it's observation time anyway. If you're posting anchor charts with every lesson, then you don't have to make sure you have your anchor chart when you're being observed because it's just a routine for you. So, knowing that you can't fix everything but you can control what's in this classroom. (Interview 3)

Jessamyn was confident in her ability to make her classroom an effective learning environment, regardless of outside factors like policy.

Jessamyn identified parent involvement as a constraint on teacher leadership, so she worked hard to build relationships with parents. For example, she worked to find ways to show respect and help parents understand the school better:

Well I taught Parent Academy when I was at School F. I taught it and then I was, I taught it one year and then I was in charge of it the next two years. And I taught a class, I taught a class with the Spanish parents and teaching them English. And they loved it, and we did that, the kind of food night during Parent Academy. They loved me because I could speak a little bit of Spanish, and they always said that you explain things so easy, like you make it so easy for us. And so I guess I just found a loophole to still let the parents know that someone here understands and respects and you know, we're going to do what we can. (Interview 1)

As an outsider to the school communities Jessamyn was working in, she often needed to find out how things were done in a certain school or district. Jessamyn made use of her ability to build relationships with colleagues to help her negotiate constraints she faced as a teacher leader who sought to have an impact beyond her own classroom:

Well, it's nice because I have connections in each district. And sometimes at the school, so if I don't know necessarily the principal or AP, I may know the CC or I may know a teacher there. So before I go administrative and ask a question I'll ask around and say "How do you all do this here"? (Interview 2)

When working with other teachers, Jessamyn felt that it was very important to stay positive. She said, "I try to be very nonjudgmental. You see things sometimes or you hear things for them. I just, I always try to keep it positive" (Interview 2). Jessamyn voiced her personal strategy for staying positive:

Every day, like, find one thing that makes it fulfilling. Like, whether it's something so small that, you know, Johnny finally knows that he can't yell out. He has to raise his hand, or a light bulb goes off, but like every day

there's, there are a lot of rewarding things that happen in a school day, but every day, like, pick one to remind you of the joys of being an educator. (Interview 3)

Jessamyn knew herself and was aware of what she needed to feel successful.

She said, "I have to keep that passion and that work and that interest level up in order to feel like I'm really doing something" (Interview 1) as a teacher leader.

Valerie

Valerie identified many constraints on her work as a teacher leader in a low-performing school, but she also frequently expressed confidence in her ability to find solutions to the problems she faced. She said, "So there again, I would have to get creative about solving my own problems" (Interview 1). For example, when a student did not participate in her class, she found that referring the student to the office and calling the parent were not effective. She took matters into her own hands:

So I said ok I will fix her, I will keep her so busy, she will not have time to do anything and she ended up being my best helper. 'Cause I told the kids, we did a My Life Brochure, I said y'all bring your pictures in and she will scan them for you, because we only had one scanner. So I kept her busy and that's how I dealt with her. But you have to be creative in how you deal with things. You know, the difference in the school system and the work place, the business world, you know when you get these kids in your class, you know I can't negotiate to get them out so I have to deal with [what] I have. But in the business world if something wasn't right I could say, hey this should not be my file or this really should be transferred to somebody else but in education, you're kind of stuck with it. I hate to say stuck with it but you have to deal with that challenge in your class and you have to be creative about it and you are going to have that child for the whole semester. So it's best to try to embrace it rather than to challenge it. (Interview 1)

As department chair at School G, Valerie was proud that she came up with a solution to the problem of department members being asked to cover other teachers' classes when they were out:

I was talking to somebody yesterday about this and he said that when I was department chair that our department ran really well. And that was because I would tell the teachers you know its best for us to cover for each other in our department where we probably most likely know the kids than for us to cover a math class or an English class or a history class. So when one of our people were out I would make a schedule and we would do that instead of us going out. So, basically you all will leave us alone because we are not asking you to find coverage for any our teachers when they are out. In my opinion that was a way of being resourceful because you pretty much knew what you would be limited to so it a way negotiating. We will take care of our department if you just leave us alone and not use us to sub outside of our department. And I think it worked pretty well, nobody would do the whole block and I would do the same thing I would ask other people to do. (Interview 1)

This strategy of coming up with an alternative solution to a common problem of not having enough substitutes allowed Valerie and her colleagues to retain some autonomy while working within the structure of the school.

Like several of the other teacher leaders, Valerie expressed the importance of embracing change as a way of dealing with constraints on her leadership. She said:

If you don't like it, don't worry about it, because soon it is going to change. It will change, just do it and wait for the change. You just have to embrace whatever is required of you and find a way to deal with it. Coping. (Interview 1)

Valerie's strategy for negotiating constraints involved working within the boundaries while still finding ways to do what was best for her students:

I think you have to be flexible and I think you have to—no, I know you have to be flexible and you have to prioritize based on your own value system. You know, “I hear what you're saying. I'm going to do what you're asking” but you know, like I said, I guess you can say I'm a manipulator when it comes to stuff on the computer. “I hear what you're saying. This is what I'm going to do. But at the same time I'm going to do what's best for my students. You know, within the rules cause I'm not going to be a rule breaker but you know, at the same time I'm still going to do what's best for them within the guidelines that you've set up for me.” (Interview 3)

Valerie gave another example of how she would find ways as a teacher leader to meet student needs when she was constrained by her environment:

I got a class that required the internet but I had a classroom with no internet. So it's like they tell you teach this but they don't give you the resources. So there again you have to figure out a way to help your students be the best they can be when you are not given the tools that you need to do your job. So what I did was, we saved our stuff on a flash drive and the school did give me flash drives and then sometimes we would go to the media center to do stuff. When you don't have the resources and its like I want you to teach this but I am not going to give you the tools to do it so do the best you can. So you have to be very creative in how you teach and what you teach to your students. (Interview 1)

Valerie summed up her strategies for negotiating constraints this way:

You know being a teacher with very limited resources, I think I can help people manipulate through the fact that you don't have any resources and I'll try to, you know, find you some. Or you know, find creative ways to get around what you don't have but you know, work with what you have and not waste your time on talking about what you don't have. (Interview 3)

Mel

Mel identified several strategies that she used as a classroom teacher leader to address the constraint of student behavior. She said, “I had lots structure, organization, all, I figured it out. I just figured out that’s all I needed was a lot of structure. And that I couldn’t assume anything” (Interview 1). Along with structure and “high expectations” (Interview 1), Mel said, “and then there was the building the relationships” (Interview 1). Outside of her classroom, Mel dealt with the expectations of administration by enthusiastically embracing everything that she was asked to do:

I was the kind of teacher who, again, would try to learn every new idea, every—I did attend every professional development. I would, go to anything extra that we needed to go to. I was very, the person who would conform to anything too. You know, if the principal said that we were going to try, you know, a new model or a new program or whatever, I was right on board. (Interview 1)

Mel was very focused on getting the job done, which led to people thinking she was “aloof or seen that way and snotty” (Interview 1) so a strategy that she had to learn was building relationships with colleagues:

I was nice! But all I cared about was getting things accomplished. No I shouldn’t say that. It’s not all I cared about. It’s just what was on the forefront of my mind. So, once they pointed it out, I began to change. And I would catch myself like I’d have to say, “Hey how are you doing?” first, before I would get there. But then I got to where I was saying, “Hey how are you doing?” and meant it. You know, there’s a difference between the whole at the copier in the copy room, “Hey, how are ya?” and then moving on to what you need, instead of stand-, not standing there and saying, “Hey, how’s your...” You know, being specific, “How is your mom doing?”

How's grandma doing?" And I would start trying to remember things about people like if they told me their grandma was sick or they told me, you know, their child, something was wrong with their child or things, I started really focusing on that. (Interview 1)

Mel's efforts to build relationships with her colleagues paid off as a teacher leader, but that meant that she had to develop another strategy for negotiating tensions between teachers and administration:

I've come a long ways in getting to know people rather than just jumping straight to this is what we need to get accomplished. So I learned really well how to do that, I think, over time, with her so I would also run into this issue of they really liked me and then they didn't really like [the principal] very much. So, you know, it was a balancing act. It was a huge balancing act. So, now, I have that balancing act even with administrators of always wanting to touch base with them to make sure that do they have any concerns or questions, you know, of I want to keep in good, in good standing with them, and I learned how to do that. And, still support the teachers. (Interview 3)

At this point in her career, Mel felt good about her ability to balance her relationships with teachers and administrators:

So I think that through my experiences it's gotten me there today to be able to figure out those situations and think ahead on, okay, how do I get through this without -- and, make everybody feel good. You know, feel supported and feel like we got to where we needed to be and then she [the principal] feels good about it. (Interview 3)

Themes

Stayers.

Staying positive. Vickie and Casey were explicit about working to stay positive as a strategy to deal with difficult situations. Vickie said “I’m positive about it so I feel like that just kind of rubs off on other people” (Interview 2) and Casey said, “I’ll just kind of twist it around and make it a positive kind of thing” (Interview 1). Savannah expressed positivity as a strategy in how she dealt with students’ academic needs and their behavior. For one thing, she rejected the notion that her students are not capable of doing well, saying, “We have smart children. You have children who can do math and who can write” (Interview 1). Savannah will “point out those kids that are those leaders in that classroom and kind of give them more responsibility” (Interview 3) as a means of promoting positive behavior. Lisbeth explicitly remained positive in the face of ever-changing expectations, policies and programs:

You go to the training. Learn it. And you implement it. And you go on. And I think you’re better off just by accepting that and not—because you can’t. You can’t fight it. You just have to do it. (Interview 3)

Leavers. There were no themes that emerged for the leavers in terms of strategies for negotiating constraints that did not also emerge for the stayers.

All.

Meeting student needs. All of the teachers interviewed for this study employed a strategy of focusing on meeting students’ needs in order to negotiate

their contexts and overcome constraints on doing what is best for students. For example, Savannah said:

For a lot of these kids, it's not an academic concern for them; it's personal. You almost have to get past their personal issues and help them get past in some way to leave that there and focus here to get them to do what they need to do. (Interview 1)

In order to get past the personal, Savannah worked to get to know each child as an individual and addressed each child's different needs within her classroom context.

Vickie also spoke about the importance of getting to know students and building relationships:

Maybe there's something more that she or he wants to talk about like maybe you know, it like... well how things at home? Are you still planning on moving to California or are you going to stick around and ...well mom thinks we're going to stay now and you know we'll have that little bit more communication that that bonding I guess in that relationship it's all...it's about that relationship that you have with them. (Interview 1)

The relationship that Vickie had with her students helped her to find ways to overcome many of the difficulties she encountered as a teacher leader.

Jessamyn utilized a strategy of going through all her students' names in her head as she was planning to ensure that she was meeting their needs:

The one or two who you forget to name, you're forgetting them in class. Like there's something that you're teaching and they're not getting it. They're in the back of the room or they're quiet so you just kind of forget

about them, or they're behavior issues, so you don't think they need to learn, and make sure you touch that child every day. (Interview 3)

Casey continually strove to meet student needs by utilizing the best of a variety of strategies and programs:

I'm a believer in that one program is not the right way. You've got to tap into the best of many. I think just putting those altogether and then seeing -- you know those lessons that work, right, with the kids, and those stick in your mind. (Casey, Interview 1)

Lisbeth said that no matter what program a teacher is given to work with, she has to "make it work in your classroom" (Interview 3). Camilla expressed this same strategy another way:

I think a lot of times teachers feel constrained, especially new teachers of, of the way that they're told the way things have to be done but I think leading from within is, like I said, finding that balance of what you have to do and what you know should be done for kids. Not necessarily breaking rules but saying "Okay, I know I have to do this. These things have to be done. What else can I do to make sure that this that has to be done isn't actually hindering what needs, the needs of my kids?" (Camilla, Interview 3)

Mel and Valerie also talked about the importance of meeting students' needs, but at a whole school level rather than a classroom level. Mel and Valerie both defined teacher leadership in terms of working with other teachers to help them improve student outcomes. Valerie's strategy involved collaborating with colleagues to ensure student learning:

Because you can say, you know, “Increase your test score.” Yeah but when I get with my peers and my colleagues and I’m working with them and we’re sharing what works, what has not worked and we’re growing as professionals and helping our students become better learners and teaching those strategies, learning strategies to them, I think it’s, I just feel it’s more powerful cause it trickles down directly to the student. (Interview 3)

Mel’s strategy was to conduct a thorough needs assessment before deciding on a program:

Not, not just a brush over of everybody can’t read or, what specifically are the problems. Is it that these kids have problems with phonics? Are these kids really have problems with, you know, was it decoding? Was it comprehension? What types of comprehension strategies do we need to put in place? (Interview 1)

While working in different contexts and having different personal styles, all of these teacher leaders expressed the importance of focusing on meeting student needs as a strategy for feeling successful as teacher leaders.

Personal responsibility and problem solving. Another strategy common to the teacher leaders is their sense of responsibility to the students they serve. Vickie’s sense of responsibility comes out of the relationships that she builds with students. She wants the students to know that they can count on her to be a stable presence at the school. She said, “I’m going to be there, I want them to know that next year I will see you here” (Interview 1). Vickie also expressed a sense of wanting to do all she can to help her students. She said, “You just do what you can do for those kids that you have” (Interview 1).

Savannah summed up her sense of responsibility by saying, “At the end of the day, I’m still responsible for them whether or not those parents walk in or whether or not they help them on homework” (Interview 3). Valerie echoed this sentiment, saying, “Regardless of what they give me, it’s still my responsibility to make sure [students] have the best experience they could have” (Interview 3). Casey felt that she had to do everything possible to ensure student success. She said, “I’m the one that sees ‘em the most, other than their parents. I don’t know, I just feel like we’ve got a huge responsibility” (Interview 3).

Jessamyn had no patience for excuses, saying “There’s always going to be top down duties or changes, or schedule changes, or things you don’t like, but you can’t have an excuse of why this lesson didn’t go well in your classroom” (Interview 3). Camilla echoed this, saying, “if our true goal as educators is to prepare our kids for what’s really out there then we don’t settle for just getting by” (Interview 3). Mel and Lisbeth’s sense of responsibility manifested itself at the whole school level. Mel said, “there is not one thing in a school that I haven’t had my hands in” (Interview 1) and Lisbeth said, “I’m willing to work to create even outside of my classroom the kind of environment I want to be in” (Interview 3). Mel and Lisbeth took responsibility for creating the change they wanted to see in the schools they worked in.

Stayers Versus Leavers

Themes for Stayers, but Not Leavers

One theme that emerged for stayers that was not also a theme for leavers was the constraint of time. The constraint of time was not expressed by the leavers, even in their recollections of their classroom experience. This difference may be a result of the leavers having more control over their time as coaches for beginning teachers than classroom teachers do. The day-to-day pressure of a lack of time was very powerful for the stayers, however, who remained in classroom teaching situations.

Most of the stayers shared the experience of being uncomfortable with the negative reputation of their schools because of low-performing or under-performing status. This theme was not apparent in the experiences of the coaches who had left their classrooms for this role, perhaps because none of them were still working in a single school site and therefore would not have the personal association with a negative reputation that the current teachers did.

Another theme for the stayers that was not universally apparent in the leavers' experience was staying positive. All of the stayers explicitly employed a strategy of staying positive in order to negotiate their contexts. The strategy of staying positive was expressed by some, but not all, of the leavers.

Finally, the stayers all explicitly discussed their relationships with students as a support. While some of the leavers did talk about building relationships with students as a strategy, this theme did not appear as a support. This is not

surprising given that the leavers were no longer working directly with students on a daily basis.

Themes for Leavers, but Not Stayers

One theme that emerged for the leavers that was not also expressed by the stayers was developing capacity in other teachers as a support. This difference is almost certainly a function of role, since all of the leavers were working as coaches for other teachers, while the stayers were more focused on their own practice. Another common theme for leavers that appeared in some, but not all, of the stayers' experience was discomfort with top-down pressure due to accountability policies.

Summary of Findings

Themes for All

All of the teacher leaders, regardless of whether they stayed in the classroom or moved into other roles, shared a number of common experiences. Common themes that emerged across the research questions included support from collaboration and from colleagues and support from administration. All of the teacher leaders experienced conflicting values as a constraint. Overall, the teacher leaders shared an overriding sense of personal responsibility and an intense focus on meeting the needs of their students.

The way that stayers and leavers experienced accountability policies was a significant difference that emerged from this study. Stayers were more concerned about a school-level impact, a negative reputation, while leavers were

more concerned with broader impact, namely pressure from above. However overall the teacher leaders interviewed for this study had more in common than they had differences. Their shared experiences of teacher leadership can be summarized under two major categories: an overarching focus on students and a sense of personal responsibility. As Savannah said, these teachers all felt that “it's up to you as a teacher to get out of your comfort zone and get out of your box to do something to help someone else” (Interview 1). One of the things Camilla said in exploring the meaning of her experience of teacher leadership was that she was “strong enough to endure it” (Interview 3). Her response to the question “What do you mean by strong enough to endure?” is a good description of the shared experience of finding a balance between working within the structural constraints they encounter and challenging those constraints recounted by the participants in this study:

I think strong enough to kind of be able to get over those things that you don't like or change the things that you don't like or be able to live in the balance of the things that you don't like and what you enjoy and what makes, what makes you come to work every day and get up at four o'clock in the morning because you're so excited, I think that's what the strength is, being able to know that the good outweighs the bad, in a sense. (Camilla, Interview 3)

For Camilla, and for the other teacher leaders interviewed, the good (a passion for meeting the needs of the students) was enough to outweigh the bad (structural constraints).

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study examined the lived experiences of eight teacher leaders who experienced the phenomenon of teaching in low-performing and underperforming schools under conditions of accountability. This chapter presents a discussion of the findings and implications of the study. I begin with a summary of the findings, followed by a discussion of the findings as related to the propositions, the theoretical framework and the existing literature. Next, I discuss implications of the findings for teacher educators, school administrators and policy makers. Finally, I acknowledge the limitations of the research and discuss possibilities for future research stemming from this study.

Summary of the Findings

In this section, I summarize the findings from Chapter IV for each of the six research questions.

Research Question 1

How do teacher leaders (TLs) perceive and describe their experience of teacher leadership? York-Barr and Duke (2004) define teacher leadership as “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” (p. 287-288). In a paraphrase of the York-Barr and Duke (2004) definition, I define teacher leadership as leading from within the classroom for the benefit of students. The eight teacher leaders’ own definitions of teacher leadership are paraphrased in Table 2.

Table 2

Teacher Leaders’ Definitions of Leadership

Teacher Leader	Definition of Leadership
Camilla	Working towards helping students to be successful
Casey	Modeling effective practices
Jessamyn	Having influence on others and having an impact beyond ones’ own classroom
Lisbeth	Being part of the team, doing more than what is required for the good of the school, sharing with other teachers
Mel	Relating to people, creating capacity in others
Savannah	Finding solutions to help kids
Valerie	Working with other people collaboratively, drawing on one’s own strengths and the strengths of others
Vickie	Engaging others in solving problems while keeping kids in mind.

The definitions of teacher leadership expressed by the participants in this study are consistent with York-Barr and Duke’s (2004) definition as well as my own definition; however there are slight differences in focus for the stayers and the leavers. For the four stayers (Casey, Lisbeth, Savannah and Vickie), the theme common to their experience of teacher leadership was a focus on students. Focusing on the needs of the students they taught helped these four teachers continue to do their work of improving teaching and learning, in spite of

the constraints they encountered, such as poor student performance on tests. The common theme across the leavers' experience of teacher leadership was developing capacity in others. That is, Camilla, Jessamyn, Mel and Valerie all felt the meaning of their leadership resided in their ability to support and develop the skills of other teachers to meet the needs of all students. Across all eight of the teacher leaders' experiences the common theme was collaboration. While each teacher leader had an individual style and approach to leadership, all of them stressed the importance of working with other teachers to solve problems of classroom practice, to motivate students and to bring about positive change. Examples of how each teacher experienced and enacted leadership are included in Chapter IV.

Research Question 2

How do the pressures of accountability policies such as NCLB or Race to the Top figure in teacher leaders' lived experiences? The literature suggests that teachers in public schools, and particularly teachers in public schools found to be underperforming or low performing, are subject to increased scrutiny and surveillance due to accountability policies (Daly, 2009; Olsen & Sexton, 2009; Rothstein & Jacobsen, 2006). The teacher leaders in this study certainly experienced some of this increased scrutiny and surveillance. Most of the stayers (Vickie, Savannah and Casey) indicated that the negative reputation of the schools in which they teach is a stressor for them. Negative attention from the public and emphasis on poor test scores made these teacher leaders

uncomfortable, because they preferred to remain positive and focus on their students. All of the leavers expressed a sense of increased pressure from above associated with accountability policies while they were still in the classroom. This pressure came from expectations related to improving the results of standardized tests, which did not always align with the teacher leaders' understanding of what was best for their students. A common theme for all of the teacher leaders was a concern that the pressures of accountability policies were negatively impacting their students through a narrowing of the curriculum and less attention paid to social needs. Three teacher leaders expressed concern that too much focus on accountability for test scores resulted in less student learning (Jessamyn, Mel, Valerie) and that the focus on poor test scores exacerbated the public's already poor perceptions of the students they taught (Casey, Vickie). More/specific examples of how each teacher experienced accountability are included in Chapter IV.

Research Question 3

What constraints on their leadership do teacher leaders perceive?

The literature on teacher leadership suggests that barriers to teacher leadership include norms of isolation and individualism, structural issues such as lack of time or lack of access to colleagues and top-down decision-making (Chew & Andrews, 2010; Firestone & Martinez, 2007; Harris & Muijs, 2003; Hatch, White & Faigenbaum, 2005; Smylie & Denny, 1990; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). The experience of the teacher leaders interviewed for this study echoes some of

these themes. For example, all of the stayers experienced a lack of time to meet with colleagues, to plan lessons and to contact parents. A theme for all of these teacher leaders, stayers and leavers, was conflict between their values as teachers who lead from within the classroom for the benefit of students and the values of individuals around them or the values of the institutions in which they work. Examples of this included structural issues such as extensive meetings that did not focus on instruction and hierarchical issues such as administrators who did not value teacher autonomy and decision-making. Institutional focus on raising standardized test scores at the expense of other student needs was another constraint for these teacher leaders. Examples of how each teacher experienced constraints are included in Chapter IV.

Research Question 4

What are teacher leaders' perceptions of supports/mediating factors that enable them to demonstrate leadership? Previous research indicates that there are conditions that can support the practice of teacher leadership. These factors include collegial school cultures (Chew & Andrews, 2010; Ghamrawi, 2010; Harris & Muijs, 2003; Muijs & Harris, 2007; York-Barr & Duke, 2004) and principal support and encouragement (Beachum & Dentith, 2004; Birky et al., 2006; Chew & Andrews, 2010; Harris & Muijs, 2003; Hatch et al., 2005; Mangin, 2007; Muijs & Harris, 2007; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). The findings of this study are consistent with previous findings. All of the teacher leaders interviewed experienced significant support from administration and also from colleagues.

Having colleagues who shared their values and who could be relied on as resources and teammates was an important factor for all eight teacher leaders in this study. Administrative support and encouragement was also important. All of the teacher leaders indicated that they had principals and other administrators who made them feel valued and encouraged them to take risks. In many cases, principals explicitly nurtured and developed leadership within the teachers (c.f., Camilla, Jessamyn). A theme that emerged in this study that does not appear in the literature is that all of the stayers experienced relationships with their students as a support for teacher leadership. A desire to see their students succeed motivated the four stayers to persist in their efforts in spite of the constraints they encountered. Examples of how each teacher experienced supports are included in Chapter IV.

Research Question 5

What strategies do teacher leaders employ to negotiate structural constraints on teacher leadership? The four teacher leaders who have stayed in the classroom shared a common strategy of staying positive. Vickie and Casey explicitly stated that they used staying positive as a strategy to negotiate the constraint that they faced as teacher leaders. Savannah and Lisbeth also used positivity as a strategy, although they were not as explicit about it. All four of these teacher leaders (Casey, Lisbeth, Savannah and Vickie) indicated that they dealt with constraints by turning negative situations and attitudes into positive ones and by focusing on the positive aspects of their jobs and their students. All

of the teacher leaders in this study, both stayers and leavers, shared a strategy of focusing on meeting student needs. They accomplished this through building strong relationships with students, through utilizing a variety of instructional strategies and materials, by adapting the resources that they are given so that they work for the students and by paying close attention to what works and doesn't work through ongoing formative assessments.

In addition to meeting the needs of students, all of the teacher leaders interviewed for this study expressed a strong sense of personal responsibility that served as a strategy for them in negotiating constraints. These teacher leaders' sense of personal responsibility also led them to persist in finding ways to solve the problems that they encountered, in spite of structural constraints. Examples of how each teacher experienced strategies for negotiating structural constraints are included in Chapter IV.

Research Question 6

What similarities and/or differences are there in the experiences of TLs who have left the classroom versus those who have stayed? Table 3 summarizes the themes present in the data for stayers only, for leavers only and for all of the teacher leaders.

Table 3

Themes Present by Research Question

Research Question	Themes for Stayers Only	Themes for Leavers Only	Themes for All
Experience of Leadership	Focus on students	Developing capacity in others	Collaboration
Pressures of Accountability	Negative reputation of school	Top-down pressure	Concern for students
Constraints on Teacher Leadership	Time		Conflicting values
Supports for Teacher Leadership	Relationships with students		Colleagues Administration
Strategies for Negotiating Constraints	Staying positive		Meeting student needs Personal responsibility and problem solving

For each of the first five research questions, there were themes present for the stayers that were not present for the leavers. These themes included a focus on students as part of the experience of leadership, the negative reputation of the school as part of the experience of accountability, time as a significant constraint, relationships with students as a support and staying positive as a strategy for negotiating constraints. Leavers, on the other hand, shared a common experience of developing capacity in others as their definition of leadership and top-down pressure associated with accountability.

Differences between the stayers' experience and the leavers' experience are likely related to the teachers' roles at the time of the interviews. All of the stayers were still actively teaching in the classroom at the time of the interviews, while the leavers were still actively working in low-performing schools but as coaches for beginning teachers rather than as classroom teachers. The differences noted in perceptions of accountability policies and leadership make sense for each group given their different roles. In the area of leadership, for example, teachers still in the classroom were focused on students, while the coaches were focused on developing other teachers. When it came to experience of accountability, the stayers were most concerned about a school-level factor, negative reputation, while the coaches were more concerned about top-down pressure, which applies across schools and districts. Other themes present only for the stayers that are likely related to their current role were time as a constraint and relationships with students as a support. These themes were less likely to emerge for the leavers because as coaches they had more control over their time than classroom teachers do and because they do not have the same opportunity to build relationships with students as coaches as they would have as classroom teachers.

All eight teacher leaders, regardless of whether they stayed in the classroom or moved into other roles, shared a number of common experiences. Common themes that emerged across the research questions included support from collaboration and from colleagues and support from administration. All of

the teacher leaders experienced conflicting values as a barrier and concern for students related to accountability. Overall, the teacher leaders in this study shared an overriding sense of personal responsibility and an intense focus on meeting the needs of their students.

Discussion of the Findings

The experiences of the teacher leaders in this study are consistent with the propositions outlined in Chapter I and with the underlying theoretical framework. My first proposition was that an inner source of vision, along with an understanding of the system that they are a part of and their role in that system could help teacher leaders move beyond the structural constraints that they face, overcoming the effects of surveillance and disciplinary judgment. My second proposition was that once teacher leaders suspend and become aware of the taken-for-granted notions that tend to imprison, they may have the opportunity to sense their role in creating reality and can develop a vision that will help bring forth a new reality, free from the constraints of the imprisoning structures. My third proposition was that teachers who successfully exhibit third wave teacher leadership (Pounder, 2006; Silva et al., 2000) under the structural constraints imposed by the current context of accountability may be able to do so because they have moved through the U process (Scharmer, 2009b; Senge et al, 2005), whereas teachers whose leadership and innovation is suppressed by structural constraints perhaps have not experienced presencing and are therefore not able to produce not-yet-embodied knowledge.

Propositions one and three are closely related because presencing is defined as “accessing one’s inner sources of creativity and will” (Scharmer et al., 2002, p. 14). When individuals experience presencing, they become aware not only of the hidden structures of hierarchical power, but also of the interconnectedness of human beings in a living system. Through presencing, individuals understand their part in changing the system that they have helped to create and sustain and are able to access inner sources of leadership in order to enact change. While the individual action of teacher leaders may not completely free them from established structures of surveillance, I assert that my proposition that presencing is important in helping teachers lead from within the classroom is upheld by the experiences of participants in this study. This is supported by evidence that each of the participants experienced tapping into inner sources in their own ways: Vickie accessed her inner positivity; Savannah tapped into her belief that all kids are good kids; Casey’s inner desire to excel pushed her forward; Lisbeth’s need to build community for herself served as an inner source; Camilla accessed her passion for helping students learn; Valerie relied on her resourcefulness and creativity; Mel’s drive to excel fueled her efforts; and Jessamyn tapped into a strong sense of self-worth as an educator. This experience of presencing by accessing inner sources in order to enact positive outcomes for students in their classrooms, or what Scharmer (2001) would call “not-yet-embodied knowledge” is also evident in the ways that the teacher leaders talked about their experience of dealing with the constraints of teaching

in low-performing schools. Through their individual inner sources of creativity and will, these teacher leaders were able to envision and enact positive outcomes for their students, in spite of the surveillance and disciplinary judgment that they encountered. Valerie, for example, frequently talked about her use of creativity in order to meet student needs. The idea of accessing “will” was expressed by the teacher leaders in terms of passion and drive for helping students learn.

The teacher leaders who participated in this study demonstrated the second proposition of sensing their role in creating reality and developing a vision that will bring forth a new reality through the theme of personal responsibility. All of the teachers interviewed indicated that they sensed that their role included being responsible for student learning. They all felt that they were capable of creating new realities for their students through their actions as teachers who led from within the classroom for the benefit of students. Senge et al. (2005) pointed out that in order to form vision, a critical shift in thinking from “they” to “we” is necessary. The teacher leaders in this study demonstrated what “we” thinking looks like for teacher leaders working under conditions of accountability. For example, each of the teachers spoke about the power of their individual and collective actions. Casey, for example, said, “You’ve got a huge responsibility on your hands” (Interview 2) and Valerie said, “As a teacher it’s your responsibility or a challenge to engage that child that is not engaged” (Interview 3). Taken as a whole, the experiences of these eight teacher leaders appear to support my three propositions in that the teachers’ visions for student learning emerged from a

combination of “accessing inner sources of creativity and will” (Scharmer et al., 2002, p. 14) and understanding that they have a role in changing the systems that they are a part of. Nevertheless, additional research as described below is needed to confirm my assertions.

Connections to Previous Research

Barriers to Teacher Leadership

The barriers identified by the teacher leaders in this study are consistent with barriers to teacher leadership reported in the literature. For example, Mel’s experience with colleagues who did not like her being placed in leadership roles over them by the principal, saying, “Who in the world are you coming in telling us what to do?” (Interview 1) is consistent with the findings of Ghamrawi (2010), who found that hierarchical power relations between teachers had a negative impact on teacher leadership. Likewise, Valerie recounted her experience of isolation and difficulty in engaging other teachers in collaboration at the high school:

I am always trying to get an English teacher with a CTE teacher, and share your writing rubric so the kids can have the same thing across the curriculum. I have tried stuff like that but we are so departmentalized and that is what I don’t like about the school. (Interview 1)

This account is consistent with de Lima’s (2008) study, in which department heads were not successful in developing instructional collaboration, and also with

Birky, Shelton and Headley (2006) who found that structures that isolate teachers from one another were a barrier to teacher leadership.

The theme of time as a barrier to teacher leadership, common to all of the teachers who stayed in the classroom in this study, is consistent with the findings of a number of studies (Firestone & Martinez, 2007; A. Harris & Muijs, 2003; Smylie & Denny, 1990; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). School practices and structures that limit time and opportunity for teachers to work together have consistently been found to impede teacher leadership. Overall, the participants in this study experienced hierarchical, compartmentalized structures as a barrier to their practice of teacher leadership.

Supports for Teacher Leadership

Supports experienced by the teacher leaders in this study were also consistent with supports reported across the literature. Collegial school cultures have repeatedly been found to be important in supporting the practice of teacher leadership (Chew & Andrews, 2010; Ghamrawi, 2010; Harris & Muijs, 2003; Muijs & Harris, 2007; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Likewise, all of the teacher leaders in this study experienced support from relationships and collaboration with colleagues.

Another support frequently found in the literature and experienced by the participants in this study was principal support and encouragement. Many previous studies found administrative support to be a critical factor in fostering teacher leadership (Beauchum & Dentith, 2004; Birky et al., 2006; Chew &

Andrews, 2010; Harris & Muijs, 2003; Hatch et al., 2005; Mangin, 2007; Muijs & Harris, 2007; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Principals in this study demonstrated their support by encouraging teacher leaders to become involved in school-wide planning and reform efforts (Camilla, Casey, Valerie and Mel). Camilla and Casey also experienced both administrative support for taking instructional risks and teaching in innovative and non-conforming ways. Principals also demonstrated support by showing confidence in teacher leaders' ability to solve problems on their own, such as Valerie's experience of feeling free to "be creative working my list" (Interview 1). Several of the teacher leaders felt supported by principals who saw potential in them (Camilla, Casey, Jessamyn, Mel). Another way in which principals demonstrated support was through establishing mutual trust and respect. Several of the teacher leaders experienced a high degree of trust and a sense of administration having respect for them as professionals (Casey, Jessamyn, Lisbeth).

Accountability Policies and Inequitable Impact

A number of themes present in the literature regarding the inequitable impact of accountability policies appeared in the experiences of the teacher leaders interviewed for this study. For example, the narrowing of the curriculum recounted by Mel and Valerie are consistent with research by Hursh (2007) and Rothstein and Jacobsen (2006), who found that accountability policies often result in the reduction or elimination of instruction of subjects not tested. In Mel's case, she experienced the absence of significant instruction in social studies and

science, while Valerie recounted many instances of lack of attention and resources in high school courses without an end-of-course test.

Kornhaber (2004) expressed concern about the use of high-stakes testing as a proxy for learning that was born out by the experience of the teacher leaders in this study. The emphasis on preparing students for tests frequently interfered with the teacher leaders' efforts to ensure that their students learned. For example, Valerie felt that school leaders were not paying attention to whether or not students were learning as much as they were to test scores and standardized teaching methods. Jessamyn experienced pressure to move students through the curriculum faster than she felt was appropriate so that they would be ready for the test. Mel experienced a shift in focus from schools implementing targeted reforms to meet specific student needs to schools implementing as many initiatives as they could think of in hopes that something would increase scores.

The literature suggests that some problems associated with accountability are the reduction of teacher autonomy and higher degrees of top-down, hierarchical decision-making (Daly, 2009b, Olsen & Sexton, 2009). Some of the teacher leaders in this study experienced a reduction in autonomy that they associated with accountability policies. Examples are Jessamyn feeling that someone is "riding your back every day" (Interview 2) or Camilla feeling pressure because she "was not using their Test Pro books" (Interview 1). Some of the teachers also experienced top-down decision-making and control. For example, Mel encountered having to "check off all these things that are expected of you"

(Interview 1). This top-down control and reduction in autonomy are associated with the construal of teaching as a technical act rather than a profession (Bushnell, 2003; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2006). Lisbeth, Jessamyn and Valerie particularly noted experiences that made them feel less professional. For example: Lisbeth's time clock (Interview 2), Jessamyn's encounter with the distrustful administrator in New York (Interview 3), and Valerie's experiences with assistant principals who did not value her professional knowledge (Interview 1).

In contrast, many of the experiences of the teacher leaders in this study were consistent with existing research suggesting that treating teachers as professionals by allowing self-direction and risk-taking and building trusting relationships supported the practice of teacher leadership (Beachum & Dentith, 2004; Daly, 2009; Lieberman & Mace, 2009). All of the teachers in this study recounted examples of feeling supported by administrators who built trust (Camilla, Casey, Lisbeth, Vickie), supported them in taking risks (Camilla, Casey) allowed for self-direction and autonomy and valued teachers' professional expertise (Camilla, Casey, Jessamyn, Mel, Savannah, Valerie).

Another issue identified in the literature related to the inequitable impact of accountability policies is teacher turnover (Clotfelter, Ladd, Vigdor & Diaz, 2004; Farkas, 2003; Ng, 2006). Frequent turnover of colleagues, who served as an important support to teacher leaders, was experienced by both Vickie and Savannah as a constraint to their practice of teacher leadership. Working conditions were often cited in the literature as a contributing factor to high

teacher turnover (Haberman & Rickards, 1990, Howard, 2003). Poor working conditions, such as frequent discipline problems or a lack of administrative support, were perceived by the teacher leaders in this study as a constraint. For example, Casey and Savannah both experienced poor student behavior as a constraint, and Lisbeth, Jessamyn and Valerie all perceived a lack of respect from administration as a constraint. These experiences are consistent with the findings of Howard (2003).

On the other hand, overall the teachers in this study experienced positive working conditions, such as support from administration, collaboration with colleagues and collegial cultures. These positive conditions have been found by other researchers to contribute to teacher retention in high-poverty urban schools (Brunetti, 2006; Kardos et al, 2001; Kardos, 2002; Olsen & Andersen, 2007; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). The experiences of the teacher leaders in this study are consistent with the literature about the inequitable impact of accountability policies. The teacher leaders interviewed for this study experienced many of the problems that are noted in the literature and also experienced many of the mediating factors that were indicated in previous studies. In the next section, I discuss the implications of this study for school administrators, teacher educators and policy makers.

Connections to Theory

The pressures of accountability experienced by the teacher leaders in this study are the result of what Foucault would call technologies of surveillance and

normalizing judgment. The accountability policies that label schools and students as low-performing create conditions in which certain schools, and therefore certain teachers, are under increased scrutiny by the public. This public scrutiny and accompanying ranking and grading of schools made the teacher leaders uncomfortable both for their own sake and for the sake of their students. For example, Camilla worried about the impact on her students of low expectations that were the result of the public illumination of students' low test scores.

Hierarchical observation was also experienced by the teacher leaders in this study. For example, Valerie was concerned that administrators paid attention only to the instruction of certain tested subjects that were subject to the technologies of surveillance and neglected subjects that were not tested to the detriment of student learning. Theoretically, this type of supervisory focus results from systems of hierarchical observation, where a few people are expected to observe many others, while they themselves are being observed by someone else, as Foucault says, "supervisors, perpetually supervised" (1977a, p. 177). These types of power relations often result in behavior being controlled because each individual is acutely aware of the supervisory gaze of others. Many teachers become a part of the very system that constrains them, complying with the expected behaviors to avoid normalizing judgment.

Senge et al (2005) theorize the U as a way out of self-imprisonment, a vehicle for personal agency. "The core of presencing is...using the Self as a vehicle for bringing forth new worlds" (p. 186). The teacher leaders interviewed

for this study were able work in unexpected and innovative ways for the benefit of their students. They were able to see beyond the existing structures and envision and enact something different for their own classrooms and students. While the teacher leaders were all acutely aware of the systems of surveillance and hierarchical power within which they worked, as evidenced by their experience of accountability policies, the teacher leaders in this study all took action in the best interest of their students, moving from the self, or “the person or community we have become as a result of a journey that took place in the past” (Scharmer, 2009b, p.41) to the Self, or “the person or community we can become as we journey into the future” (Scharmer, 2009b, p.41).

While the teachers interviewed for this study certainly experienced the effects of hierarchical observation, normalizing judgment and technologies of surveillance as predicted by Foucault (1977a), they also experienced a sense of personal responsibility and agency that are consistent with what Theory U calls presencing and realizing (Senge et al, 2005). While these teacher leaders continued to work within the structures of hierarchical power and surveillance and were not completely freed from those structures, through presencing they were able to realize positive outcomes for themselves and for their students.

Implications

Implications for School Administrators

The results of this study highlight the importance of collegiality in the school environment. The teachers in this study reflected frequently on the

positive support they received from colleagues within their contexts. Therefore school leaders might consider putting in place structures that encourage and support teachers working together, such as the Learning Teams that Savannah referenced. Another implication for school leaders is to consider how they schedule teachers' time. The teachers who remained in the classroom all experienced time as a barrier to the practice of teacher leadership, frequently commenting that their time was taken up by meetings that did not focus on important content like lesson planning and instructional decision-making. While time for collaboration with colleagues is important, it is also critical that teachers have discretionary time and are able to make decisions as to how collaborative time is used.

Because colleagues were an important support for the teacher leaders in this study, another implication for school leaders to consider ways to encourage and support a variety of opportunities for teachers to get to know one another and spend time together, such as staff socials, teacher-led professional learning communities, book clubs or other voluntary social and professional gatherings. Building positive personal relationships among staff members may support third wave teacher leadership.

Another implication of this study is the importance of teacher leaders feeling empowered by school leaders to take risks and make autonomous decisions. The teacher leaders in this study all experienced support from principals who treated them as professionals who were capable of making

instructional decisions and managing their own time. This shared experience of principal encouragement may have nurtured the practice of teacher leadership by giving teachers the opportunity to “make mistakes and learn how to do things the right way” (Camilla, Interview 3). Therefore, school leaders should create conditions in which teachers feel safe in trying new things and possibly making mistakes.

Finally, this study has implications for school leaders in terms of selecting teachers to work in high-needs schools. The teacher leaders in this study had personal characteristics that helped them to negotiate the challenges that they encountered. Therefore, school leaders should consider implementing interview practices that will assist them in selecting teachers who have the deep sense of personal responsibility to students and commitment to building relationships with students that the teachers in this study share. Furthermore, because being part of a team of teachers who share a common set of values and work well together was important to all of the teachers, school administrators should pay careful attention to the placement of teachers when making grade level or departmental groupings.

Implications for Teacher Education and Teacher Educators

This study has a number of implications for teacher educators. First, this study highlights the importance of developing teacher candidates' resilience and the ability to negotiate constraints appropriately. Teacher candidates should have opportunities to discuss real-world problems that teachers face and brainstorm

multiple approaches to dealing with these challenges. Teacher educators should also ensure that candidates have clinical experiences that provide an opportunity to experience the types of constraints that teacher leaders describe and to debrief those experiences while in a supported environment. This may help develop resilience and strategies for dealing positively with challenge.

Secondly, teacher educators should provide experiences for teacher candidates that develop skills in building relationships with colleagues and students. Teacher candidates need to develop excellent communication skills and strategies for getting to know students personally and academically. All of the teacher leaders described formative experiences that helped them develop both their skills in building relationships with students and the disposition to do so.

Another implication for teacher educators is the importance of developing the capacity of teacher candidates to take responsibility for solving problems. The teacher leaders in this study shared a sense of being capable of solving their own problems. This common trait of personal responsibility supported the teacher leaders in navigating the constraints that they encountered in their practice. Teacher educators might nurture a sense of self-reliance and creative problem-solving in candidates through role-play and teaching cases where candidates can practice coming up with ways to navigate the kinds of constraints they are likely to face when working in low-performing and under-performing schools.

Finally, this study implies that teacher educators should consider the importance of developing a sense of personal responsibility for student outcomes. Teacher candidates need to have experiences that will develop their understanding of the impact of teachers on student outcomes and counter the perception that outside factors such as poverty or linguistic diversity are insurmountable challenges.

Implications for Policy Makers

One implication of this study for policy makers is that rather than serving as a motivator for teacher leaders, sanctions such as placing schools on “watch” lists and allowing students to transfer from one school to another make it more difficult for teacher leaders to do their work. Negative impressions of schools in the community are worsened by placing schools on such lists, and the stayers in this study perceived such negative reputations of their schools to be a constraint on their practice. Also, Vickie and Savannah perceived student transience as a constraining factor, so encouraging more student movement through transfer policies is unlikely to improve outcomes. Additionally, top-down pressure resulting from accountability policies was perceived by all of the leavers in this study as a barrier to teacher leadership. Policy makers should carefully consider the need for across-the-board reforms that reduce teacher autonomy and decision-making, as these policies, while perhaps intended to improve teacher effectiveness, may in fact negatively affect teachers who are already effective.

Another implication of this study for policy makers is that individual teacher factors are important. Policies should take into account that teacher success is a complex process that is affected by numerous factors such as prior life experience, individual personality and teaching context (Levin, 2003). It is therefore unlikely that a single method of preparing or selecting teachers will result in universal success.

Finally, policy makers should recognize that individual relationships between teachers and administrators, teachers and students and teachers and colleagues are important in supporting teacher leadership. A teacher who is successful in one context may experience difficulty when that context changes. Applying policies that do not take into account contextual factors such as relationships and school climate are likely to suppress teacher leadership.

An overall implication of this study for all audiences is that, just as it is important for teachers to know their students and acknowledge their differences, it is important to understand that teachers are individuals who have different experiences and are motivated and supported by different aspects of their work. There is no one-size-fits-all approach that is likely to address the needs of all teachers.

Limitations

The main limitation of this study is its focus on only eight instances of the phenomenon in question. Because it is qualitative research focused on the experiences of a limited number of teacher leaders from one region in North

Carolina, the findings of this study are not generalizable to other settings; however, the findings of this study may be illustrative of the experiences of teacher leaders in low-performing schools and therefore may be informative in other contexts (Maxwell, 2005).

My own inexperience as a researcher and my own lived experience further limit this study. Because of my inexperience with the analysis and interpretation of data and my own experiences as a teacher leader, there is the possibility of researcher bias in interpreting the data. It is likely impossible to completely separate my own experiences as a teacher leader from my interpretation of the data. For example, in my own experience, I found building relationships with students and colleagues to be a critical component of my practice. Since I already believe this to be important, it could have colored my interpretation of the importance of building relationships to the teachers in this study.

In order to mitigate the effects of researcher bias due to inexperience as a researcher and from my own prior experience, I used several validation strategies (Maxwell, 2005). First, I used member checking (Creswell, 2007), having participants read over the transcripts of the interviews to ensure that the interviews accurately recounted their experiences. I also had the participants read their profiles and themes I gathered from the data and offer feedback to make sure that my interpretations were consistent with their experience. Second, I used extensive quotes and rich description of each participant's experience so that readers can draw their own conclusions about the findings (Creswell, 2007).

Finally, I had the guidance of expert reviewers in the form of my advisor and committee members to guard against the effects of my inexperience as a researcher.

A third limitation of the research design is the sampling methodology. Purposeful sampling allows the researcher to select participants who are representative of the setting of interest and who represent the heterogeneity of the setting (Maxwell, 2005). Purposeful sampling also allows the researcher to ensure that the participants have experienced the phenomenon of interest and to set up specific comparisons, such as a comparison between teacher leaders who have stayed and those who have left the classroom (Maxwell, 2005). However, purposeful sampling can leave the researcher subject to key informant bias (Maxwell, 2005). In this case, the sampling methodology resulted in the selection of two pairs of participants who had worked for several years in the same school, which may have reduced the diversity of the participants' experiences. Additionally, the purposeful sampling resulted in the selection of four participants who shared the role of supporting beginning teachers in low-performing schools. This shared experience may explain many similarities in the experiences reported that might not be shared by other teachers working in different settings. Another limitation of this study related to the participants is the fact that all four of the participants who have left the classroom are still actively engaged in working with teachers in low-performing schools. Their experience of leaving the classroom is likely to be very different from the experience of teachers who

remain in the classroom but leave low-performing schools, or the experience of teachers who leave the classroom and move to a career outside of education.

Future Research

Further research is warranted to explore the phenomenon with additional teacher leaders and to more deeply study the individual experiences of teacher leaders in order to better understand the inner sources of their leadership (Scharmer, 2009, 2010; Scharmer et al., 2000; Scharmer et al., 2002). In order to better understand the similarities and differences between teacher leaders who stay in low-performing schools and those who leave, further research is also needed that includes teacher leaders who have left teaching for other fields and teacher leaders who continue to teach but who no longer work in low-performing schools. The experiences of teacher leaders who have left may further contribute to our knowledge about barriers and supports for teacher leadership. It will be important to further examine the proposition that presencing plays an important role in teacher leadership in light of the experiences of these other groups of teacher leaders. Each of these potential areas for research is discussed in more detail below.

Additional teacher leaders

Similar research with additional teacher leaders working in low-performing and underperforming schools under conditions of accountability would be useful in determining whether or not the themes evident in the findings of this study extend to other contexts. The experiences of teacher leaders in contexts such as

smaller or more rural districts or in different parts of the country may or may not be different from the experiences of the participants in this study. Further research is needed to determine which findings, if any, carry across these different contexts.

Deeper focus on inner sources of leadership

Further phenomenological studies with teacher leaders are indicated, using an interview protocol that more deeply explores the inner sources (Scharmer, 2009, 2010; Scharmer et al., 2000; Scharmer et al., 2002) of their leadership. Research questions for this further study might include: What do teacher leaders perceive to be critical experiences in the development of their leadership? How do teacher leaders perceive accessing these inner sources? What are teacher leaders' perceptions of how their inner sources help them develop vision? What are the visions of teacher leaders what are their perceptions of success in enacting those visions? These and other questions could be explored to further understand how Theory U operates in the lives of teachers.

Conclusion

The successful exercise of teacher leadership from within the classroom for the benefit of students under the constraints of accountability policies depends upon a delicate balance between living within structural constraints and challenging those constraints. From the lived experiences of the teacher leaders who participated in this study I learned that the support of colleagues and

principals was critical in developing and sustaining leadership from within the classroom for the benefit of students. I also learned that the inner sources (Scharmer et al., 2002) of a sense of personal responsibility and a focus on meeting the needs of students can help teachers negotiate constraints on their leadership that result from accountability policies. Studying the lived experiences of teacher leaders working in low-performing schools under conditions of accountability gives me a deeper understanding of how some teachers are able to successfully demonstrate third wave teacher leadership (Pounder, 2006; Silva et al., 2000) under conditions of surveillance. The findings of this study indicate that tapping into inner sources (Scharmer et al., 2002) of leadership allows teacher leaders to find ways to enact positive outcomes for their students, in spite of technologies of surveillance (Bushnell, 2003) and other structural forces that might discourage such agency.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW GUIDE

I am interested in learning about the experiences of teacher leaders working in low-performing and underperforming schools, particularly about the details of what it is like for you to be a teacher who leads from within the classroom for the benefit of students.

Begin each interview with a few minutes of chatting, then begin with the broad, overarching question for the interview. Prompt for more detail as necessary as the interview proceeds. Each interview should last 60-90 minutes.

Interview 1

Tell me the story of how you came to be the teacher you are today.

Interview 2

What is it like for you to be a teacher leader from within the classroom? What are the details of your work as a teacher leader within the classroom? Focus on your current experience and just tell me as much as you can about what its like for you on a day-to-day basis.

Interview 3

Given everything that you've told me so far about your life before you became a teacher leader and your experiences leading up to being where you are now, and given what you said about your work now, how do you understand being a teacher leader? What sense does it make to you?

END each interview with:

Given that I am interested in how TLs work in schools like yours, is there anything else that you would like to share?

Thank you!

Remember to email and thank again the next day.