Defining Teacher Leadership
Affirming the Teacher Leader Model Standards

Michael N. Cosenza
California Lutheran University

Background

Although there is no common definition for teacher leadership, the concept is continually advanced as a key component for both the success of schools and the professionalization of teachers (Boles & Troen, 1994; Dozier, 2007; Greenlee, 2007; Lieberman, 1987; Smith, 1999). Teachers need to be given opportunities to leave the isolation of their classrooms to collaborate with others in order to build leadership capacity (Dozier, 2007). While there are some teachers who view teacher leadership as formal administrative roles, others view it as any opportunity in which teachers contribute to the decision making process (Donaldson & Johnson, 2007). Whichever way it is defined, it is commonly accepted that teacher leadership capacity is underdeveloped in most schools (Greenlee, 2007).

The Institute for Educational Leadership (2001) provided a broad and progressive definition. It suggested that teacher leadership is not necessarily about power, but about teachers extending their presence beyond the classroom by seeking additional challenges and growth opportunities. Teachers have long been accustomed to working in isolation within the boundaries of their own classrooms. Going beyond the classroom by providing input at meetings, sharing best practices, working

Michael N. Cosenza is an associate professor and coordinator of professional development schools in the Graduate School of Education at California Lutheran University, Thousand Oaks, California. mcosenza@clunet.edu

with the community, working with university faculty, and mentoring teacher candidates are examples of additional challenges that can foster the development of leadership (Petrie, 1995).

Teacher leadership is an important component of student success which requires teachers to be included in the decisions that are made which affect students (Smith, 1999). This includes the basics such as class scheduling and textbook selection but it also should go further to incorporate collaboration for best practices, mentoring student teachers, providing support for new teachers and having access to student data to inform their teaching practices (NCATE, 2001). Teacher leadership is really a collective effort that empowers teachers to make positive contributions to the school community while establishing expectations for all teachers (Greenlee, 2007).

Danielson (2006) suggested that teacher leadership is not about formal assigned roles, but emerges informally by earning it through specific actions. These teacher leaders possess a set of skills that not only allows them to be effective in the classroom but also permits them to exert influence beyond their classroom. York-Barr and Duke (2004) put forward that teacher leadership is a unique form of leadership that borrows from multiple conceptions of leadership that focus more on collaboration than on authority vested in one person.

Kouzes and Posner (2002) suggested that it is mythical to believe that leadership is found only at the highest levels of an organization. An example of this is when a staff member independently brings a group of coworkers together to collaborate to solve a problem without being directed to do so by a manager or prior to the manager being aware that there is a problem. Another example is when a group of teachers work together to develop a before school remediation class on their own time to assist low performing students without being told to do so by the principal. In both examples, it is safe to say that the employees could have easily chosen to take no action because it was outside the scope of their job or responsibility. Instead, by taking specific action, they demonstrated leadership even though they are not working at the highest level of the organization.

Kotter (1996) suggested employees are too often limited to narrow job descriptions that promote complacency and discourage continued learning. This parallel can be seen in many schools when considering the actions of teachers. Kotter (1996) also puts forth that employers need to provide lifelong learning opportunities that will develop leadership skills. According to Kouzes and Posner (2002) leadership can be found throughout organizations, but often it requires nurturing and opportunities for development. This literature implies that it would be

prudent for public school systems to provide coaching and development in leadership for teachers. Unfortunately, as budgets in school districts around the country continue to tighten; less funding is available for the professional development of teachers. It is difficult to develop leaders when the necessary knowledge and opportunities to practice those skills are not provided (Greenlee, 2007).

The development of teacher leadership is increasingly viewed as an important factor in improving schools, improving student achievement, and retaining teachers for the long term (Boles & Troen, 1994; Dozier, 2007; Greenlee, 2007; Lieberman, 1987; Smith, 1999). Unfortunately, attempts to provide teachers with leadership opportunities have been interpreted as a threat to the authority of site administrators (Holmes Group, 2007). Traditionally, schools are organized with a top-down management structure where teachers have little voice in the decision-making process (Boles & Troen, 1994; Donaldson, 2006). This hierarchical structure relies on formal leadership positions, which makes it difficult for teachers to emerge as leaders (Boles & Troen, 1994; Greenlee, 2007).

Formal credentialing programs for administrators are offered at universities across the United States. These educational leadership programs tend to prepare individuals for the top-down model (Greenlee, 2007). Once an administrator is credentialed, schools and districts will typically provide continuing professional development in leadership. Teachers are often excluded from professional development focused on leadership skills (Greenlee, 2007). Leadership is something that administrators, faculty, and staff must become collectively responsible for to improve the whole school (Vernon, 2003). The top-down model causes teachers to be overlooked as important players in the leadership model (Darling-Hammond, Bullmaster, & Cobb, 1995). Barth (1990) suggested that if teachers are enlisted and empowered as school leaders, everyone can benefit and the success of school initiatives will have greater success.

Many educators and educational researchers have put forward standards and guidelines for teacher leadership. The most recent contribution to this initiative is a set of teacher leader standards from the Teacher Leadership Exploratory Consortium which are the basis for this study.

Teacher Leader Model Standards

A group of educators came together in May 2008 to discuss the potential of teacher leadership and the positive impact it can have in school improvement and student achievement. This group expanded its membership and became the Teacher Leadership Exploratory Consor-

tium. The consortium members studied the latest research, conducted interviews of known teacher leaders, and examined leadership programs across the country. Through analysis of their findings and dialog, the group developed the teacher leader model standards which were published in 2011. The standards consisted of seven domains of model standards to describe the scope of teacher leadership (Teacher Leader Model Standards, 2011).

The teacher leader model standards are as follows:

Domain I: Fostering a Collaborative Culture to Support Educator Development and Student Learning

Domain II: Accessing and Using Research to Improve Practice and Student Learning

Domain III: Promoting Professional Learning for Continuous Improvement

Domain IV: Facilitating Improvements in Instruction and Student Learning

Domain V: Promoting the Use of Assessments and Data for School and District Improvement

Domain VI: Improving Outreach and Collaboration with Families and Community

Domain VII: Advocating for Student Learning and the Profession

The teacher leader model standards were developed to encourage discussions about the competencies required for teacher leadership as a means for school transformation. They are also intended to serve as guidelines to inform teacher credentialing programs in the preparation of future teacher leaders (Teacher Leader Model Standards, 2011).

The teacher leader model standards recognize that many teachers may serve in formal leadership roles. Through formal positions, teachers may have administrative authority but the standards are intended to provide a set of guidelines that generate influence and respect through being continuous learners, being approachable, using group skills and influence to improve the educational practice of their peers, model effective practices, exercise their influence in formal and informal contexts, and support collaborative team structures within their schools. Similar to some of the other literature on this topic (Barth, 1990; Danielson, 2006; Darling-Hammond, et.al; 1995; Greenlee 2007; Vernon 2003), the Teacher leader model standards steer away from the top down model in support of the idea that teachers cannot be overlooked as key players in the success of schools and student learning. These standards place emphasis on collaboration, the development of professional learning

communities, sharing of best practices, and reflective practice. (Teacher Leader Model Standards, 2011).

Research Aims

This study seeks to discover how teachers define the term teacher leadership and then compare those findings to the seven domains of the teacher leader model standards. The consortium that developed the teacher leader model standards did so with the intention to provide guidance about teacher leadership and to delineate for universities and other providers of professional development a set of guidelines for the preparation of future teacher leaders (Teacher Leader Model Standards, 2011). This researcher is aware of two teacher leadership certificate programs in southern California that have been developed by county offices of education using the teacher leader model standards as the framework for the program. Considering the magnitude of their intended purpose and the recent adoption by county offices, the aim of this study is to discover if these standards are in alignment with the viewpoints of practicing teachers.

The twenty-two participants were not familiar with or introduced to the Teacher leader model standards prior to the interview.

Site Selection

The first location for this study (site one) was a public elementary school serving kindergarten through fifth-grade students. The school is located in a suburban community in southern California. The elementary school had twenty-one general education teachers in kindergarten through fifth grade, one reading specialist funded by the federal Title I program, two special education teachers, one speech pathologist, and three additional teachers specializing in math, science, and technology enrichment.

The second location (site two) was a middle school serving students in grades six through eight in different suburban community in southern California. The middle school had forty-seven teachers. Sixth-grade teachers worked in pairs sharing a core group of students for two subject areas. Typically, one teacher was responsible for the instruction of language arts and social science while the other was responsible for math and science. Teachers in the seventh and eighth grades followed a single-subject model specializing in a particular content area. Although most teachers focused on one subject area, several of the seventh and eighth grade teachers kept students in the same class for two periods covering both English language arts and social science.

Participants

Twenty-two teachers participated in semi-structured individual interviews for this study. Fourteen of the participants were from the elementary school and eight were from the middle school. Participants were offered a thirty-minute appointment at a time and location that was most convenient to them. All of the participants chose to be interviewed at the school site where they were employed. All discussions were recorded and transcribed and informed consent was obtained from each participant. Once the recordings were transcribed, they were destroyed to ensure the anonymity of the participants. Additionally, pseudonyms were used to further protect the identities of the participants.

All the participants in this study were females. Though it would have been preferable to have included male participants, there are decreasing numbers of male teachers in the public school system. In 2012, the National Education Association reported that 23.9% of public school teachers in the United States were male and only 9% of public elementary school teachers were male. Based on these statistics, it was not surprising that there were no male teachers employed at site one, which is an elementary school. Though site two (the middle school) had male teachers, all declined to participate in the study. There was no specific reason given as to why the male teachers chose not to participate.

In the demographic areas aside from gender, the twenty-two participants represented a diverse range of age groups, educational level, and years of experience. This data was used to determine if there were trends in responses based on the demographic backgrounds of the participants. After analysis of the responses, no patterns could be found that linked any of the participants' views and perceptions of teacher leadership to any specific demographic group. Additionally, fifteen participants reported that they held some type of formally appointed leadership role which included positions such as, department chair, union representative, grade level representative, PTA liaison, school site council representative, district English language development advisor, GATE (gifted students) coordinator and district curriculum council representative. Table 1 provides collective demographic data for the participants.

Methodology

It is recommended that qualitative research be used when the goal is to gain fresh insight about topics or when little is known about a particular research question (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2005; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The qualitative research approach was appro-

priate because the purpose of this study was to determine perceptions of the term teacher leadership.

For the purpose of this study, the participants were only asked to define or describe the term teacher leadership. Additionally, they were asked to provide demographic data on a questionnaire which was used to develop Table 1. Pseudonyms were used in this study to protect the anonymity of each participant. Thematic analysis of their responses was conducted by using the systematic design theory, which is widely used in educational research (Creswell, 2005). Systematic design theory is related to grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) with the intention to determine emergent themes from responses to questions. Thematic analysis included the reading and open coding of responses to determine initial emergent categories. Subsequently, the information was axial-coded to determine interrelationships and possible causal conditions between categories. Selective coding was done to determine the final categories that relate to teacher leadership (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2005)

Table 1
Participants Demographic Data

Demographic category	n^a
Male	0
Female	22
Age 20–29	1
Age 30–39	5
Age 40–49	8
Age 50–59	6
Age 60+	2
Holders of bachelor's degrees	22
Holders of master's degrees	10
Holders of elementary teaching credential only	9
Holders of single-subject teaching credential	1
Holders of more than one teaching credential	12
Teaching less than 5 years	2
Teaching 5–10 years	7
Teaching 11–15 years	4
Teaching 16–20 years	4
Teaching 21–25 years	2
Teaching more than 25 years	3
Those with an appointed leadership role in addition to teaching	15

[a] n = number of participants that belonged to the demographic category.

Limitations and Biases

The two sites selected for this study are schools that are engaged in professional development school (PDS) partnerships with the university where the researcher serves as a faculty member. The researcher's relationship with site one is twofold. The researcher teaches two of the university's teaching methods courses on the campus of site one. Because of this, the researcher has frequent interaction with the staff of this elementary school, which includes visiting classrooms and collaborating with teachers in regard to the preparation of teacher candidates. The researcher also serves as the university's PDS liaison to site one, which includes the responsibilities of co-facilitating the steering committee meetings and arranging for the fieldwork placements of teacher candidates with cooperating teachers.

The researcher's relationship with site two is serving in the role as the university's PDS liaison. Similar to site one, this includes the responsibility of co-facilitating the steering committee meetings and arranging for the placements of teacher candidates with cooperating teachers.

The relationships described between the researcher and the two sites had the potential of limiting the candidness of the respondents during the interview process. The researcher encouraged each participant to answer truthfully and stated that the conversation was confidential. With this in mind, the researcher made every attempt to ensure anonymity while creating a comfortable and nonthreatening atmosphere to encourage sincere responses during the interview appointment.

Interview Results

The participants in this study were asked to describe or define the term "teacher leadership". This was done to determine what the expression "teacher leadership" meant to each person. No established definition, standards or literature were discussed or shared prior to the interview. Coding and analysis of their responses resulted in the emergence of five distinctive themes: collaboration, sharing best practices, taking action, role modeling, and formal leadership roles. These themes are presented in Table 2

Theme 1: Collaboration

Those who discussed *collaboration* when defining teacher leadership focused on situations when they work with their grade-level or departmental colleagues. The participants suggested that they act as leaders when they collaborate in this manner because they are able to make decisions that will offer better learning experiences for their students.

Through this type of collaboration, they believe they are also simultaneously providing support for each other, which they saw as another way to demonstrate teacher leadership.

Several participants discussed collaboration as occasions when both

Table 2
Emergent Themes Defining Teacher Leadership
and Relationship to Teacher Leader Domains

Theme	Characteristics	Number of participants who included it in discussion	Alignment to Teacher Leader Domain
Collaboration	Work with colleagues to improve practice and set common goals	14	Domain I, III, IV
	Joint decision making to benefit student outcomes		
	Provide support for one another		
Sharing best practices	Share teaching successes	12	Domains I, II, VII
	Share knowledge and methods		
	Support struggling teachers		
Taking action	Drive the profession	8	Domains II, III, IV, VII
	Direct the learning		
	Not wait for administrative decisions		
Role modeling	Demonstrate professional dispositions	8	Domains III, IV, VII
	Demonstrate positive character traits to students		
	Mentor students		
Formal roles	Traditional appointed roles	4	No Direct Alignment

formal and ad hoc meetings take place to decide what is in the best interest of the students and the school as a whole. Some participants suggested that it does not always matter who the site administrator is because if teachers at the school are collaborative, they have the ability to steer the decision-making process. The majority of participants viewed collaboration as an opportunity to demonstrate leadership by setting common goals for the department, grade level, and school site as a whole.

Overall, the participants suggested that collaboration gives all teachers the opportunity to have input in the decision-making process. Subsequently, everyone benefits from the multiple ideas that are shared rather than the ideas of one leader or administrator. In summary, the participants believed that when teachers work cooperatively, they become empowered as leaders, and in the long-run, everyone benefits.

One teacher named Ursula suggested that teachers must be collaborative and that the true role of an administrator is to facilitate the decisions that teachers make to benefit the school.

> The people that should be really running the schools are the teachers themselves, and the way that happens is by cooperatively working together and making decisions on what kind of goals should be held for the school throughout the year. . .

Another teacher named Anne believed that collaboration was truly the center of teacher leadership.

> I think teacher leadership is having everyone come together as co-leaders. I think that's what makes teaching more productive… I think this is where teaching is finally coming, we're all co-leading together…teacher leadership is allowing everyone to have input in working together in a cooperative method of leadership.

Julia, another teacher, believed that having a voice in decisions was an important component of collaboration. She discussed that teachers needed to be brought together so that all the different voices can be heard. She suggested that teachers feel empowered when they have an opportunity to collaborate.

> So every teacher has a voice and then feels empowered by the decisions…Collaboration is so much a part of teacher leadership. . . . you don't have to agree . . . but it's the best solution for the child, best solution for the program, best solution for the parent.

Theme 2: Sharing Best Practices

Sharing best practices was discussed as another method of collaborating and is closely related to the first theme. Although the sharing of best

practices is collaborative in nature, it is being reported separately from the theme *collaboration* because participants were very specific about its impact on individuals and its contribution to teacher leadership.

Those who discussed sharing best practices when defining teacher leadership most often pointed to opportunities to share their successes in the classroom with other teachers, especially those teachers who may need extra support. Several participants discussed the fact that when teachers are successful, they can demonstrate leadership in the school by sharing their knowledge and teaching strategies with others.

Other participants discussed their belief that they felt empowered as leaders when sharing best practices because they were able to influence others and provide guidance to their peers. There was an underlying belief that this was also empowering because the sharing of best practices had a positive impact on the learning of young students. It was also mentioned that this process is reciprocal in nature and that teachers who share can become enriched in return when others share their best practices with them.

A teacher named Victoria believed that sharing best practices was truly an exhibition of leadership. She stated:

> The teacher who is always sharing, who is always going after the grade level and saying, I did this lesson, here's an idea how you can do it, or have we thought about . . . whatever it could be . . . and it's also to know when to step back while others take that role and become an encourager . . . almost a leader teaching leaders.

Mary discussed how she feels empowered when she has an opportunity to share her expertise in English language development with her colleagues, but she feels equally empowered when there is reciprocity and she can learn from others' best practices as well. She affirmed:

> I feel like a leader when I can help them in any way I can. I steal stuff from them too… So I think leadership is a reciprocal thing . . . multiple people have to be benefitting from both sides (of sharing best practices).

Naomi also believed that the sharing of best practices was a way for teachers to be effective leaders at their school sites. She said:

> Most importantly, I also need to share with my colleagues as well . . . the sharing of ideas to direct and guide others… So if I have something solid to show, then I'm leading, I'm guiding. . . . so to me that's my role I think as a teacher leader, is to make sure that I can offer something substantial to my colleagues so that their classrooms can be effective as I feel mine is effective.

Theme 3: Taking Action

The theme *taking action* focused primarily on the notion that teachers should be the drivers of their profession as opposed to sitting back and waiting to be directed by a principal or some other person in an administrative role. The participants who discussed taking action in their definition of teacher leadership pointed to decisions having to do with curriculum choice, program improvement, materials for instruction, student placement, and anything that affects the learning outcomes of children. It was believed that when teachers take action in making decisions in these areas they are acting as leaders.

These participants believed teacher leadership was found in those who took action at the school by advocating for change or encouraging others to support something new. They also described taking action as directing and guiding the learning process in their own classrooms by doing whatever is necessary to meet the needs of their students. Last, it was discussed that taking action can also be viewed as reaching out to the larger community to achieve goals and objectives. The community included other teachers, students, and parents.

Wilma summed up the idea well:

> I view it [teacher leadership] as a teacher taking the profession and being the driver of it. In the school setting, teachers would not wait for an administrator to make choices and decisions, but they would be the driving force to make the changes that would affect their students.

Wilma also discussed a particular example to support her idea. A group of teachers at her school felt a particular program would benefit English learners and other children who were working below grade level. The choice to invest in this program was driven by the teachers.

> This is something they saw and valued. They [the teachers] did the research, they brought it to us, they presented to other staff members; that is taking a leadership role and making changes occur for all students. So I view a teacher's role as being the driver and not the passenger.

Danielle discussed taking action whenever and wherever it is needed as a demonstration of teacher leadership.

> Someone who assumes responsibility … and helping the whole staff with it. Or someone who has an idea about something and is willing to research it and then bring it back and present it and possibly helping to implement it with the school.

Helen agreed with Danielle's ideas and added the thought that teacher leadership was also found in those who work to gather support from others for whatever action they wanted to take. Helen shared:

> I see that person [teacher leader] being someone who is able to rally up other teachers, and maybe start sort of a wave, and whether it be with curriculum, whether it be with just programs in general . . . I see them kind of getting people all excited at the school site. Not just teachers, but maybe other people as well, other staff members and other students.

Theme 4: Role Modeling

The participants discussed *role modeling* in two different ways. Four of the eight respondents who discussed this stated that teacher leadership was about being a role model for their students, while the other four respondents believed that it was about being a role model for their colleagues. When speaking about role modeling, most participants viewed it as an obligation to demonstrate respectful behaviors, professional dispositions, and high-quality character traits.

The idea of being a role model extended to some discussion about the importance of being a mentor to students. A belief was shared that the mentoring of students and leading young children by example is another way for teachers to act as leaders in a meaningful way.

Lori discussed that being a role model was making certain one is knowledgeable of one's subject and practices as a teacher. She emphasized that to be good role models, teachers need to be aware of their own understandings and behaviors; otherwise, students would be adversely affected.

> I feel as a teacher I need to be a leader, and to me that means know who you are and your practices are as a teacher . . . and the signals that you want to send out to your students, what your goals are for them and what your expectations are . . . so if you're not sure of who you are and what you are about to them, they're not going to be sure; [this is being] a good role model.

A teacher named Odessa similarly believed that teacher leadership was primarily about her actions within her classroom. She believed she needed to model for her students the idea that there was someone in charge. She believed this role modeling instilled confidence in her students.

> The first thing I think of is being a leader on the staff, but when I try to define it, I start thinking about the classroom. So I would say a leader in the classroom is someone who makes students feel that there's a partnership, but that someone's in charge—someone who knows what's going on and someone who knows what's happening. So I think I like to have a classroom where the students feel confident that I know what I am doing.

Paula agreed that teacher leadership was primarily found when working with her students. She felt the leadership role for teachers

was providing guidance to students and demonstrating by example the potential they have for success.

> The first basic thought that comes to me of course is that teacher leadership is with the students I work with…leadership by example…helping them to reach their potential…and really seeing my role as helping them not just across that grade level, but helping to create the next generation of thinkers.

Paula also discussed her view that role modeling went beyond the classroom and was an important component when interacting with her colleagues.

> I see my role as a leader within the staff itself and helping to lead by example. . . . I see that as the core, falling into the different categories, sharing ideas, being open to listen and being able to show by example.

Theme 5: Formal Roles

When discussing *formal roles* in their definition of teacher leadership, these four participants were referring to traditional roles that exist at school sites, similar to department chairperson, grade-level representative, union representative, and a member of various leadership committees. They believed that these formal roles give teachers the opportunities to effect change or serve as a representative of their peers in a larger group. These teachers believed that educators in schools had clearly defined roles which determined their level of leadership and influence. They believed that that being appointed to formal roles were empowering opportunities and overall seemed to view leadership as something that was official in nature requiring a title. There was an underlying belief that unless teachers had one of these roles, they had very little voice in the decision-making process.

One of the four also commented that the term leadership could extend beyond the formal roles, and she shared her belief that her grade level sometimes demonstrated collaborative leadership by sharing responsibilities for lesson planning.

Kayla discussed more traditional views of leadership and the role of the teacher in her school. She further implied that teachers still had little voice in decision making.

> Well, I think of teachers sometimes as independent contractors because we go in our classroom and we close the door and we pretty much run our own show. We follow rules. We follow curriculum, but you know it's our show. So I think that leaders, the teachers as a group may have latent leadership skills that are not always tapped into in a school environment unless you're asked to be on a committee.

Irene believed that teacher leadership was primarily formal roles:

Teacher leadership, probably it would be taking roles in the school other than just being a teacher . . . like being on a student study team, being on the leadership team. Those kinds of things…

Themes Compared with Teacher Leader Model Standards

Theme 1: Collaboration

The findings persuasively suggest that the majority, specifically 66% of participants, viewed teacher leadership as opportunities to collaborate with colleagues as opposed to taking on traditional or appointed positions. This supports Domain I of the Teacher leader model standards: Fostering a Collaborative Culture to Support Educator Development and Student Learning. This implies that teachers are beginning to step outside their classrooms and take on the broader affairs of the school. Those who spoke of collaboration believed it was incumbent on teachers to work together to set common goals that would benefit all of the stakeholders of the school. They further implied that when teachers co-lead, everyone benefits from the diverse ideas that are brought to the entire group. This further suggests that teachers no longer view site administrators as the sole source for decision making and believe that they are empowered as leaders when collaboration takes place. Regardless of who was facilitating the discussion, respondents viewed teacher collaboration as leadership, as opposed to working in isolation in the classroom. This implies that collaboration in itself is a form of teacher leadership. These perceptions provide support for both Domain III: Promoting Professional Learning for Continuous Improvement and Domain IV: Facilitating Improvements in Instruction and Student Learning.

Theme 2: Sharing Best Practices

Sharing best practices is another form of collaboration and ties in directly to the first emergent theme. Several participants specifically discussed this aspect of collaborating as a way to demonstrate leadership at a school site. This confirms them as professionals and provides validation to their teaching practices, which further develops their leadership potential.

Sharing best practices gives teachers a chance to step outside their classrooms and have influence throughout the school site. Similar to the theme of collaboration, the concept of sharing best practices as a form of leadership supports Domain I: Fostering a Collaborative Culture to Support Educator Development and Student Learning. The participants made note that through the sharing of best practices they have an op-

portunity to share their successes, share their strategies, and provide support to struggling teachers. This supports Domain III: Promoting Professional Learning for Continuous Improvement. Lastly, through the sharing of best practices, teachers stated they can influence the profession overall which would have a positive impact on the young students in their classrooms. This supports Domain VII: Advocating for Student Learning and the Profession.

Theme 3: Taking Action

When discussing taking action, the participants focused on taking charge of their own profession. They implied that taking action meant taking personal responsibility for the goals and outcomes of the school and doing something about it. These responses suggested that teachers have an increasing desire to be proactive beyond their normal duties instead of being passive and taking direction from administrators. It was clear from the responses that these teachers respected those individuals that were not complacent and stepped out of their classic job description to take action especially when they had research to support their position. This supports Domain III: Promoting Professional Learning for Continuous Improvement, Domain IV: Facilitating Improvements in Instruction and Student Learning and Domain II: Accessing and Using Research to Improve Practice and Student Learning

Those participants who discussed taking action were clear that to be a teacher leader, one needed to advocate for what was best for the school despite the actions of an administrator. Reliance on an administrator to make decisions was viewed as unnecessary. This included reaching out to the larger community to achieve goals. This supports Domain VI: Improving Outreach and Collaboration with Families and Community.

The overall implication of this theme was that if teachers acted together and decisions were made with strong rationales, their actions were justified. In some ways, these responses seemed to flirt with insubordination because teachers were speaking about situations of taking action whether or not they had the support of the principal or other site administrators. The spirit behind this way of thinking was that taking charge, making decisions, and rallying support would benefit everyone in the long run.

Theme 4: Role Modeling

This theme emphasized a personal desire to lead by example. The teachers who responded in this way believed it important to model exemplary character traits and professional dispositions to both the students they serve and the colleagues they work with. These teachers

felt like leaders when they were able to offer guidance, set expectations, and demonstrate success through role modeling. Through role modeling, teachers believed they were demonstrating leadership for both their colleagues and their young students. Role modeling is a way of influencing the profession and leading by example. Role modeling also a way to mentor young students and influence their behaviors and academic performance. This supports Domain III: Promoting Professional Learning for Continuous Improvement, Domain IV: Facilitating Improvements in Instruction and Student Learning and Domain VII: Advocating for Student Learning and the Profession.

Theme 5: Formal Roles

Four participants described teacher leadership as something that was appointed or assigned by a higher authority. The participants who responded in this manner saw their primary function as teaching within the classroom. In other words, they believed that a teacher's role was to work with his or her students and someone else was the leader. Their responses suggested that they view management and leadership as the same thing. Many schools have been and still are managed using a top-down approach (Darling Hammond et al., 1995; Greenlee, 2007). In line with that idea, the four participants who responded in this manner did not seem to believe that teachers had a leadership role in the school unless they were given specific duties by a site administrator. This supports the ideas of Darling-Hammond et al. (1995), who suggested that the top-down model causes teachers to be overlooked as important players in the leadership model. Although this was a minority viewpoint, it is important to keep in mind that for a very long time, teachers were not given opportunities to be a part of the decision-making process.

The majority of teachers are left out of the process in schools whose cultures rely on formal appointments to leadership positions by a site administrator. Those who are left out have no opportunities to gain professional development in leadership (Darling Hammond et al., 1995). This theme does not align with any of the domains of the Teacher Leader Standards. It seems noteworthy that so few participants in this study viewed leadership in this manner, which suggests an underlying belief that leadership does not need to come from formally appointed positions. The overall consensus from the majority of the responses is that leadership can go beyond the traditional role of the classroom teacher.

Conclusions

In concert with the literature, a common definition for teacher

leadership did not emerge after interviewing the participants for this study. The vast majority (80%) of the respondents provided definitions that did not include traditional, administrative, or formally appointed roles. The findings also revealed no trends or similarities in responses based on the demographics of the participants who responded.

The themes that emerged from the responses support a more progressive understanding of the term teacher leadership. This is in line with the teacher leader model standards which provide a progressive set of guidelines for teacher leadership. The responses from the participants supported six of the seven domains of the Teacher Leader Standards. This is a powerful affirmation that teachers are beginning to view themselves as professionals who have a voice in their own vocation. It is apparent from the interviews that the some of the participants have affected the broader culture of the school in positive ways. Teaching methods are improving through the sharing of best practices, modeling lessons, and making presentations. These are all goals that align with the expected outcomes of the teacher leader model standards.

It is clear that the majority of participants believed that teachers can be leaders either with or without the support of an administrator and that a collaborative environment is key to both the success of the school and academic performance of the young students. This further suggests that more teachers are beginning to view their roles as much more than delivering specific curriculum within the confines of their classrooms. The participants at these two sites demonstrated through their responses that teachers are beginning to recognize that there is a clear difference between leadership and management. The participants in this study portray teacher leadership primarily as a collaborative activity that draws them into the decision making process. This is a powerful affirmation that teachers are beginning to see themselves as professionals who have a voice in their own profession. Overall, this outcome supports the definition of teacher leadership put forward by the Institute for Educational Leadership (2001), which suggests that teachers are leaders when they seek additional challenges outside the confines of their classrooms.

The analysis of demographic data revealed that no patterns aligned with the responses of any particular group. This also suggests that these new ideas about teacher leadership are reaching all teachers regardless of their age, years of service, educational level, and subjects taught. This suggests a trend in the belief that teachers do have opportunities to make a difference in their schools if they are proactive and work collaboratively with their colleagues.

The only domain of the teacher leadership model standards that was

not directly supported in the responses was Domain V: Promoting the Use of Assessments and Data for School and District Improvement. Though all of the comments and responses about collaboration and sharing best practices may have implicitly included the use of assessment and data, it was not specifically articulated in anyone's response. This may suggest that more work needs to be done to encourage teachers to use common assessment and analyze the data that is created to inform teaching practice. For teachers, professional development could be offered that focuses on how educators can make sense of student work to make decisions about lesson planning, targeted instruction and interventions.

Implications and Future Study

The findings of this study provide additional information to policy makers and teacher educators regarding the importance of developing leadership capacity among teachers. There has been national concern regarding the attrition rate of teachers who leave voluntarily early in their careers. The literature (Boles & Troen, 1994; Darling Hammond et al., 1995; Dozier, 2007; Greenlee, 2007; Lieberman, 1987; Smith, 1999) suggested that teachers who feel they have leadership roles tend to stay in the profession for longer periods of time. In the past, teachers who wanted to become educational leaders needed to leave the classroom to become administrators. Following this route takes them out of the classroom into a whole new role. The findings of this study demonstrate that teachers have the potential to be leaders without giving up their classrooms which could translate into keeping good teachers longer where we need them most, in the classroom. This study also demonstrates that there are many ways to allow teachers to emerge as leaders without formalizing it through a specific appointed role.

Continued research about teacher leadership and the importance of the teacher leader model standards would shed more light on the significance of promoting teachers to be leaders. This study focused on a small aspect of the relationship between teachers' perceptions of leadership as compared to the domains of the model standards. Additional qualitative research that includes the perceptions of how administrators view teacher leadership and how they view the development of teacher leadership capacity would provide additional insight on the dynamics of teacher leadership and perhaps the types of individuals that emerge as leaders. Revisiting this question with the same participants longitudinally would provide additional insight to the field as to whether views about teacher leadership change over time. Further, asking this question of newer teachers entering the field can provide some insight about viewpoints

of individuals when they first complete teacher preparation programs. It would also be timely for further investigation to determine the different factors and dispositions that cause certain teachers to emerge as leaders on their own. Lastly, more research is needed regarding the impact of teacher leadership on student achievement because this above all things is something we need to understand with greater clarity.

References

Barth, R. S. (1990). *Improving schools from within*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Bogdan, R., & Biklen, S. (2007). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theories and methods*. Boston, MA: Pearson

Boles, K., & Troen, V. (1994, April). *Teacher leadership in a professional development school*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association.

Creswell, J. W. (2005). *Educational research, planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research*. Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education.

Danielson, C. (2006). *Teacher leadership that strengthens professional practice*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Darling-Hammond, L., Bullmaster, M., & Cobb, V. (1995). Rethinking teacher leadership through professional development schools. *Elementary School Journal, 96*(1), 87-106.

Donaldson, G. A. (2006). *Cultivating leadership in schools: Connecting people, purpose, and practice* (2nd ed.). New York: Teachers College Press.

Donaldson, G. A., & Sanderson, D. R. (1996). *Working together in schools: A guide for educators*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Donaldson, M. L., & Johnson, S. M. (2007). Overcoming the obstacles of leadership. *Educational Leadership, 65*(1), 8-13.

Dozier, T. (2007). Turning good teachers into great teachers. *Educational Leadership, 65*(1), 54-55.

Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory*. Chicago: Aldine.

Glesne, C., & Peshkin, A. (1992). *Becoming qualitative researchers: An introduction*. White Plains, NY: Longman.

Greenlee, B. J. (2007). Building teacher leadership capacity through educational leadership programs. *Journal of Research for Educational Leaders, 4*(1), 44-74.

Hobbs, S. F., Bullough, R. V., & Kauchak, D. P. (1998). Professional development schools: Catalysts for collaboration and change. *The Clearing House, 72*, 47-50.

Institute for Educational Leadership. (2001). *Leadership for student learning: Redefining the teacher as leader*. School leadership for the 21st century initiative. A report of the task force on teacher leadership. Washington, DC: Author.

Kotter, J. P. (1996). *Leading change*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.

Kouzes, J. M., & Posner, B. Z. (2002). *The leadership challenge* (3rd ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Lieberman, A. (1987). Teacher leadership. In J. Soltis (Ed.), *Reforming teacher education: The impact of the Holmes Group Report*. New York: Teachers College Press.

National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education. (2001). *Standards for professional development schools*. Washington, DC: Author.

National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education. (2004). *PDS project press conference*. Retrieved July 27, 2007, from http://www.ncate.org/documents/PDSFactSheet.pdf

Petrie, H. G. (Ed.). (1995). *Professionalization, partnership, and power: Building professional development schools*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Smith, B. J. (1999). *Transformative professional development: Discovering teachers' concepts of politicized classroom practice*. Unpublished dissertation, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Teacher Leader Model Standards. (2001). Retrieved January 20, 2015, from www.teacherleaderstandards.org

Vernon, L. J. (2003). *Collaborative practices in schools: The impact of school-based leadership teams on inclusive education*. Unpublished dissertation, College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, VA.

York-Barr, J., & Duke, K. (2004). What do we know about teacher leadership? Findings from two decades of scholarship. *Review of Educational Research, 74*(3), 255-346. Retrieved on March 12, 2009, from http://www.jstor.org/pss/3516026