

Increasing Elementary and Middle School Teacher Retention Through Meaningful Distributive Leadership Practices

Aimee Sulit

Scottsdale Unified School District

Frank D. Davidson

Northern Arizona University

Distributive leadership is a prominent leadership framework within the twenty-first century. Focusing on authentic leadership opportunities, distributive leadership explores the unique interactions between leaders, followers and situations. Promoting teachers as meaningful leaders within a school setting, distributive leadership has been shown to have a positive impact on school improvement. As teacher retention continues to surface as a predominant concern in American schools, distributive leadership may offer a potential solution. This qualitative study identified various connections between distributive leadership as it impacts elementary and middle school teacher retention. Theoretical and practical implications are discussed.

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The construct of leadership is often welcomed with a multitude of definitions, perceptions, and experiences. Leadership in education is often misunderstood, as previous models emphasize approaches that place principals in the center of schoolwide change. As teams of educational leaders are often required to address the vast intellectual and emotional needs of students, teachers and the surrounding community, this perception of the principal as “heroic leader” is no longer acceptable (Yukl, 1999). In addition to developing procedures to support the day-to-day school operations, principals are often tasked with a multitude of responsibilities – ranging from ensuring student safety, developing efficient procedures for the day-to-day school operations, monitoring students’ academic and emotional success, assessing teachers’ instructional delivery, supporting families with locating community resources, revising educational policy, and providing a vision for the future. Given the expansive role of leadership within the school setting, no one individual is equipped to lead (Burke, Fiore, & Salas, 2003).

The role of the educational leader has likely never been so complex. At the same time, the role of the teacher is becoming increasingly challenging. Amidst national protests from teachers who are fed-up with the profession, teacher retention is gaining momentum as a profound concern. It’s no longer just a hunch that teachers are frustrated. In 2012, the University Council for Educational Administration found that “16% of the teacher workforce, or almost 500,000 teachers, left their school each year” (Castro, Quinn, Fuller, & Barnes, 2018, p. 1). This statistic is especially alarming when we consider that “90% of the nationwide annual demand for teachers stems from when teachers leave the profession,” (Castro, et al., 2018, p. 1). With a “10% decline in national teacher preparation program enrollment from 2004 to 2012,” the future of the teaching profession is at risk (Castro et al., 2018, p. 1).

The future of the teaching profession is desperate for help. Teacher retention is a complex issue that likely will not be solved by one great idea. Rather, supporting teacher retention requires additional attention at the multifaced root of the concern. Addressing teacher retention may very well require the education profession to pull back the metaphorical curtain on effective leadership. Over the years, publication after publication has documented the tremendous connection between teacher retention and administrative support (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Glaser, 2003; Hirsch, Emerick, Church & Fuller, 2007; Loeb, Darling-Hammond, & Luczak, 2005). It would be prematurely dismissive to overlook the impact of a supportive site administrator or principal. Additionally, the literature points to a distinct relationship between principal leadership and teachers’ organizational commitment (Hoy, Tarter, & Bliss, 1990; Koh, Steers, & Terborg, 1995; Nguni, Slegers, & Denessen, 2006). The notion of teacher commitment is frequently associated with teacher work performance and the overall quality of education (Dee, Henkin, & Singleton, 2006; Tsui & Cheng, 1999).

The definitive relationship between leadership and the teaching profession warrants further investigation in the discussion of teacher retention. In pursuing this conversation, one leadership framework has risen to the top. Distributive leadership has gained recognition over the past 20 years for its positive influence on principals’ job satisfaction (Hulpia & Devos, 2009a). Labelled as the “hot item in the educational management literature” (Hulpia, Devos & Van Keer, 2010, p. 46), the distributive leadership framework offers insight into key aspects related to teacher retention.

Background of the Study

Ask a teacher or principal and they will tell you that retention is a concern. With projections estimating a dismal 200,000 teachers available for hire by 2025, the trends in teacher retention predict a gap of more than 100,000 teachers each year (Sutcher et al., 2016, p. 3). Simply put, our schools cannot afford empty classrooms. Teacher retention may be most detrimental among our nation's struggling schools, where the cycle of poverty negatively reinforces teachers' decisions to remain in the classroom. Sutcher et al. (2016) identified a "vicious cycle" that "is often created in hard-to-staff schools" (p. 5). Such hard-to-staff schools "typically end up with a disproportionate number of relatively inexperienced teachers, who typically leave at much higher rates than other teachers" (Sutcher et al., 2016, p. 5).

Increasing teacher retention will require an investment from within the educational system. The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (2007) could "reduce teacher turnover, and thus reduce the costs associated with teacher turnover" (as cited in Barnes et al., 2007, p. 5). Investing in teacher retention includes advocating for responsible leadership practices. Leadership has been associated with teacher retention throughout the literature (Borman & Dowling, 2006; Brill & McCartney, 2008; Hall et al., 1992; Ingersoll, 2001; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; Johnson & Birkeland, 2003; Kersaint et al., 2007; Kukla-Acevedo, 2009; Stockard & Lehman, 2004; Swars et al., 2009; Wynn et al., 2007). Specifically, distributive leadership may serve as a missing ingredient in the recipe to address teacher retention. While touted as an effective leadership framework, the research on distributive leadership is underdeveloped (Gronn, 2010). Therefore, additional research is not only warranted, but necessary to uncover the potential of distributive leadership in increasing teacher retention.

Review of Literature

Distributive Leadership

Distributive leadership has gained recognition in the education world as the "normatively preferred leadership model" (Bush, 2018, p. 535). The literature is extremely favorable toward distributive leadership as a framework of school improvement (Bush, 2013; Hallinger and Heck, 2009). Day et al. (2009) further identified a connection between distributive leadership and academic achievement, finding that "substantial leadership distribution was very important to a school's success in improving pupil outcomes" (p. 17). With its ability to promote meaningful configurations of leadership amongst capable teachers and staff, distributive leadership promotes such a collective interest and responsibility (Ritchie & Woods, 2007).

The distributive leadership perspective applied within this study emphasizes Spillane's (2006) definition. Spillane's (2006) definition addresses the unique interplay between school leaders, followers, and situations. In acknowledging the dynamic relationship between leaders, followers, and situations, Spillane (2006) identifies distributive leadership as a fluid framework, requiring continuous review and adaptation. As such, distributive leadership studies the practice of individuals operating within the organizational system and the patterns of interactions among those participants and factors within the school environment. With distributive leadership, multiple individuals work together within formal and informal roles to impact school improvement (DeFlaminis et al., 2016; Spillane, 2006). In this way, distributive leadership is viewed as "descriptive rather than prescriptive" (DeFlaminis et al., 2016, p. 9). DeFlaminis et al. (2016)

acknowledged that the distributive leadership framework “does not tell us how leadership should be distributed but asserts that it already is distributed” (p. 9). Recognizing that leadership is nonlinear, distributive leadership is a “framework for understanding leadership, which emphasizes the embedded, shared, and practice-oriented nature of organizational leadership” (DeFlaminis et al., 2016, p. xvii).

Spillane’s (2006) definition of distributive leadership is greatly enhanced by the concept of leadership practice (Supovitz, D’Auria, & Spillane, 2019). Distributive leadership draws attention to the practice of interactions of leaders, followers, and the surrounding situations that impact a school. Focusing on leadership practice, highlights the ability of teacher leader actions (Sinha & Hanuscin, 2017). Specifically, there are five elements recognized as supportive of leadership practice within a distributive leadership framework (Supovitz, D’Auria, & Spillane, 2019). First, school organizations in a distributive leadership framework assume greater responsibility with “recognizing, positioning, and utilizing resources for leadership” (p. 9). In addition, successful distributive leadership schools will create a set of “leadership skills which emphasize enacting influence rather than relying largely on authority” (p. 9). Furthermore, such schools utilize leadership skills to “craft a set of organizational conditions” that positively encourage and support engagement and produce school improvement (p. 10). Emphasizing leadership practice requires that schools involve a “broader array of stakeholders as leaders” within the process of continuous improvement (p. 10). Finally, it requires individuals to navigate challenges that may arise with distributed leadership to promote meaningful school improvement (p. 10).

How might distributive leadership support teacher retention? Distributive leadership requires “a fundamental shift in the way formal leaders view their leadership roles and responsibilities when interacting with others” (Peters, Carr, & 2018, p. 33). Empirical evidence affirms that schools with only one identified source of leadership (i.e. – principal) experience poor performance and low morale (Tian, Risku, & Collin, 2016, p. 153). Distributive leadership creates deliberate pathways to share and distribute leadership within a school (Bush, 2018; Harris, 2011). Leaders may be “individual, pairs or groups, formally appointed or not. They may lead for a long period or step up in response to a particular opportunity or need” (DeFlaminis et al., 2016, p. 11). As a framework, distributive leadership is not forced onto teachers by principals and supervisors. Rather, “[i]t is fostered through the interactions and relationships occurring among individuals throughout the school community on a daily basis” (Peters, Carr, & Doldan, 2018, p. 33). Distributive leadership may be arranged within three configurations: division of labor, co-performance, and parallel performance (Spillane, 2006). Utilizing an intentional dispersion of leadership responsibilities, distributive leadership has found success in improving organizational outcomes and increasing teacher satisfaction (Ross, Lutfi, & Hope, 2016, p. 162). The intentional dispersion of leadership present in a distributive leadership framework allows teachers to rise as key components of school improvement (Ross et al., 2016). Distributive leadership is especially impactful with school improvement due to the “multidirectional flow of influence that entwines the principal, teachers, counselors, and other organization members” (Ross et al., 2016, p. 159). This multidirectional flow may be recognized as empowering for teachers who are recognized for their talents and abilities to lead. Over multiple cycles, a school may develop a network of qualified teacher leaders. As leaders within the school, teachers participating in a distributive leadership framework gain the authority to actively participate within the decision-making process and impact authentic change. Thus, by seeking out the expertise of many leaders within a school, the entire organization is able to progress (Tahir et al, 2016).

Distributed leadership is a relatively new leadership framework, yet its research is underdeveloped (Gronn, 2010; Peters, Carr, & Doldan, 2018; Tian, Risku, & Collin, 2016). As a proven framework of school improvement, distributive leadership may offer significant potential in the realm of teacher retention (Spillane, 2006, p. 30). The literature is conclusive that "leadership may support efforts to recruit, retain, and develop the best teachers and mitigate teacher turnover" (DeFlaminis, Abdul-Jabbar & Yoak, 2016, p. 84). As a recognized framework for school improvement, it seems likely that distributive leadership may also offer implications for teacher retention.

Teacher Retention and Attrition

The connection between teacher retention and administrative leadership is well documented in the research (Borman & Dowling, 2006; Brill & McCartney, 2008; Hall et al., 1992; Ingersoll, 2001; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; Johnson & Birkeland, 2003; Kersaint et al., 2007; Kukla-Acevedo, 2009; Stockard & Lehman, 2004; Swars et al., 2009; Wynn et al., 2007). Among the contributors, Ladd (2009) isolated teacher perception of school leadership as the most impactful working condition that impacts teacher retention. Ulrick (2016) found that "[t]eacher perception of leadership is a well-established predictor of attitudes associated with teacher decisions to stay or leave" (p. 435). Also present in the literature is the understanding that teachers experience more organizational commitment and greater levels of empowerment in their positions when administrators facilitate opportunities to partake in decision-making, support professional development, and promote community relations (Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, & Easton, 2010; Urick, 2016).

While the presence of leadership greatly impacts teacher retention, the research is also clear that a lack of effective leadership or negative leadership poses a threat to teachers' decisions to remain in the classroom. In fact, negative leadership demonstrated by inadequate administrative support has been identified as one of the most detrimental factors involved with teacher attrition (Prather-Jones, 2011; Schlichte, Yssel, & Merbler, 2005; Struyven & Vanthournout, 2014). Other areas of leadership that have been found to present a negative influence include teachers' perceptions of reduced or limited autonomy, micromanagement (including the need to justify one's actions), and possessing a lack of power to impact or change school policy (Struyven & Vanthournout, 2014).

Beyond leadership, there are other factors that influence teacher retention. In fact, the research clearly identifies a difference among elementary and secondary teachers. For example, elementary teachers are more likely to remain in the teaching profession than their secondary counterparts (Guarino, Santibanez, & Daley, 2006; Hughes, 2012; Kukla-Acevedo, 2009; Murnane, Singer, & Willett, 1989). Middle school teachers are typically associated more with attrition due to concerns directly associated with adolescence (Brill & McCartney, 2008; Hughes, 2012). Additionally, experience or efficacy are commonly linked with teacher retention. Hughes (2012) found that teachers with less experience or knowledge about teaching were more likely to leave the classroom.

Research Questions

This qualitative study was informed by three guiding research questions:

1. What qualities of distributive leadership may improve teacher retention?

2. How do elementary and middle school teachers experience distributed leadership?
3. Do elementary and middle school teachers' current experiences with distributive leadership influence their desire to remain in the classroom?

Study participants provided invaluable data regarding the ways distributive leadership impacted teacher retention at one elementary and one middle school within the southwest United States.

Conceptual or Theoretical Framework

Phenomenology provided the theoretical framework and guiding methodology for this qualitative study. Phenomenology served as the foundation for this study by allowing the researcher to focus on the "complex, detailed understanding" of teachers' lived experiences with distributed leadership (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 46). The researcher constructed this qualitative study to withhold predeterminations or bias, in favor of understanding the lived experience distributive leadership created among elementary and middle school teachers. Utilizing data collected from elementary and middle school teacher in-depth interviews, the researcher was able to identify teachers' lived experiences with the phenomenon of distributed leadership. Synthesizing and refining the data allowed the researcher to produce a description of its universal essence (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The universal essence provided a composite description of the "what" and "how" regarding teachers' experiences working for the two principals practicing distributed leadership (Moustakas, 1994). Utilizing the data collected, the researcher was able to describe teachers' experiences distributive leadership; determine the qualities of distributive leadership that impact teacher retention; and identify whether or not distributive leadership would impact their decisions to remain in the classroom.

Methodology and Instrumentation

This qualitative study sought to identify the distributive leadership practices that may increase elementary and middle school retention. In so doing, phenomenology served as the guiding theory and methodology. Phenomenology provided an essential function by emphasizing participants' lived experiences that impacted their understandings and feelings regarding distributive leadership. In this study, the researcher sought to understand elementary and middle school teachers' lived experiences in working at a school where distributive leadership practices were prevalent.

As a research method, phenomenology provided the investigator with in-depth interview data to fully encapsulate participants' lived experiences. Phenomenology reflects Van Manen's (2014) assertion that its methodology reflects daily living. Van Manen (2014) proposed that a "phenomenological question may arise any time we have had a certain experience that brings us to pause and reflect" (Van Manen, 2014, p. 31).

The structure of this study reflected Moustakas' (1994) Transcendental Phenomenology Framework. Narrowing the focus from phenomenology to transcendental phenomenology allowed the researcher to focus on elementary and middle school teachers' lived experiences with distributed leadership over other personal interpretations (Moustakas, 1994). Data collected from the teacher in-depth interviews responded to two central phenomenological questions (Moustakas, 1994): "What have you experienced in terms of the phenomenon?" and "What contexts or situations have typically influenced or affected your experiences of the phenomenon?" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 79). Following each in-depth teacher interview, participant data was coded and

reduced into significant statements or quotes. Prior to coding, the researcher was careful to bracket her own interpretations and beliefs separately from the codable text. Utilizing the process of horizontalization (Moustakas, 1994), the researcher examined data from elementary and middle school teacher interview transcripts to “highlight 'significant statements,' sentences, or quotes that provide an understanding of how the participants experienced the phenomenon” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 79). Significant statements were subsequently combined into meaningful themes that represented all teacher participants. These themes were reviewed by the researcher to develop textural and structural descriptions to elucidate the experience of distributed leadership. Finally, textural and structural descriptions were combined to convey the full essence of distributed leadership as a lived experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Study Sample and Target Population

This qualitative study included elementary and middle school teachers from two schools within a district in the suburbs of Phoenix, Arizona. As a large district, it provides instructional services to over 23,000 students. The district encompasses 29 schools (14 elementary schools, five middle schools, four K-8 schools, five high schools and the online high school). The district employs roughly 1,500 teachers to serve its students and families.

Criterion sampling was used among two schools to select teacher participants. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), “[c]riterion sampling works well when all individuals studied represent people who have experience the phenomenon” (p. 157). Working from this understanding, the researcher required several criteria of each teacher participant. First, elementary and middle school teachers were required to serve within the district as currently employed and practicing teachers. Second, each participant was required to work at one of two sites (one elementary and one middle) that were identified within a principal focus group as having leadership that demonstrated qualities of distributed leadership. Selecting teachers that worked at one of the two schools identified within the principal focus group was critical with ensuring the integrity of phenomenological research. This essential component speaks directly to the “data collection procedures that [involve] interviewing individuals who have experienced the phenomenon” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 77). Finally, teacher participants were chosen by research in accordance with their understanding of the study’s purpose and willingness to participate.

Focus Group Participants. This qualitative research study took place at one elementary and one middle school within the school district that was the site for this study. As indicated, the researcher utilized a principal focus group to identify one elementary and one middle school where distributive leadership practices were evident. Aden Elementary School (AES) and Avery Adams Middle School (AAMS) (these names were used to replace the schools’ actual names) emerged from an initial focus group on December 5, 2019 as providing climates to teachers where distributed leadership served as the primary leadership model. The principal focus group was conducted with 15 administrators. The school district’s Assistant Superintendent of Education Services shared the focus group information with each of the elementary, middle, and high school principals to ensure equal access for participation. Of the 29 principals contacted, a combination of 15 principals volunteered to serve as participants in the focus group. As shown in Table 1, the 15 principal participants represented a varied mix of talents and experience. Table 1 shows that four principals represented the high school level, three were principals at the middle school level, and eight were principals at the elementary level. Gender represented a mostly even distribution,

with seven principals being male and eight being female. The principal with the largest number of years of experience (13 years) was HP2, followed by MP2 (11 years); MP1, EP5, and EP6 (10 years each); and EP1 with nine years. The remaining principals participating in the focus group had between seven and two years of experience; HP4 (7 years), EP2 (6 years), HP1 (5 years), EP3 and MP3 (4 years), EP4 (3 years), and EP7, EP8, and HP3 (2 years each).

Table 1 (Sulit, 2020, p. 127)

Focus Group Participants Demographics: Administrators

Participant	Years of Service	Gender
EP1	9	Female
EP2	6	Female
EP3	4	Female
EP4	3	Male
EP5	10	Male
EP6	10	Female
EP7	2	Female
EP8	2	Female
MP1	10	Male
MP2	11	Male
MP3	4	Male
HP1	5	Male
HP2	13	Female
HP3	2	Female
HP4	7	Male

Elementary and Middle School Teacher Participants. Thirteen teachers were interviewed within this qualitative study. As shown in Table 2, seven of the participants represented elementary teachers. Of the elementary participants, six were females and one was

male. Years of elementary teacher experience ranged from five – 25.5 years. The singular male teacher had 25.5 years of experience. The female teachers had five, eight, 12, 14, 18 and 23 years of experience. Each of the elementary teacher participants interviewed during this study taught general education, including reading, writing, math, science, and social studies. One elementary teacher was interviewed at each of the grade levels except for 4th grade, where two teachers were represented.

Table 2 (Sulit, 2020, p. 138)

Interview Participant Demographics: Elementary Teachers

Participant	Years of Service	Gender	Content/Subject Areas	Grade Teaching
ET1	12 years	Female	General Education: Reading, Writing, Math, Science, Social Studies	4th
ET2	14 years	Female	General Education: Reading, Writing, Math, Science, Social Studies	2nd
ET3	23 years	Female	General Education: Reading, Writing, Math, Science, Social Studies	Kindergarten
ET4	5 years	Female	General Education: Reading, Writing, Math, Science, Social Studies	1st
ET5	18 years	Female	General Education: Reading, Writing, Math, Science, Social Studies	5th
ET6	8 years	Female	General Education: Reading, Writing, Math, Science, Social Studies	3rd
ET7	25.5 years	Male	General Education: Reading, Writing, Math, Science, Social Studies	4th

In addition, several middle school teachers were interviewed for this study. As shown in Table 3, six middle school teacher participants were interviewed. Four were females and two were males. Middle school teachers’ experience ranged from 1 – 43 years. The two male teachers had 18 and 20 years of experience. The four females’ experience were represented by one, 12, 13, and 43 years. Middle school teacher participants taught a multitude of content areas, including: Special Education (1), English Language Arts (2), Social Studies (1), STEM Applications (1), and Title 1 Instructional Specialist (1). Of the six middle school teachers interviewed, three taught 6th, 7th, and 8th grade; one taught 7th and 8th grade; one taught 6th grade; and one taught 8th grade.

Table 3 (Sulit, 2020, p. 139)

Interview Participant Demographics: Middle School Teachers

Participant	Years of Service	Gender	Content/Subject Areas	Grade Teaching
MT1	43 years	Female	Title 1 Instructional Specialist	6th, 7th, 8th
MT2	13 years	Female	Self-Contained Special Education	6th, 7th, 8th
MT3	1 year	Female	English Language Arts	6th
MT4	18 years	Male	English Language Arts	8th
MT5	12 years	Female	Social Studies	6th, 7th, 8th
MT6	20 years	Male	STEM Applications, Advanced Engineering, Video Production	7th, 8th

Field Testing

Prior to conducting in-depth interviews with teachers at Aden Elementary and Avery Adams Middle School, field testing was used among three currently practicing teacher instructional coaches from a Southwestern School District. The process of field testing was used to support the researcher with determining appropriateness of question wording and ordering. Field testing the questions permitted the researcher to determine if the participant responding would yield pertinent information related to each of the three research questions. Additionally, field testing allowed the researcher to practice the process of remaining neutral and open-ended during the interview process. In addition, field testing was used to refine the initial listing of codes from the researcher’s codebook.

Data Collection: Focus Group

The principal focus group was conducted with elementary, middle, and high school administrators from the school district on December 5, 2019. Data collected from the principal focus group was pertinent for the researcher to identify a target sample for data collection. Fifteen SSD principals participated in a focus group to provide their viewpoints and attitudes regarding distributive leadership and teacher retention. During the conversation, the researcher jotted reflections from the principals’ conversations. The researcher made note of principals’ personal reactions, thoughts, doubts, and elaborations (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014, p. 94). The recorded conversation from the principal focus group was transcribed by the researcher. In addition, the researcher utilized analytic memoing to record her “reflections and thinking processes about the data” (Miles et al., 2014, p. 95).

Data Collection: In-Depth Interview

The researcher collected data from the teacher interviews between January 2020 and March 2020. All teacher interviews were recorded. Data collected from each teacher interview was transcribed by the primary investigator to ensure the researcher's ability to remain purely connected to the phenomenological methodology and serve as instrument of the process.

During the elementary and middle school teacher interviews, participants were asked open-ended questions to provide freedom with responding. Utilizing open-ended questions ensured that teachers were unrestricted with their responding to share additional information as needed to convey their experiences with distributive leadership. Elementary and middle school teachers responded to eight questions.

1. How would you describe the leadership at your current school?
2. Describe how teachers participate in leadership at your current school.
3. How have you personally experienced leadership at your current school? How have these experiences affected you? What thoughts stand out for you? What feelings stand out for you?
4. Describe your current principal's leadership style.
5. What impact does leadership have in your decision to remain in the teaching profession?
6. What other factors support your decision to remain in the classroom?
7. If you were a principal, what changes would you make to support teacher retention?
8. Having thought about leadership, what else would you like to share?

Data Analysis Procedures: In-Depth Interviews

Data analysis was conducted in accordance with Moustakas' (1994) guidelines for phenomenological analysis and representation as designated by Creswell and Poth (2018, p. 201). The researcher initiated data analysis by noting her reflexivity toward distributed leadership as a leadership framework. Subsequently, the researcher developed a list of significant statements to guide the initial process of coding teachers' lived experiences with distributed leadership identified within the in-depth interviews. After conducting multiple teacher interviews, the researcher modified and updated the original list of significant statements to include the most accurate representations.

Additional analysis of the data occurred through the process of horizontalization to review each significant statement as having equal value and "develop a list of nonrepetitive, nonoverlapping statements" or codes (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 201). Data analysis also reflected participant and peer feedback gathered at various points in the process (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 195). Initial categories and themes were continuously refined via analytic memoing. The primary researcher highlighted impactful quotes, numerated the frequency of codes and identified relating categories.

Significant statements were grouped into related categories or "broader units of information" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 201). From there, themes were created to describe the experience of distributed leadership and identify meaningful clusters of data that removed repetition (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 201). Textural descriptions of the elementary and middle school teachers' experiences with distributed leadership were documented with verbatim

examples. Additionally, the researcher created structural descriptions of the elementary and middle school teachers' experiences with distributed leadership to elucidate the "setting and context in which the phenomenon was experienced" (p. 201). Finally, the researcher produced a description of the experience of distributed leadership that included both textural and structural analysis. This composite description or essence included meaningful commentaries and examples that highlighted the textural and structural descriptions of the elementary and middle school teachers' experiences.

Validity

The researcher included multiple validation strategies to address the researcher's lens, participant's lens, and reader's lens (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 261). The researcher triangulated multiple data sources from teacher interviews to address the researcher's lens and clarify reflexivity. Corroborating interview data from multiple sources allowed the researcher to ensure that teacher experiences were representative amongst multiple individuals.

Prior to conducting research, the primary investigator identified personal reflexivity to separate these values and experiences from the data. Clarifying personal bias or attitudes provided the ability for the researcher to separate her value-laden statements from the sample group.

After each in-depth interview, elementary and middle school teacher participants were given the opportunity to provide feedback on initial codes from the researcher's codebook. Allowing for feedback during the initial coding process allowed the teachers to further impact how their experiences were recorded. Thus, participants were given the opportunity to "judge the accuracy and credibility of the account" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 261).

Beyond the opportunities listed above, teachers were encouraged to supplement additional information related to their experiences. During the in-depth interviews, elementary and middle school teachers were invited to openly share additional information that remained previously unanswered.

Finally, the reader's lens was validated by including opportunities for colleagues to peer review the researcher's data collection process. Individuals selected for peer review were carefully chosen by the researcher as demonstrating expertise in both qualitative research and research methodology.

Reliability

The researcher utilized multiple procedures to ensure reliability and intercoder agreement within the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 265). First, two recording devices were present at each teacher interview to ensure accuracy with the production of reliable interview transcripts. Additionally, the researcher saved all data on digital files to enhance access of materials and ensure ease with crosschecking data. Digital files were saved on the principal investigator's password-protected hard drive to guarantee privacy of materials. Furthermore, the researcher developed a preliminary code list and codebook to enhance and support the process of data interpretation. The researcher's codebook was reviewed with multiple teacher participants and colleagues to promote reliability with the data. Finally, the researcher's codebook underwent multiple revisions to identify a conclusive set of codes.

Limitations

As with any research method, utilizing a qualitative analysis approach offered the potential to produce several limitations. For example, a potential limitation existed with the identification of teacher participants depending on teachers' preferences to participate or not participate in the study. Fortunately, the elementary and middle school teacher participants in this study were anxious to participate and volunteered freely. Similarly, a potential limitation existed with the identification of participants for the principal focus group. This was addressed by collaborating with the district superintendent to ensure an appropriate meeting date and time were selected. Furthermore, participation within the principal focus group had the potential to be hindered if administrators perceived that the study would identify weaknesses in their leadership. Fortunately, administrators expressed interest in participating within this research study and volunteered freely.

Beyond participant selection, another challenge that often occurs within qualitative research is the lack of consistent data that is received from participants. Conducting open-ended, in-depth interviews allows for potential differences in reporting between teacher participants. In qualitative research, it is essential to capture and report these differences. In order to capture the full depth and breadth of teachers' experiences with distributed leadership, the researcher conducted multiple and exhaustive in-depth interviews. A final potential limitation existed with the amount of time needed to conduct the in-depth interviews. The researcher overcame this potential obstacle by meeting teachers at times that were convenient for their schedules.

Research Findings

RQ1 Overall Summative Findings

Research Question 1 (RQ1) addressed the question: What qualities of distributive leadership may improve teacher retention? Accordingly, four interview questions were asked to address RQ1: IQ5 (What impact does leadership have in your decision to remain in the teaching profession?), IQ6 (What other factors support your decision to remain in the classroom?), IQ7 (If you were a principal, what changes would you make to support teacher retention?), and IQ8 (Having thought about leadership, what else would you like to share?).

In response to RQ1, six common themes were identified as qualities that may improve teacher retention: Administrative Support, Extra Work/Teacher Responsibilities, Culture/Climate, Making a Difference/Joy in the Classroom, Leadership: Tough Stuff, and Balance: Work/Family (see Table 4).

Administrative support. Elementary and middle school teachers identified Administrative Support as a quality of distributive leadership that may positively impact teacher retention. Three elementary teachers and three middle school teachers described the importance of working for a supportive administration. Elementary teachers described the significance of their principal in maintaining an environment with open communication. Elementary teachers expressed perceiving an ease with communication with their principal leadership. In addition, elementary teachers described feeling supported with school initiatives.

Alternately, middle school teachers discussed the importance of a principal providing support as the instructional leader on campus. Middle school teachers identified the need for principals and administrators to provide guidance within the professional goal setting

process. Beyond goal setting, middle school teachers shared the need for leadership to build connections and create rapport with new teachers.

The literature also points to the significance that Administrative Support may provide in the discussion about teacher retention. Boyd et al. (2011) found “teachers’ perceptions of the school administration” was the most significant factor in teacher retention (p. 321). Urick (2016) confirmed the significance of school leadership by identifying it as a significant predictor of whether or not teachers would decide to remain in the profession. Given the supportive nature of the distributive leadership framework, teachers may perceive the experience as positively impacting their decision to remain in the classroom.

Extra Work/Teacher Responsibilities. Both elementary and middle school teachers discussed the significance of Extra Work/Teacher Responsibilities as a quality of the distributive leadership experience. Of the participants, three elementary teachers and five middle school teachers voiced concern regarding the Extra Work/Teacher Responsibilities associated with distributive leadership.

Both teacher groups described Extra Work/ Teacher Responsibilities as an over-filling their metaphorical “plates.” Furthermore, elementary and middle school teachers described this extra work as including additional meetings before, during, and after school. Of note, both groups of teachers perceived Extra Work/ Teacher Responsibilities as being stressful.

There were several differences between the elementary and middle school teacher groups. For example, elementary participants perceived the additional work associated with distributive leadership as being unnecessary to their roles as teachers. However, middle school teachers commented about the additional work (or paperwork) being taken home. The middle school teacher participants perceived these additional chores as being “never-ending.”

When consulting at the literature, Extra Work/Teacher Responsibilities is commonly connected with teacher attrition – not retention. In actuality, the research shows that exaggerated amounts of work may cause teachers to leave the classroom (Brill & McCartney, 2008; Johnson & Birkeland, 2003; Kersaint et al., 2007). Alternately, Hughes (2012) found that minimizing teacher work can have a positive impact upon teacher retention. Therefore, administrators seeking to use a distributive leadership framework would be strongly encouraged to research healthy ways to support teachers with balancing the additional leadership responsibilities.

Culture/Climate. Elementary and middle school teachers identified the distributive leadership quality of Culture/Climate as potentially having a positive impact on teacher retention. Three elementary teachers and two middle school teachers discussed their positive experiences with Culture/Climate.

Elementary and middle school teachers recognized the significance of Culture/Climate but expressed its importance differently. Elementary teachers described the significance of relationships at their school and sharing a common feeling of being connected with their fellow teachers. Elementary teachers acknowledged their ability to make key decisions for the school. For elementary teachers, decision-making was heavily connected with their school’s positive culture and climate.

Middle school teachers focused on their principal’s ability to set a positive tone at their school, promoting a positive culture and climate. Middle school teachers discussed the importance of having an administrator check-in to connect with teachers in a positive manner.

Culture/Climate has been identified in the literature as being positively associated with teacher retention. Wynn et al. (2007) noted that school climate had a positive impact upon teacher retention. Such a positive work environment has also been associated with teachers’

organizational commitment (Dorman, 2003; Loeb et al., 2005; Skaalvik and Skaalvik, 2010). In a distributive leadership environment, teachers may experience greater support from colleagues and administrators. This additional support may encourage elementary and middle school teachers to stay in the classroom.

Making a Difference/Joy in the Classroom. Elementary and middle school teachers discussed Making a Difference/Joy in the Classroom as a shared quality within the distributive leadership environment. Specifically, five elementary teachers and three middle school teachers discussed a multitude of accounts surrounding their positive association with making a difference in their students’ lives or experiencing joy in the classroom environment. Both teacher groups reflected expressed feeling an overall excitement to impact children’s learning. Both teacher groups discussed feeling “passion” or “joy” when working with children.

Unlike the middle school teachers, elementary participants discussed their positive association with working in a classroom environment that allowed freedom of movement. Elementary teachers discussed their displeasure for working in restrictive environments, similar to those found in an office setting.

The literature offers connections between distributive leadership and job satisfaction. Distributive leadership has been positively and significantly related with job satisfaction (Torres (2017). Alternately, Hughes (2012) found that teachers may be more likely to leave the profession when presented with a mismatch between expectations and reality. Distributive leadership has the potential to foster retention by increasing teachers’ involvement with directly making a difference in the lives of their students.

Balance: Work/Family. Three elementary and two middle school teachers identified Balance: Work/Family as a distributive leadership quality that impacts teacher retention. Both teacher groups shared their appreciation for experiencing balance between work and family life. Elementary and middle school teachers discussed the importance of having regular breaks in the summer and throughout the year to reconnect with family members. Both teacher groups expressed their appreciation of having flexibility throughout their work schedules to take their children to doctor appointments as necessary.

Middle school teachers identified the ability to pursue hobbies and interests as a benefit of having a flexible work schedule. In addition, middle school teachers described how extended summer breaks permitted additional travel with family.

According to the literature, personal reasons and marriage may influence teacher retention. Married teachers exit the profession 1.40 times greater than teachers who are not married (Borman & Dowling, 2008, p. 385). As principals distribute leadership among capable teacher leaders, they may be able to create a balance between work and family to improve teacher retention.

Table 4 (Sulit, 2020, p. 184)

RQ1 Overall Themes and Imaginative Variation

<u>Elementary Teachers</u>	<u>Middle School Teachers</u>
<u>RQ1 Overall Themes</u>	<u>RQ1 Overall Themes</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parent/ Community Support (6) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Administrative Support (6)</i> • <i>Extra Work/Teacher Responsibilities (6)</i>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Making a Difference/Joy in the Classroom (5)</i> • Teacher Support (5) • <i>Administrative Support (4)</i> • <i>Culture/Climate (4)</i> • <i>Extra work/Teacher Responsibilities (4)</i> • Instructional Shifts/Changes at the School (4) • <i>Balance: Work/Family (3)</i> • Salary (3) • Decision-Making (2) • Professional Development/Mentoring (2) • Previous Superintendent (2) • <i>Leadership: Tough Stuff (2)</i> <p><u>Imaginative Variation</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Salary (3) • Previous Superintendent (2) • Leadership: Tough Stuff (2) • Leadership Turnover (1) • RED 4 Ed (1) • Generational Changes (1) • Previous Ambitions (1) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Culture/Climate (3)</i> • <i>Making a Difference/Joy in the Classroom (3)</i> • <i>Leadership: Tough Stuff (3)</i> • Valuing/Affirming Teachers (3) • <i>Balance: Work/Family (2)</i> <p><u>Imaginative Variation</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership: Tough Stuff (3) • Salary (2) • Personal Work Ethic (1) • Previous Role in Business (1) • Political Teaching Climate (1)
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Note. Common themes between groups are italicized.

RQ2 Overall Summative Findings

Research Question 2 (RQ2) addressed the question: How do elementary and middle school teachers experience distributed leadership? Five interview questions were addressed with RQ2: IQ1 (How would you describe the leadership at your current school?), IQ2 (Describe how teachers participate in leadership at your current school.), IQ3 (How have you personally experienced leadership at your current school? How have these experiences affected you? What thoughts stand out for you? What feelings stand out for you?), IQ4 (Describe your current principal’s leadership style.), and IQ8 (Having thought about leadership, what else would you like to share?).

In response to RQ2, the researcher identified four significant themes that elementary and middle school teachers shared in common to describe how participants experienced distributive leadership: Administrative Support, Teacher Leadership: Formal, Decision-Making, and Teacher Leadership: Informal (see Table 5).

Administrative support. Six elementary teachers and four middle school teachers described experiencing Administrative Support at their respective schools. Both groups reflected upon their appreciation of their principal leadership providing tangible resources and materials to enhance their teaching role. In addition, elementary and middle school teachers described their appreciation of being supported with relevant professional development to support their teacher efficacy.

Elementary and middle school teachers shared several differences in their views of Administrative Support. Elementary teachers described feeling supported by their administration in resolving questions about their school and district. At the same time, elementary teachers

described the need for administrative support with student behaviors. Rather, middle school teachers appreciated the way their administration removed barriers to teaching such as angry parents and school politics.

The literature shows that organizational commitment increases among teachers who feel supported by administrators (Hulpia et al., 2012). Additionally, research shows a significant relationship between principal leadership style and teacher attrition, moral, and satisfaction (Thibodeaux et al., 2015). Given the collective and supportive role present within a distributive leadership framework, it is not surprising that Administrative Support was identified as a common experience between both teacher groups.

Teacher leadership: Formal. Seven elementary teachers and six middle school teachers shared their experiences with formal leadership at their respective schools. Elementary and middle school teachers shared similar experiences with formal leadership roles. Both groups described how Teacher Instructional Leaders (TILs) supported teachers and facilitated schoolwide operations. Additionally, both groups of teachers discussed the necessity of having a Leadership Team to ensure their schools functioned. Moreover, both groups discussed the role of teachers taking on leadership responsibilities with facilitating student clubs.

Differences among the formal roles existed between elementary and middle school teachers. Elementary teachers included an additional leadership role (Professional Learning Community Coaches) to support their school with becoming a PLC Model School. Elementary teachers also serve on committees as examples of their formal leadership. Alternately, middle school teachers shared how their school's Site Council serves as a formal role in making decisions.

According to the literature, "the formal distribution of supportive leadership among the leadership team [has] a positive significant impact on teachers' commitment to the school." (Hulpia et al., 2009b, p. 46). As a leadership framework, distributive leadership frequently includes formalized leadership roles to support school initiatives.

Decision-Making. Two elementary teachers and three middle school teachers described their overall positive experiences with decision-making. However, there were differences between the two groups. Elementary teachers discussed how decision-making is shared with a multitude of teachers. Additionally, when elementary teachers serve on committees, they ensure that all teachers have a voice in the decision-making. Alternately, middle school teachers focused on their ability to promote school improvement. Middle school teachers described how they influenced decision-making by researching topics of interest, instructional strategies, or innovative technologies that may support school improvement.

The literature is conclusive that decision-making is a predictor of teacher retention (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Boyd et al., 2011; Brown & Wynn, 2009; Horng, 2009; Weiss, 1999). Hulpia et al. (2009b) observed that "participation in decision-making increased people's commitment to the organization" (p. 46). The distributive leadership framework allows teachers to make decisions that impact their school. Having this type of authentic voice may encourage teachers to remain in their schools.

Teacher leadership: Informal. Two elementary teachers and three middle school teachers shared experiences regarding informal leadership at their campuses. Both groups of teachers discussed how teacher leaders naturally rise or "bubble-up" at their schools. Both elementary and middle school teachers perceived their informal leadership was encouraged and supported. Both groups expressed feeling comfortable with taking risks with assuming leadership.

One distinction emerged amongst the teacher interviews. Elementary participants asserted that their teachers were especially involved and aware of leadership opportunities within their school. This could potentially indicate a greater desire to assume informal leadership amongst elementary teachers.

The literature suggests that teacher leadership encompasses three components in relation to retention: coaching and mentoring, developmental tasks to improve learning and teaching, and the modelling of effective teaching (Harris & Muijs, 2003, p. 40). Distributed leadership offers opportunities for teachers to be involved with formal and informal leadership opportunities to impact their school.

Table 5 (Sulit, 2020, p. 233)

RQ2 Overall Themes and Imaginative Variation

<u>Elementary Teachers</u>	<u>Middle School Teachers</u>
<p><u>RQ2 Overall Themes</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Administrative Support (10)</i> • <i>Teacher Leadership: Formal (7)</i> • Shared Leadership (5) • Strong Leadership (3) • <i>Decision-Making (3)</i> • Teacher Support (3) • <i>Teacher Leadership: Informal (3)</i> • Consistent Expectations (2) • Leadership: Tough Stuff (2) • Culture/Climate (2) • Student-Centered Leadership (2) • Extra work/Teacher Responsibilities (2) • Rebuild (2) <p><u>Imaginative Variation</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rebuild (2) • Administrator Relationship (1) • RED 4 Ed (1) 	<p><u>RQ2 Overall Themes</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Administrative Support (6)</i> • <i>Teacher Leadership: Formal Roles (6)</i> • Inclusive/Multidirectional Communication (5) • Administrator Expectations (4) • <i>Decision-Making (4)</i> • Direct Communication/Not Warm and Fuzzy (4) • Visionary Leadership (4) • Decisive Leadership/Action- Oriented (3) • Leadership Turnover (3) • <i>Teacher Leadership: Informal (3)</i> • Balance: Teaching Role (2) • Micromanagement (2) <p><u>Imaginative Variation</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership Turnover (3) • Previous Leadership Experience (1) • First Year of Teaching (1) • Student Teaching Experience (1) • Previous Experience at Previous School (1) • Previous Work Relationship (1)

Note. Common themes between groups are italicized.

RQ3 Overall Summative Findings

Research Question 3 (RQ3) addressed the question: Do elementary and middle school teachers' current experiences with distributive leadership influence their desire to remain in the classroom? Accordingly, one interview question was addressed with RQ3: IQ5 (What impact does leadership have in your decision to remain in the teaching profession?).

In response to RQ3, the researcher utilized teacher participant data collected from IQ5 (What impact does leadership have in your decision to remain in the classroom?) to identify three themes. Elementary and middle school teachers shared that distributive leadership impacted their decisions to remain in the classroom in either one of three ways: Positive Impact, Negative Impact, or No Impact (see Table 6).

DL/Positive Impact. Roughly half of the elementary and middle school teachers who participated in the qualitative study identified distributive leadership as positively impacting their decision to remain in the classroom. Of the thirteen participants, four elementary and three middle school teachers described distributive leadership as having a positive impact.

Both teacher groups reported an overall positive response with distributive leadership. This positive connection may have been bolstered by self-proclaimed fears of experiencing micromanagement. Elementary teacher and middle school teacher participants shared that teachers working in other schools within a Southwestern school District experienced increased micromanagement and reduced teacher autonomy.

Two significant differences surfaced between the two teacher groups. Elementary teachers valued their current administration's encouragement with pursuing formal and informal leadership opportunities at their school. Alternately, middle school teachers focused upon their administration's student-centered decision-making.

DL/Negative Impact. Approximately one-sixth of the teacher participants identified distributive leadership as negatively impacting their decision to remain in the classroom. Of the thirteen teachers who participated in the qualitative study, one elementary and one middle school teacher described the negative aspects related to distributive leadership.

While maintaining negative experiences, the two teachers shared no other similarities. The elementary teacher participant described having a lot on her metaphorical "plate" that extended beyond the teaching role. Alternately, the middle school teacher shared the frustration of his campus valuing test scores and assessment over the social and emotional aspects of children.

DL/No Impact. Approximately one-third of the participants identified distributive leadership as having a minimal or no impact on their decision to remain in the teaching profession. Two elementary and two middle school participants stated that distributive leadership does not affect their decision to continue teaching. One elementary and one middle school teacher shared that they would rather transfer schools within the district over succumbing to a negative situation with an administrator.

While the teachers in this group were similar in their overall perspective of distributive leadership, the data identified one significant difference. The middle school teacher falling within this category explained how he alters the learning environment to teach in a way that offered flexibility. This teacher shared that chooses to instruct elective courses that do not carry the same level of academic rigor and stress.

The elementary and middle school interview data surrounding RQ3 (Do elementary and middle school teachers' current experiences with distributive leadership influence their desire to remain in the classroom?) demonstrates the complex nature of distributive leadership as it relates to teacher retention. Data collected from this study reveals a nearly even split between DL/Positive Impact and DL/Negative Impact at the two schools. These results are consistent with the literature that confirms the complexity surrounding distributive leadership and teacher retention. Research shows that distributive leadership is difficult to define (Bennett et al., 2003; Bolden, 2011; Hartley, 2007; Timperley, 2005). Without a clear or consistent definition of distributive leadership, it is difficult to measure its impact on teacher retention. Additional

confusion arises as the nature of extra work commonly associated with a leadership role may be viewed negatively by teachers (Lumby, 2018). If distributive leadership is viewed as creating extra work for teachers, distributive leadership may be negatively associated with teacher retention. Furthermore, concerns surface with the profession's overemphasis of evaluating distributive leadership using data from student test scores (Woods & Woods, 2013). This study replicated concerns from the literature as DL/Negative Impact and merit further exploration.

Table 6 (Sulit, 2020, p. 246)

RQ3 Overall Themes

Elementary Teachers	Middle School Teachers
<p>IQ5: What impact does leadership have in your decision to remain in the teaching profession?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DL/Positive Impact <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appreciates positive leadership/ fear of micromanagement at another school • Hopes to impact newer teachers to assume leadership roles • Administration supports culture and climate of the school • Appreciates being able to take-on leadership roles • DL/Negative Impact <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would consider leaving due to extra work associated with leadership; may consider staying due to strong teacher support • DL/No Impact <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not sure/ would be willing to transfer schools or stay regardless of leadership • Not returning due to personal reasons/ not impacted by leadership 	<p>IQ5: What impact does leadership have in your decision to remain in the teaching profession?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DL/Positive Impact <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appreciates positive leadership/ fear of micromanagement at another school • Positive experiences offset her previous beliefs from student teaching • Feels supported by administration • DL/Negative Impact <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would leave if academic pressures increase • DL/No Impact <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would transfer to another school • Adjusted his teaching environment

Implications for Practice and Research

Implications for Practice

This qualitative study sought to identify qualities of distributive leadership that may positively impact teacher retention. Results from this study contributes to the education profession in a myriad of ways. First, this research brings forth the need for school leaders to understand the impact of distributing leadership and moving towards principals serving in a more supportive leadership role. Second, the obtained research provides opportunities for principals and district leaders to obtain deeper insight into elementary and middle school teachers' motivations for remaining in the classroom. Third, this study provides principals and district leadership with

feedback regarding teachers' perceptions of leadership. Fourth, educators may develop an understanding of the benefits and drawbacks related to the distributive leadership framework. Fifth, this research responds to the complex principal role by supporting multiple individuals as leaders with experience and ability. Sixth, implications from this research strongly suggest the need for administrators to increase their ability to collaborate and network with community members and stakeholders to support teacher retention. Finally, this study contributes to the scholarly research regarding distributed leadership and its impact upon teacher retention.

Recommendations for Practical Applications

The data presented from this qualitative study reflects personal accounts from elementary and middle school teachers. Administrators and educational practitioners may benefit from careful reflection of this data to make timely decisions that impact their teachers, principals, and community. Given the connection between leadership and teacher retention, administrators or district leadership may conduct an internal investigation of teachers' attitudes and perceptions of the leadership at each of their schools and at the district office. Given the connection between sharing leadership and the distributive leadership framework, educational leaders may wish to conduct an internal analysis of how teacher leadership is shared at each school to determine commonalities and positive behaviors. Specifically, district leaders may seek to evaluate schools' procedures for selecting, sharing, and recognizing teacher leadership. Furthermore, district leaders may create a task force committee that includes principals and teachers to address positive solutions for minimizing the extra work commonly associated with distributive leadership. District leaders seeking to minimize the impact of teacher attrition may conduct an internal investigation regarding the impact of principal and administrative turnover between the school and district levels. Further investigation may include the exploration of administrator attitudes pertaining to the principal role to identify how this may negatively reinforce teachers' decisions to remain in the classroom and avoid the principalship. Finally, K-12 institutions may conduct an internal investigation of administrator preparation programs at the district level to support readiness of future principal candidates.

Recommendations for Future Research

Additional research may enhance the understanding of distributive leadership as a framework for supporting teacher retention. Continued research may support the understanding of distributive leadership that includes larger samples of elementary and middle school teachers. Furthermore, additional research of distributive leadership as a supportive framework to enhance teacher retention may be conducted that includes the perspective of high school teachers. Additional research may be conducted to determine how teachers' perceptions of the principal role impacts their desire to remain in the classroom. Further research is needed to explain how principal turnover impacts the effectiveness distributive leadership as it impacts teacher retention. Finally, additional research may support the understanding of teachers' perceptions regarding the extra work commonly associated with distributive leadership.

Conclusion

The research regarding distributive leadership weaves a complex tale of a framework with significant possibilities. As a model widely praised in the literature for impacting school improvement, it seems likely that distributive leadership would have the same impact upon teacher retention. To date, little research has pointed to distributive leadership as a supportive framework for increasing teacher retention.

This qualitative study sought to identify qualities of distributive leadership that may improve teacher retention. Participant data suggests mixed results regarding the effectiveness of distributive leadership. The data yielded results that were divided nearly in half. Roughly half of the elementary and middle school teacher participants welcomed the additional responsibility and ownership for their school and responded positively to the distributive leadership framework. Yet, other the other half of teachers responded negatively or were not impacted at all. This demonstrates the complex nature of distributive leadership and suggests opportunities for further research. Educators seeking to support teacher retention may further explore the implications for practice and research to identify areas of investigation that may enhance their schools and district.

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