THE EFFECTS OF TEACHER COLLABORATION ON DISTRIBUTED LEADERSHIP PRACTICE

A dissertation submitted to the Kent State University College of Education, Health, and Human Services in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By

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The purpose of this study was to examine the application of formalized collaborative structures as a vehicle for distributed leadership practice. This study sought to understand if distributed leadership was inherent within organizations employing formal collaboration structures. Additionally, this study sought to understand if distributed leadership was able to develop within a traditionally organized, hierarchical school.

This study employed a single case study to analyze the shared experience of teacher perceptions of leadership (both self and peer) within formalized collaborative structures. Additionally, participant responses gave rise to the consideration of teacher leadership within informal collaborative structures.

Participant responses overwhelming noted the emergence of leadership within both formal and informal collaborative structures and considered the personal and organizational factors that both encouraged and limited distributed leadership. The implications of this study suggest connections with the viability of distributed leadership practice and professional networks. Additionally, there should be consideration for the role of teachers in propagating democratic values in educational organization.
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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my parents and grandparents – who with their hard work, set me on this path; to my wife – who with her gentle patience, walks beside me every day; and to our children – who with their joyful spirit, inspire me to greater heights.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The quality of the individual teacher is the most influential variable on the academic success of individual students, and teachers who collaborate inherently improve their own and each other’s capacity. Teachers who work together share their knowledge, their skills and their resources in order to better not only themselves, but the entire organization (Hallinger & Heck, 2010b). Effective professional interactions among teachers are more important to the success of a school than the individual leadership of a principal because teachers enjoy a wider range of influence on student achievement (Harris, 2009a). Indeed, while public education in the United States began as the responsibility of an itinerant school master, it has evolved to the collective responsibility of an entire franchise of related and often disconnected operators (Tyack, 1974).

Today, there are increased calls for accountability – specifically on the responsibility of the principal – to increase student achievement (Ylimaki, Gurr, & Drysdale, 2011). Increased accountability efforts have led to lower principal morale and efficacy (Moak, 2010), lower teacher morale (Miller, 2010) and lower teacher efficacy (Charalambous & Philippou, 2010). This is especially true within low-income schools (Klar & Brewer, 2013; McNeil, Coppola, Radigan, & Heilig, 2008) and urban schools (Anderson, 2010). At the same time, increased accountability efforts have not directly increased student achievement rates relative to performance on international assessments
(Darling-Hammond & Wentworth, 2010). In short, accountability efforts have not only failed to improve schools, but have rendered their current organizational structure ineffective.

This study analyzes that which is being held accountable – the organizational structure of schools. Considering that current accountability measures for schools frequently call for increased collaboration and instructional effectiveness, as well as the efficient use of existing resources, schools must consider not only the application of reform efforts, but also their effects on the structure of the school. It is not enough to merely create a new program and examine its impact on student achievement; rather, schools must consider the impact of those same programming choices on all aspects of the school. Programs that might increase student achievement but at a loss of other resources must be analyzed against programs that might increase student achievement at less (or in some cases, no loss) of an expense. Increased instructional collaboration amongst staff members is one of those ideas.

Standing both contrary to and juxtaposed with the romanticism of increased teacher collaboration, modern reform agendas “cement” a division between “those who manage and lead schools and those who do not” (Fitzgerald & Gunter, 2008, p. 333). This is accomplished by solidifying the role of the principal as the “person positioned at the apex of the school hierarchy,” creating a vertical and horizontal division of labor. This argument is maintained by considering reform efforts as something done to teachers, not with teachers. Current reform efforts also promote increased leadership opportunities for teachers within their schools (Fullan, 2001; DuFour, Dufour, & Eaker, 2008).
Therefore, while schools are hierarchically arranged, a collective effort towards improvement is promoted. Efforts to improve schools and school leadership suggest decentralized decision-making and increased collaboration to facilitate organizational improvement for student achievement (Louis, Dretzke, & Wahlstrom, 2010). Leadership practice moves from “role-based conceptions and toward distributed views” (Elmore, 2000, p. 35) allowing for increased teacher capacity. In light of “evidence-informed practice” within schools, school-based experimentation occurs regarding the validity of distributed leadership techniques (Hatcher, 2005, p. 264).

Principal effective in improving schools and promoting increased student achievement must enhance collaboration and collaborative opportunities for teachers (O’Gorman & Hard, 2013). Collaborative work amongst teachers, and the creation and maintenance of organizational structures to support that, serve as a “path towards more sustainable school improvement” (Hallinger & Heck, 2010b, p. 107). Collaboration not only allows, but encourages multiple stakeholders within an organization to share ideas, resources and practices – equitably. Therefore, effective formal leaders promote leadership amongst all stakeholders in order to gain greater insight and collective support for the organization. However, within a distributed leadership framework, effective formal leaders recognize that “collective self-management can take several forms with different combinations of direct and delegated decision-making” (Hatcher, 2005, p. 264).

The application of distributed leadership theory within schools not only makes for flatter organizations, but also encourages less reliance on rigid organizational structures (Coleman, 2011). As a flat organization, a school is not only able to quickly incorporate
the ideas of individual operators, but is also able to respond to their individual needs. The leaders of the organization today, may be the followers on tomorrow’s issue(s). In fluid organizational systems, leadership and followership are attributes that all stakeholders must possess while acknowledging and encouraging them within each other.

Formal leaders cannot do the work of leadership alone. The notion of heroic leadership is as dated as the industrial model of education. For schools to effectively and efficiently improve they must distribute leadership among all staff. As schools continue to develop formalized collaborative structures as means of curricular improvement, it is important to consider how all staff are involved with that process.

**Research Questions**

This study addresses whom teachers view (among themselves) as leaders, and how they recognize those individuals as being leaders. Teachers gain, as professionals, from either being recognized as peer leaders, or by using the demonstrated leadership of their peers; subsequently, so does student achievement. Distributed leadership, as a phenomenon, is examined within the context of teacher interactions within existing formalized collaborative structures. The formalized collaborative structures studied exist at a traditionally organized (i.e. hierarchical) comprehensive public high school within a Midwestern state. The formalized collaborative structures are comprised of those teachers within each academic department teaching the same courses. While the teachers have been working as small groups over the last three years to create and refine mutual course assessments, their forays into curriculum and instructional practices have been
limited. The directives to individual groups have been top-down, and yet the work and its implementation has occurred within each group according to its own direction.

Schools, as collective enterprises, improve and sustain best when teachers are working both in concert and collaboratively (DuFour et al., 2008). This is a departure from the traditional organization of roles within schools as top-down and hierarchical. Instead, schools wherein teachers share and learn from one and another would be flatter, with less rigid roles (Louis et al., 2010). Roles are herein defined not merely as job titles, but as system-wide responsibilities. It is a role within the school system to implement and refine a particular curriculum and best instructional practices. Within formalized collaborative structures, teachers should share not only resources and techniques, but should also collectively examine practices and results. As such, this study proposes to examine whether the collective efforts of teachers regarding curriculum, assessment and instructional practices amounts to a realization of distributed leadership.

Improvement efforts involve multiple individuals connected both with (de Lima, 2009; Anderson, 2010) and within the organization (de Lima, 2008; Daly, Moolenar, Bolivar, & Burke, 2010; DuFour et al., 2008). Teacher leadership emerged as both a goal and a support of school improvement efforts (Sergiovanni, 1992; Mascall, Moore, Jantzi, Walker, & Sacks, 2011). The importance of collective leadership has not diminished (Hallinger & Heck, 2010a; Louis et al., 2010) despite being viewed as the leadership theory du jour (Harris, 2010; Hartley, 2007; Leithwood, Mascall, & Strauss, 2009b). Distributed leadership is a reflection of the political and cultural zeitgeist (Hartley, 2007), a reflection that mirrors the assumptions and expectations of ever-democratizing
society (Uhl-Bien, Marion, & McKelvey, 2007). It is not enough to place power and authority in the hands of a few (whether through privilege, birth, money, or training). Rather, power, authority, and their concomitant responsibilities reside with the masses. An ever-democratizing society promotes and evolves based on merit. Distributed leadership within specific organizations allows for merits to be continuously examined and defined, and subsequently for new ideas from new leaders to be promoted and implemented (Pease-Alvarez & Thompson, 2014; Mirra & Morrell, 2011).

This study is informed by the analysis of professional networks within school settings (de Lima, 2008, 2010; Moolenaar, 2012). Participant centrality and involvement with both formal and informal networks, the structures of the school as inherent and emergent networks, and participant interactions with both vertical and horizontal leadership are all conditions for analysis.

This study examines the following question: is distributed leadership evident within an organization that employs the concept of formalized collaboration?

Subsequently, this study examines the following sub-ordinate questions: are formalized collaborative structures autonomous of an established hierarchy (assuming there is an established hierarchy)? Is distributed leadership able to develop within a traditional school organizational structure (hierarchical, top-down)?

In order to explore the potential realization of distributed leadership within an organization employing formalized collaborative structures, a single case study has been designed. Participation has been confined to teachers in three academic departments (an elective department, a core department, and the Special-Education department) at a large,
comprehensive, public high school in a Midwestern state. Participation within the departments has been further confined to three teachers each: the department chair, a veteran teacher (15+ years of experience), and a novice teacher (<5 years of experience). Participants were asked questions relative to their experience with curriculum and instructional leadership (both as recipients and providers of that leadership). The questions were designed to illicit responses regarding the individual participants’ reflections on the work of the group to which they belong, their perspective regarding the work within that group, the realization of the groups purpose, and their interactions with other staff members regarding curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices.

**Conceptual Framework**

Because this study analyzes teacher perceptions of both self and peer involvement with curriculum, instruction and assessment improvement processes, it is situated within a context of distributed leadership theory, social network theory, and the concept of democracy in education. While this is an analysis of leadership, it focuses on teacher perceptions and involvement with leadership responsibility. The process and responsibility of leading facets of the organization in order to promote individual and organizational improvement are considered, as well as individual capacity and organizational structures.

The collaborative process of improving the curriculum, instruction and assessment practices is founded in the concept of professional learning communities (DuFour et al., 2004, 2008). Small groups of teachers responsible for similar courses, meet regularly to review the curriculum of their course, their individual instructional
practices, and their means of assessing student progress. Ultimately, the groups of teachers plan for the implementation and monitoring of targeted interventions for specific students based on identified strengths and weaknesses.

Teachers do not self-identify for membership in a particular formalized collaborative group, instead that is assigned to them. However, within the structure of the formal group, each teacher has equal ability to participate and lead. Similarly, each teacher has the opportunity to present negative or apathetic behaviors.

This study examines for distributed leadership within formalized collaborative structures, while considering the autonomy of those same groups relative to the school hierarchy. Subsequently, this study examines if distributed leadership exists within a traditional, hierarchical organizational.

**Distributed Leadership Theory**

As the research and practice of educational leadership has grown over the previous decade, there has been disagreement regarding the basic definition of distributed leadership (Coleman, 2011; Gronn, 2009b; Harris, 2009a). Some theoreticians contend that it suggests that school leadership involves multiple leaders (de Lima, 2008; Louis et al., 2010); others describe distributed leadership as an organizational quality (Hatcher, 2005; Sugrue, 2009; Goddard, Neumerski, Goddard, Salloum, & Berebitsky, 2010; Coleman, 2011); and still others state that it is a reallocation of the principal’s responsibilities to others (Spillane, 2006; Gronn, 2003; Harris, 2009a; Hartley, 2010). The theory of distributed leadership contends that leadership responsibilities should be
shared among stakeholders to gain multiple insights regarding the efficient and effective operation of the organization (Spillane, 2005; Carson, Tesluk, & Marrone, 2007).

Distributed leadership is more than participatory leadership. It is both a reflection of and a catalyst for the interwoven authority among staff members (de Lima, 2008; Fitzgerald & Gunter, 2008). Participatory leadership is a gradual and controlled acquiescence of authority and power from the titular authority to subordinates (Sugrue, 2009; Hatcher, 2005; Timperly, 2009; Harris, 2009a). Distributed leadership is instead a recognition of participatory leadership plus teacher leadership (Margolis, 2008; Spillane & Healey, 2010). It is therefore, both top-down (Hallinger, 2010) and bottom-up (Hargreaves & Fink, 2005), simultaneously organic and chaotic (Mascall et al., 2011; Gronn, 2009b; Bolden, 2011). Thus, schools employing distributed leadership theory must recognize and promote both leadership and followership within each member of the organization. What appears chaotic and ill-informed, must in actuality be purposeful.

The theory of distributed leadership is more than redistributing specific work responsibilities, or management-oriented tasks (Spillane, 2005). However, it is also countered that distributed leadership as a practice results in little more than a redistribution of management tasks – tactics of operation, not strategies (Hartley, 2007).

Therefore, if the logical goal of the organization is to continuously reform itself through internal collaborative efforts, and if those collaborative efforts are arrived at most efficiently through the distribution of leadership; then it would be assumed that for distributed leadership to be fully actualized within an organization, that organization must
distribute all aspects of leadership. For schools, this specifically refers to the curriculum and instructional leadership – the bread-and-butter issue of schooling.

Distributed leadership appears as an organizational response to the polarizing nature of heroic, hierarchical leadership of tradition (Hallinger & Heck, 2010b; de Lima, 2008; Spillane, 2006). In traditionally structured schools, principals act as final decision-maker in “an individualistic and controlling nature” (Jaimes, 2009, p. 7). Working within a school that completely employs distributed leadership practices, a principal would not necessarily abdicate responsibilities; rather she would enjoy a continuously evolving role with evolving responsibilities premised on capacity building.

Distributed leadership is a practice, both an individual and organizational attribute (Fitzgerald & Gunter, 2008; Hallinger & Heck, 2010a; Louis et al., 2010). The practice is framed as “a product of the interactions of school leaders, followers, and their situation” (Spillane, 2005, p. 144; see also Thoonen, Sleegers, Oort, Peetsma, & Geijsel, 2011; Spillane & Healey, 2010). There remain questions about how leadership is shared both formally and informally (Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008; Heck & Hallinger, 2009), and questions regarding how schools structure around the “professional” work of teachers and administrators (Fitzgerald & Gunter, 2008, p. 332). By considering the professional labor of adults within defined professional learning communities, and examining those labors for evidence of leadership, an understanding of the collaborative interactions among teachers can lead to improved organizational reform efforts and realizations.

Organizations successfully practicing distributed leadership theory understand that no single person is responsible for the overall organization (Spillane, 2006; Gronn,
2009b); and simultaneously, that not everyone is a leader (Harris, 2009a). There is a relationship that must be maintained between leadership and organizational structures, school vision, and school culture (Elmore, 2000; Hallinger & Heck, 2010b). While many participants have the “potential to exercise leadership,” the organization must examine “the way that leadership is facilitated, orchestrated and supported” (Harris, 2009a, p. 173).

**Democracy in Education**

The notion of democracy in education is not new. As a service rendered to both current employers and future citizens, education serves two masters. While the notion of teaching the values of democracy has long been upheld as an important task of American public education, the modeling of that value has not been so. External pressures on schools have placed economic priorities without sufficient resources (Pease-Alvarez & Thompson, 2014; Cuban, 2000).

Teachers have long been serfs in the fiefdom of the local school system. Much has been done to them and how they work (Mirra & Morrell, 2011). Teachers have exerted little voice within individual schools to influence the introduction, establishment, and reinforcement of school-based improvements. Instead, teacher voice has focused on government policy and local contracts (Pease-Alvarez & Thompson, 2014).

Schools have been forced to adapt to external accountability measures based in economic principles (Shipps, 2000) – most notably, consideration of centralization of authority and bureaucracy as the means of maintaining order, efficiency and effectiveness (Kantor & Lowe, 2000). Shortcomings in public education were once attributed to “the persistence of small-scale, informal organizational structures” (Kantor & Lowe, 2000, p.
131). External reform efforts continue to rely on hierarchy to promote accountability (p. 211; see also Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008; Lyons & Algozzine, 2006).

With the advent of neo-liberal reform agendas focused on economic principles, public education has disavowed the institution of democratic reforms and whole-scale participant involvement (Mirra & Morrell, 2011). Neo-liberal reformers view localism with “narrow-mindedness, racial prejudice, class bias, and financial inequities” (Kantor & Lowe, 2000, p. 132), while conservative reformers emphasize the efficiency and effectiveness of centralization of services.

While the field of democracy in education typically examines the notion of democracy as a curricular vehicle (both the means and the end) of public education, this study uses the term relative to the relationship within the school – specifically the interaction of teachers in curricular leadership.

**Professional Networks**

Individuals are connected with one another within their organizations – the stronger their connections, the stronger the network between those individual actors. Connections are measured by any number of different aspects relative to interpersonal relationships: the perception of the relationship, the number of the interactions, the intensity of the interactions, etc. (de Lima, 2010; Moolenaar, 2012). Networks within organizations can be either formal (created and/or maintained by the formal leadership) or informal (created and maintained by the participants themselves).

The structure of the professional network within which organizational reform is enacted either enhances or detracts from the effectiveness of the reform implementation
(Daly et al., 2010). In addition to technical knowledge of the network participants, leaders should attend to professional network linkages in order to facilitate effective implementation of reform efforts (Balkundi & Kilduff, 2006).

Professional networks – formal or informal – include the following factors: the importance of relations, the embeddedness of individual actors, the social utility of connections, and the structural patterning of social life (Balkundi & Kilduff, 2006). As such, it is important for those in formal leadership positions to remain cognizant of the networks within the organization, and to have situational awareness regarding the centrality and distances between organizational participants. This situational awareness is not intended to be used manipulatively, but structurally – to sustain and improve the organization (Moolenaar, 2012).

Traditionally, schools have operated in top-down manners, with individual teachers acting in isolation from one another, though organized under a distinct hierarchy. A demonstration of this model would be that the principal supervises and directs the assistant principals, they in turn supervise and direct the individual classroom teachers who are further organized and directed (though not necessarily supervised) by the department chair. Leadership responsibility is dispersed vertically. There is no sharing of curricular ideas or instructional techniques; rather there is direction and execution. However, in schools where leadership responsibility is dispersed horizontally, principals enjoy greater connections with more networks; subsequently reforms are implemented with greater fidelity because of the relationships between principals and all teachers (Moolenar, Sleegers, & Daly, 2012).
When teachers interact with professional networks their individual efficacy increases as well as student achievement (Moolenaar et al., 2012; Penuel, Riel, Krause, & Frank, 2009). The consideration of teachers interactions for both individual and collective gain is important to fuller understanding of distributed leadership.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to examine the application of formalized collaborative structures as potential vehicles toward distributed leadership practice. Formalized collaboration is considered within the framework of both social network theory and democracy in education. This study seeks to understand if distributed leadership is inherent within organizations that employ formal opportunities for teacher collaboration regarding curriculum and instruction. Simultaneously, this study seeks to understand if distributed leadership develops within traditionally organized schools.

As such, this paper examines whether distributed leadership is inherent within an organization that employs the concept of formalized collaboration.

Subsequently, this paper examines whether formalized collaborative structures operate autonomous of an established hierarchy (assuming there is an established hierarchy). Ultimately, this paper examines whether distributed leadership is able to develop within a traditional school organizational structure (hierarchical, top-down).

For the practice of distributed leadership to positively influence school organizations, capacity must be built and maintained among all staff members (Harris, 2009a). Subsequently, distributing a larger share of professional activity relative to instruction has a significant effect on student engagement (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000).
Student achievement is the bottom-line determining factor for school and staff improvement efforts (Marzano, 2007), and principals should place the most effort on the organizational capacity building in order to have the greatest positive impact on achieving learning outcomes for students (Robinson, Lloyd & Rowe, 2008).

“There is little empirical understanding of how the underlying social networks” support or constrain school reform efforts (Daly et al, 2010; Coburn & Russell, 2008). The contention is that social networks amount to mere contrivances, and should be studied more for substance and effect on the organizational mission (de Lima, 2010). Similarly, there is insufficient research on the distribution of power within distributed leadership frameworks (Bolden, 2011; Brown, Rutherford, & Boyle, 2000; Gordon, 2010; Gronn, 2009a; Hartley, 2010; Hatcher, 2005).

Therefore, by considering the application of formalized collaborative structures within traditionally organized schools as a realization of distributed leadership, this study hopes to add to the understanding of teacher collaboration (relative to curriculum and instruction) as an effect of organizational effectiveness.

Significance of the Study

This case study is unique not only because it will add to the understanding of social networks and democracy relative to education organizations, but also because it will add to the understanding of the implementation of distributed leadership within education organizations. The uniqueness of this study is within its assumption of distributed leadership within a traditionally hierarchical school organization.
Spillane, Camburn, Pustejovsky, Pareja, and Lewis (2008) note in conducting research on distributed leadership, two basic questions should be considered:

1. what aspects of leadership and management work are hypothesized to be distributed across people; and
2. across which school actors do researchers hypothesize leadership and management work is distributed? (p. 190)

Methodologically, these questions give rise to:

1. who should provide evidence of distributed leadership;
2. should evidence come from self-reports or externally (as perceived by others);
3. what trade-offs do researchers make with each of these decisions?

This study responds to those questions by examining teacher perceptions of the distribution of leadership responsibility, and their involvement with that process.

The purpose of this case study is to understand the application of formalized collaboration within a traditionally organized school as a potential realization of distributed leadership theory. This research adds to the body of literature regarding distributed leadership theory, as that has grown from a basis in “socio-cultural activity theory” (Gronn, 2000, 2002; see also Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2001, 2004).

Hartley (2010) suggests that Spillane’s “own theoretical position - a broadly socio-cultural one – spans the subjectivists-objectivist epistemological divide” (p. 278). The central issue in studying distributed leadership is considering the unit of analysis (Hartley, 2010) – a “leader-plus” organizational structure (Spillane, 2005). Thus, the unit of analysis exists in the interactions between participants, rather than in the participants
or the organization (Spillane et al., 2008). Therefore, the individual formal leader enjoys no ontological status.

Establishing a teacher leader’s “immediate social context” requires considered information from “every department member and his or her relations with the others” [italics in original] (de Lima, 2008, p. 166). That immediate social context is the “web of influence” that permeates network relations. Examining participant perceptions for evidence of leader influence and leadership distribution establishes not only formal, but “de facto leaders – that is, individuals who, regardless of their position, exercise influence on others” (de Lima, 2008, p. 166; see also Spillane, 2006). Themes emerge from the interactions of participants – it is essential to analyze leadership practice from the level of the group or collective” (Spillane, 2006, p. 56).

This study examines those networks within academic departments at one school site in order to analyze whether leadership (relative to curriculum, instruction and assessment practices) is distributed in a traditional, hierarchical leadership team. This study examines if the work of the organizational actors transcends the organization’s structure. While external school reform efforts continue to promote either participatory leadership (Muijs & Harris, 2003), or for leadership practices to distributed (Lambert, 2006), these tend to be about organizational requirements and reform implementation rather than teaching and learning” (Fitzgerald & Gunter, 2008, p. 332).

Studies of leadership should be based in a process ontology focused on practices based in interactions – embedded in a cultural context where the “societal notion of ‘leadership’ is both taken for granted and under re-construction” (Crevani, Lindgren, &
There are four basic ways to gauge the operationalization of distributed leadership: examination of an organization chart (to assess for formal and informal leadership roles); school staff self-reports; principal reports of formal and informal leadership activities; and an examination of social networks wherein teachers share advice on curriculum, instruction and pedagogy (Spillane et al., 2008, p.193-4).

This study is biased by the researchers’ former employment as an assistant principal at the high school being used as the case study, working with teachers to create and maintain a school culture for student achievement. These relationships, and this bias, are further discussed in the section on limitations.

Therefore, this research is posited in both pragmatic and post-positivist terms. The knowledge that arises from this study comes from on-going actions, situations, and consequences (Creswell, 2003), and there is a concern to find solutions (Patton, 2002) regardless of method. Similarly, this study is situated in the “social, historical, [and] political” contexts of the school, as noted by the researcher’s bias (Creswell, 2003, p. 12). This study attempts to explore and understand the complexity of the relationship between distributed leadership practice and social networks within academic departments at a traditionally organized high school. Examining for the phenomenon of distributed leadership, this study also analyzes the complexity of the relationships between staff members in light of improving student achievement.
**Limitations**

This study is limited by the researcher’s former direct involvement with the school being analyzed. The researcher was employed at the site for thirteen years, six as a classroom teacher, and seven as an administrator. As an administrator, the researcher was both the principal of one of the schools-within-the-school (during the period of time that the school was thus structurally organized), and as an assistant principal.

**Delimitations**

The only delimitation of this study is that it is constructed as a single case study of teachers’ perceptions of distributed leadership practice and department networks at one comprehensive, public, urban high school in a Midwestern state.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Theories of educational leadership exist in a multitude of different names, forms, and suggestions. Each form seeks to adequately describe the function of school leadership roles. (Bush & Glover, 2003; Day, Gronn, & Salas, 2004; Hernandez, Eberly, Avolio, & Johnson, 2011), ultimately “seek[ing] to supplant the original, classic myth of leadership with an alternative” (Sugrue, 2009, p. 359).

Leadership serves a singular purpose – to enhance the organization through the efforts of others (Hallinger & Heck, 2010b). The responsibilities of leadership roles are many, but can be categorized as: “managerial, instruction, financial” and organizational (relative to stakeholder relations) (Onorato, 2013, p. 35; see also, Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; Hess & Kelly, 2007; Timperley, 2005). Leadership, as an activity is demonstrated as either an input on or an output of individual actors (Grenda & Hackmann, 2013; Hernandez et al., 2011; Pearce, 2004; Day et al., 2004). Individual actors – regardless of role – and the organizational structure internally affect leadership. Similarly, leadership is externally affected by structural changes imposed by market, societal and government agencies (Hallinger & Heck, 2010a; Klar & Brewer, 2013). As a practice, leadership focuses on what organizational actors do, but also how and why they respond in that manner (Spillane, 2005).

While leadership is defined as the activity of coordinating organizational improvement efforts, followership is defined as acting on those organizational improvement efforts. The two terms, however, are not mutually exclusive – instead,
individual actors may enjoy transience between status in both realms (Sherer, 2008; Gibb, 1954). Acting on improvement efforts is demonstrated in routines, procedures, and structures – all of which are both limiting and empowering depending on the type of leadership and individual actor. Followership is limited by group interactions demonstrated by leader-follower relationships and participant perceptions of those relationships as they affect the organizational vision, as well as the participant’s sense of well-being (Nielsen & Daniels, 2012; Bacha & Walker, 2013). Whether leadership activities impact followership responsibilities or vice versa remains a consideration of researchers – mitigated effects versus reciprocal effects (Hallinger & Heck, 2010a).

Within schools, leadership theories are typically applied with consideration of “crudely abstracted leader-follower dualism” (Gronn, 2000). This is typically rendered in the consideration that leaders are superior to organizational participants, and followers are dependent on leaders for dispersing limited resources. Leadership, in the manifestation of individual participants acting in prescribed formal roles, is either the “consequence of individual agency” or the consequence of systems and structures (Gronn, 2000; see also Bolden, 2011). Followership thereby, is the navigation of organizational politics in the execution of specific roles for organizational maintenance (Kimura, 2013).

**Types of Leadership**

The more directive leadership inherent in leader-follower dualism is less likely to promote sustainable school improvement gains (Chapman & Allen, 2006), while vertical leadership that integrates leadership responsibilities with follower needs improves student achievement (Louis et al., 2010).
While instructional leadership is the core of effective educational leadership (Marzano et al., 2005), it does not always affectively address inherent organizational problems. Early considerations of instructional leadership responsibilities built upon ideals of charismatic, strong, directive leaders (Elmore, 2000). This reinforced the “romantic idea of the heroic school leader” acting individually to affect school improvement (Goddard et al., 2010, p. 339; Yukl, 1999). Subsequent iterations of educational leadership consider less directive and more vertical influences of leadership activity. Figure 1 explores a continuum of leadership theories from more directive (heroic leadership) to less directive (self-leadership), and includes a reflection on the effects (whether mitigated or reciprocal) of leadership-followership dualism.

![Continuum of Leadership Theories](image)

*Figure 1*

Continuum of Leadership Theories
However, educational leadership practice trends towards hybridizations – a contrast to the “one-size-fits-all” approach of theory (Gronn, 2009b). Educational leadership practice should not be merely heterogeneous, but situational – considering the context, participants, and influences on and in the organization. The specific situation of the school supports the contention for the application of different leadership styles and practice (Klar & Brewer, 2013; Woods, Bennett, Harvey, & Wise, 2004; Fiedler, 1967). For example, in failing schools leadership should be “very directive and task focused” (Harris, 2004, p. 18), but in improving schools, less directive leadership can be utilized (Muijs & Harris, 2003). The interdependency of relationships in the leader-follower-situation dynamic is demonstrated in Figure 2: Interdependency of Organizational Relationships (Sherer, 2008).

![Figure 2: Interdependency of Organizational Relationships](image)

Harnessing the unified effort of teachers requires principals to gain teacher buy-in and consensus – “compliance,” which in turn begets commitment (Hatcher, 2005, p. 235). The application of social network thinking allows for the consideration of leadership activity vis-à-vis interdependent participant relationships (Moolenaar, 2012),
wherein participants are committed to the organizational goals through their engagement with interdependent relationships throughout the organization.

**Heroic & Charismatic Leadership**

Early theories of leadership suggested that it was an activity of select individuals possessing particular traits. Heroic leadership – “heroic, legendary, archetypal” (Sugrue, 2009, p. 359) – plays into the traditional, hierarchical bureaucracy of schools, and does not promote participant capacity building (Fitzgerald & Gunter, 2008; Coleman, 2011; Crevani et al., 2010; Spillane, 2006; Gronn, 2003).

Heroic leadership springs from the notion that those in formal leadership roles have the sole authority to affect change and operate the organizational system. That authority originates from personal traits, positional authority, or a combination thereof; but it amounts to leadership activity – which the participants in the system are recipients of. Thus, leadership activity occurs in large-group, small group, and dyadic relationships; but begins with the formal leader and is dispersed to the follower(s) (Hayibor, Agle, Sears, Sonnenfeld, & Ward, 2011; Hernandez et al., 2011).

As the literature on heroic leadership evolved, it changed from “the great man” theory of the nineteenth century to include a consideration of particular “traits” such as intelligence and social status (Hernandez et al., 2011). The notions of this particular theory evolved to suggest that there are no singular personality traits of leadership – and thus, heroic leadership can be practiced, not merely made.

Heroic leadership theory needs to account for the context within which leadership activity occurs. While individuals may have particular traits that influence leadership, the
activity is not merely dependent on either the individual or the role, and instead includes the organizational context and the participant behaviors (Stodgill, 1948). Behaviors of heroic leadership stem from the values and effects demonstrated in the charisma of the formal leader (Yukl, 1999), but are resultant from the organizational context.

Followership in this paradigm, then, either reflects or responds to the traits and charismas demonstrated by those in formal leadership roles. The advancement of the organization is hindered (or enhanced) by the formal leader’s response to forces of change. The abilities, skills and knowledge inherent in the “diverse” group are never fully realized (Harms & Credé, 2010, p. 5).

The directiveness inherent in heroic leadership results from dispersing leadership activity originating in the positional authority of formal leadership. Heroic leadership is oriented as a “direct effects model” of leadership (Hallinger & Heck, 2010a, p. 99), and less likely to promote sustainable school improvement gains (Chapman & Allen, 2006).

Seemingly the foundation of literature on leadership studies (Hernandez et al., 2011), heroic leadership continues to be readily evident in contemporary society. In a study regarding the firing of head coaches in the Norwegian Premier League, Arnulf, Mathisen, and Hærem, (2012) support a post-heroic form of leadership, suggesting that athletic teams would have performed just as well or quickly improved had the head coach not been removed. Their contention is that decision-makers (i.e. ownership) act on misconceptions of leadership based on the heroic ideal.
Transactional Leadership

Transactional leadership is the recognition of a contractual, vertical relationship between leaders and followers. The application of transactional leadership is reciprocal and dependent on interactions within the organization, a response to the “risk of manipulation” available in transformational leadership (Crevani et al., 2010, p. 78). Conversely, transformational leadership is a response to the reactivity inherent with transactional leadership.

Considering the need to overcome ideals, transactional leadership relies on relationships between leaders and followers – wherein the leaders ability to influence followers frames the relationship. This emphasizes a “consideration for the individual with a concern for task completion” (Coleman, 2011, p. 305). While leaders maintain their positional authority to enact reform, followers demonstrate awareness of their needs. Thereby, the activity of leadership recognizes individual needs and monitors follower task completion (Groves & LaRocca, 2011).

Three organizational factors arise inherent in transactional leadership (Bass, Avolio, Jung, & Berson, 2003):

- contingent reward,
- management by exception (active leadership),
- management-by-exception (passive leadership).

The manner by which the formal leader acts based on economic principles and rewards defines contingent rewards. Leaders operating with an active management-by-exception paradigm actively monitor the operations of the organization, and proactively reform the
system, while leaders operating with a passive management-by-exception paradigm wait for mistakes to occur and then act to correct them (Harms & Credé, 2010, p.6).

Contrary to a sense of heroic leadership, transactional leadership demonstrates a “disrupt[ion]” with the departure from the “charismatic” principal (Fullan, 2001), and instead focuses on relationships constrained by the transaction and allocation of resources. Thus, transactional leadership is contingent on economic realities and participant perceptions of those.

The implementation of a transactional leadership paradigm manifests in the maintenance of organizational commitment based in the “integrity” of transactional relationships. The factors of integrity consist of: honesty, consistency and transparency; each countered against limited resources (Miller, 2010, p. 35; see also George & Sabhapathy, 2010). Individual needs such as self-actualization are not expressly focused on, as the focus of leadership activity is instead on lower-ordered needs.

Transactional leaders are viewed as reactive rather than proactive (Bass et al, 2003), and organizations can languish with only the application of transactional leadership. That is not to suggest that there are neither organizations, nor situations, where transactional leadership would not be beneficial (Groves & LaRocca, 2011).

**Transformational Leadership**

Early conceptions of transformational leadership considered formal leaders to operate at need and value levels higher than those of followers. However, transformational leadership focuses on “distinct individuals that are detached from their
cultural context” (Crevani et al., 2010, p. 77). This view tends to be moralistic and exploitative (Allix, 2000), and patronizing and elitist (Sugrue, 2009, p. 366).

Transformational leadership theory builds on the actualization inherent in transactional leadership, focusing not on economic realities and perceptions, but on self-actualization and capacity building (Hatcher, 2005). The evolution to transformational leadership consists of five traits (Judge, Bono, Ilies, & Gerhardt, 2002; Bass et al, 2003):

- idealized influence (attributed) – referring to the charisma of the formal leader and followers’ perceptions of the personality
- idealized influence (behavioral) – referring to the charisma of the formal leaders based in self perceptions;
- individual consideration – referring to the leadership activity whereby the leader attends the social-emotional needs of the followers;
- inspirational motivation – referring to the manner by which the formal leader inspires goal-setting and goal-attainment; and
- intellectual stimulation – referring to leadership activity to encourage followers to be creative risk takers.

Leaders employing transformational leadership engage in mentoring organizational participants, frequently communicating with them, and encouraging capacity building (Onorato, 2013; Bacha & Walker, 2013). With the advancement of transformational leadership paradigms from individually (leader) centered to organizationally (leader-follower centered), the impetus for leadership activity switches from personality traits to psychological “mechanism[s]” (Hernandez et al., 2010, p. 1169).
Transformational leadership is viewed as activity that is done to others, as opposed to activity that is done with others. Those in formal leadership roles “provide meaning, act as role models, provide challenges, evoke emotions, and foster a climate of trust” (Harms & Credé, 2010, p. 6). Their actions remain contingent on their relationships with organizational actors.

Teacher commitment can be secured through transformational leadership (Thrupp & Willmott, 2003), because the goal of transformational leadership is to “help others find and embrace new goals individually and collectively” (Hallinger & Heck, 2003, p. 222; Crevani et al., 2010). Through the implementation of transformational leadership, the school “becomes less bureaucratic and it functions as its own transforming agent” (Balyer, 2012, p. 582). Task completion remains the responsibility of followership, but with enhanced organizational commitment realized in the potential for self-actualization.

**Self & Laissez-faire Leadership**

Self-leadership emerges as a response to self-control and self-management literature within clinical psychology (Pearce & Manz, 2011). The notion that leadership activity and responsibility emanate from within the individual promotes self-actualization and transcends the traditional view of vertically imposed leadership. Instead self-leadership suggests that leadership responsibility comes from within.

Similar to self-leadership, laissez-faire leadership suggests an absence of formal leadership activity. However, the dissimilarity between them rests in the execution of the formal leadership role – laissez-faire leadership does not employ any. In self-leadership
practice, formal leadership roles avoid decision-making and refrain from acting on responsibility (Harms & Credé, 2010, p.6). While there is a role, it does not act.

The inactivity of formal leadership continues the similarity between laissez-faire leadership and the passive management-by-exception style of transactional leadership, with the difference being that laissez-faire leadership refuses to act even when necessary; while passive transactional leadership acts when necessitated for corrections to the organization. Laissez-faire leaders believe that the organization self corrects.

Formal leadership roles serve an unclear purpose in laissez-faire leadership practices if the organization is ultimately going to be left to its own devices for survival. This is contradictory to self-leadership practice, where formal leadership roles are non-existent, and leadership activity is contingent on the practice, desire and influence of individual participants within the organization.

Because self-leadership is a fundamental shift away from reliance on traditional, hierarchical distribution of leadership responsibilities, self-leadership paradigms can be helpful in the implementation of distributed leadership practice, especially in empowering knowledge-based organizations like schools (Pearce & Manz, 2011). It promotes a subtle reliance on decentralized authority. This is not because of the structure or the culture of the organization, but instead is contingent on the individual traits of organizational actors (Müller, 2006).

The promotion of individual influence promotes not only a distribution and sharing of leadership activity, but also a distribution of the inherent power incumbent in leadership authority (Sherer, 2008), because of the “inherent checks and balances”
demonstrated in self-leadership (Pearce & Manz, 2011). Self and laissez-faire leadership each call into question an examination of what it means to perform and accomplish specific organizational tasks, and invite consideration of the connection between leadership and task completion (Gronn, 2000). Tasks can become more routine and encoded in the execution of job performance; while leadership activity manifests in individual perceptions regarding coordination (Robinson et al., 2008).

**Shared Leadership**

Shared leadership is a “dynamic, interactive influence process” of participant interactions within the organization (Pearce & Conger, 2003). It recognizes the leadership potential of individual participants within the system, and promotes the capacity for every individual to exert influence on both co-participants and the system.

Participants in shared leadership paradigms serve as both leaders and followers – often simultaneously (Muethel & Hoegl, 2012, p. 425; Pearce & Conger, 2003; Marks & Printy, 2003). However, shared leadership differs from teamwork – whereby teamwork and leadership are different aspects of the team process. Shared leadership focuses on the followership dimension of leadership (Erkutlu, 2012). By promoting the use of information, shared leadership takes on different roles within the group as systemically necessitated (Zhou, Vredenburgh, & Rogoff, 2013, p. 6).

Shared leadership does not merely focus on formal leadership roles as the center of leadership activity and responsibility; rather, that emanates in the entire organization (Muethel & Hoegl, 2013, p. 425). To that end, shared leadership counters negative

Formal leadership has a specific, situational responsibility within shared leadership paradigms. Those in leadership roles must monitor the responsibility of followers and provide direction and support accordingly. Thus, relationships remain the central factor in organizational effectiveness, and formal leaders are effective so long as they adjust to the needs of the followers (Hernandez et al., 2011).

The organization has as much effect on shared leadership, as shared leadership has on the organization. Several factors must be present in the organization to promote shared leadership: the capacity for collaboration, trust, and internal accountability (Angelle, 2010). A “supportive” environment promotes shared leadership, ultimately promoting “high proactive behavior” in organizational participants (Erkutlu, 2012).

The supportive culture of shared leadership allows for increased individual participant impact through the acknowledgement of individual knowledge, expertise and skills. However, while shared leadership builds on the notion that all-of-us-are-smarter-than-one-of-us, it does not maximize that potential. This is because leadership responsibility continues to vertically extend from the formal leader through effective relationships with organizational participants (Zhou et al., 2013).

The performance of the organization can potentially improve with the implementation of shared leadership (Zhou et al., 2013, p. 13). While shared leadership promotes the sharing of knowledge and skills, when there is no representative diversity of knowledge or skills, shared leadership can limit the organization.
Collaborative Leadership

Collaborative leadership is a “sharing” of leadership responsibilities with followers to “promote learning” across the organization and thus enhance organizational “effectiveness” (Coleman, 2011, p. 300). It differs from shared leadership because leadership responsibilities are shared across the organization, not just with specific participants. And, it differs from distributed leadership because the sharing of leadership responsibilities originates with the formal leader, rather than emerging from and simultaneously stretching over participants (Spillane, 2005).

Collaborative leadership goes beyond sharing responsibilities to include sharing organizational ownership (Hallinger & Heck, 2010a). Shared ownership is manifest in the following elements of collaborative leadership:

- distributed leadership – the operation of the organization is a pluralistic endeavor, and thus accountability rests with the group not merely the principal (Leithwood et al., 2009c; Day et al., 2004; Marks & Printy, 2003);
- relational leadership – manifested not only in the connections between leaders and followers, but in the dispersing of resources and maintenance of organizational conditions (Coleman, 2011; Hallinger & Heck, 2010a; Leithwood et al., 2009a; Robinson et al., 2008; Marks & Printy, 2003);
- constitutive leadership – constructing a shared vision for the organization (Coleman, 2011; Hallinger & Heck, 2010a);
- political leadership – understanding the macro and micro political climate (Coleman, 2011; Hernandez et al., 2011).
Contrasted with transactional and heroic leadership, collaborative leadership does not rely on buy-in or compliance as the foundation of the leader-follower relationship. Instead, collaborative leadership connects with the concept of transformational leadership in its efforts to promote individual commitment as well as “discretionary effort” towards the organizational goals (Coleman, 2011, p. 303). Commitment is both secured and maintained by the professionalism of all participants. There is recognition that professionalism is fluid: “socially constructed and yet evolutionary in nature” (Coleman, 2011, p. 304).

Collaborative leadership is a response to “paternalistic” actions inherent in more directive leadership models by promoting organizational ownership amongst participants (O’Leary, Bingham, & Choi, 2010). It is dependent on the application of institutional knowledge available to specific situations – knowledge that resides with individual participants. In tapping that residual knowledge, leaders in collaborative paradigms must balance participant autonomy and interdependence.

However, formal leaders are not the only ones who must balance dichotomies in order to navigate collaborative leadership. Because there is an acknowledgement that knowledge resides within individual actors, followers (as collaborative participants in the organization) must maintain situational awareness of the macro and micro level politics inherent in the organization and their particular social network (de Lima, 2010; Kimura, 2013; Coleman, 2011).

For collaborative leadership to flourish as a means of organizational improvement, formal leaders must act to promote participant engagement. Organizational problems
must be presented to promote creativity, and tasks must be delegated via commitment rather than direction. Subsequently, organizational vision and values arise from interactions between leaders and followers (Kramer & Crespy, 2011).

**Distributed Leadership**

Often interchanged with shared leadership and collaborative leadership (Spillane, 2005; Crevani et al., 2010; Day et al., 2004; Leithwood & Mascall, 2008), distributed leadership is unique in the application of leadership responsibility beyond the role of the formal leader (Bolden, 2011). Instead leadership is distributed in a “network of both formal and informal influential relationships” (Louis et al., 2010, p. 318).

Distributed leadership is more than the actions of organizational participants; it is their interactions (Spillane, 2005; Spillane & Diamond, 2007). It is based in the function of leadership activity rather than the position (Coleman, 2011), with leaders at “all levels” of the organization (Fullan, 2001, p. 134; see also Crevani et al., 2010). The caution, however, is that not everyone “simultaneously leads” (Harris, 2009a, p. 173).

Accordingly, and in contrast with transformational leadership, distributed leadership is a post-heroic alternative to leadership and organizational structuring. The “relational, collectivist, and non-authoritarian nature” opposes the notion of heroic leadership (Crevani et al., 2010, p. 78; Spillane, 2006; Uhl-Bien, 2006; Gronn, 2009b).

Distributed leadership is an “emergent network” of interactions in “concertive action” (Woods et al., 2004; see also Mascall et al., 2011; Gronn, 2002; Spillane et al., 2001), across organizational boundaries, grounded in “trust rather than regulation,” where leadership is situated in “knowledge not position” (Woods et al., 2004; see also Harris,
Leadership arising from within the organization through experience and collective efficacy (Robinson, 2001) augments formal leadership roles engaged with management tasks in favor of informal leadership relative to systemic transformation (Fullan, 2001).

With the application of distributed leadership, organizations evolve into a “social process” with a “collective and systemic understanding” (Bolden, 2011, p. 252). This social process, founded in the networks and interactions of participants, directly influences organizational improvement capacity (Louis, Mayrowetz, Murphy, & Smylie, 2013; Hallinger & Heck, 2010a; Leithwood et al., 2009b; Robinson et al., 2008). Thus, distributed leadership promotes participant leadership grounded in learned expertise. It is a realization of interdependency (Harris, 2004) and “reciprocal dependence” between all participants (Gronn, 2002, p. 432).

For distributed leadership to become an integrated, and successful aspect of the organization, there must be “purposive” action by the formal leader to affect the formal and informal structures of the organization (Muijs & Harris, 2007, p. 111; see also Pearce, 2004; de Lima, 2008). This requires the following organizational factors:

- a culture of trust (Hopkins & Jackson, 2003);
- shared vision (Hulpia & Devos, 2009);
- clear structures (Grenda & Hackmann, 2013);
- leadership development available to all participants (Halverson & Clifford, 2013).

The purpose of distributed leadership differs dependent on the situation, the participants, and the culture of the organization (Harris, 2009a; Crevani et al., 2010). Often done for strong theoretical and practical reasons (Leithwood et al., 2009a),
distributed leadership also serves as a pragmatic response to societal pressures (Mascall et al., 2011; Hartley, 2010). The forms of distributed leadership are contingent on individual actions and participants, systemic structures within the organization, and cultural pressures both within and without the organization. Different identified forms of distributed leadership are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

*Theoretically Identified Forms of Distributed Leadership*

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<td>Pragmatic</td>
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<td>Opportunistic</td>
<td>Ad Hoc</td>
<td>Spontaneous (see also Gronn, 2002)</td>
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<td>Cultural</td>
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**Emergent leadership.** Distributed leadership is the emergent effort of a group – whereby individuals pool their expertise and skills (Hulpia & Devos, 2009; Firestone & Martinez, 2007; Gronn, 2000; Day et al., 2004; Woods et al., 2004). Leadership activity emerges through both participant interactions with one another, and within and across the organizational structures (Spillane et al., 2001; Boylan, 2013). The acknowledgement of formal and informal networks within the organization serves as an empowering mechanism for all participants. Within distributed leadership, all individual participants do not need to execute leadership roles, but there must be a collective performance
distributed leadership is the sum of collective influence.

For distributed leadership to emerge, the following variables must be considered: level of participant involvement within the organization and networks; the quality of that involvement; and the degree of individual participant political skillfulness within the group (Kimura, 2013; Harris & Lambert, 2003). Simultaneously, the actions of formal leadership on the organizational structures; capacity support; and acceptance of emergent leadership, must be considered (O’Gorman & Hard, 2013; Hallinger & Heck, 2010b).

Teachers, as leaders, affect school improvement efforts through both formal and informal engagement (Margolis & Huggins, 2012; Mascall et al., 2011; Fullan, 2001; DuFour et al., 2004). With the emergence of leadership from organizational participants, there is a promotion of the possibilities for authority, power and responsibility for and amongst teachers (Spillane & Healey, 2010). The group interactions amongst teachers spur organizational creativity and development (Boylan, 2013; Day et al., 2004; Spillane, 2005), juxtaposed against bureaucracy and away from individual improvement efforts (Fitzgerald & Gunter, 2008; Sugrue, 2009).

**Group framework in distributed leadership.** Organizations employing distributed leadership practice generally recognize work groups that are small in size. While the number and position of the individuals involved differs from situation to situation, the greater the group size, the “more energy is expended on the maintenance” of a collective identity (Gronn, 2002, p. 435). As such, the format of distributed
leadership activity typically involves from three to seven people, including those in formal leadership roles (Camburn, Rowan, & Taylor, 2003; Pearce, 2004).

Those in formal leadership roles generally select the groups engaged with distributed leadership. This can pose a hindrance to collegial acceptance, as individuals enjoying the responsibility of distributed leadership – while emergent – are selected (Flessa, 2009). Leadership responsibilities must emerge from the individual participants, but the “conflation of power (-managerial relationship) and empowerment (leadership responsibilities)” can create obstacles to full implementation (Hopkins & Jackson, 2003, p. 98). Distributed leadership is contingent on both structural factors within the organization and individual capacity (O’Gorman & Hard, 2013). As the organization promotes individual efficacy, the interactions allow for the assumption of various roles and their incumbent responsibilities by additional participants.

Organizations employing distributed leadership generally structure and operate groups in one of two manners: either collectively, or in a manner that is co-performing. These actions reflect on the macro-organization as either institutionalized or interdependent practice (Muethel & Hoegl, 2012; Flessa, 2009). The potential for individual “shift[ing]” influence ultimately directs the work of the group (Harris, 2009b; Gibb, 1954) – whether it is formal or informal (Boylan, 2013).

While distributed leadership can be more “congenial” (Hatcher, 2005, p. 258) than traditional, hierarchical leadership, there are limitations to its practice. Groups must be “cohesive” with open communication and “mutual trust” (Hulpia & Devos, 2009, p. 566; see also Woods et al., 2004). There cannot be ambiguity regarding participant
involvement or role (Muijs & Harris, 2007), and goals and objectives must be defined and articulated (Woods et al., 2003; Pearce, 2004). As a group framework, distributed leadership is either formally sanctioned or informally opportunistic (MacBeath, 2009).

**Roles in Distributed Leadership**

The relationship of distributed leadership with formal and informal leadership is akin to the chicken-and-the-egg: which came first? Is distributed leadership a top-down or bottom-up initiative (Haris, 2004; Woods et al., 2004; Pearce, 2004; Fitzgerald & Gunter, 2008)? Summarily, it is both. Distributed leadership relies on the emergent interactions of individual participants regardless of position, but it is also contingent upon the organizational culture cultivated by the principal. Formal leadership provides and maintains the system to encourage the distribution of leadership.

**The Role of Formal Leaders**

While distributed leadership recognizes the “potential” for leadership from “many people,” successful implementation is in the way that leadership is “facilitated, orchestrated and supported” by those in formal leadership roles (Harris, 2009a, p. 173). Creating a non-hierarchical network of collaborative organizational learning “alongside and separate” from the traditional bureaucratic structure, serves to counter heroic leadership (Hatcher, 2005, p. 255). Thus, those in formal leadership roles must build and maintain structures to support individual capacity building (Mascall et al., 2011). This is recognized as a “leader-plus” aspect (Spillane & Healey, 2010).

There are, however, inherent risks in sharing and distributing leadership responsibilities. Regarding external, societal pressures, there are the implications
associated with the accountability measures with school reform efforts. Internally, there is the risk that individual, or groups of participants may hijack the organizational vision, or broadcast anti-organization behaviors. The most common practice to minimize these risks is to limit leadership involvement to a few participants, thus promoting division.

For distributed leadership to occur, those in formal leadership roles need to manipulate and support both their management and leadership responsibilities, promoting the role as an end result of those actions (Hopkins & Jackson, 2003; Pearce, 2004). Formal leaders have a responsibility to promote increased leadership capacity building in individual participants, while reinforcing a context for collective leadership activity (Mascall et al., 2011; Harris, 2003b; Coleman, 2011). Similarly, formal leaders must establish and communicate the vision for the organization prior to the distribution of leadership (Louis et al., 2010; Hord & Sommers, 2008). And ultimately, formal leaders must facilitate an organizational structure and culture to promote the distribution of leadership responsibilities (O’Gorman & Hard, 2013).

While there are suggestions that distributed leadership can be arrived at because of a charismatic leader (Woods et al., 2003; Woods et al., 2004), that is countered by the argument that distributed leadership consists of multiple individuals “with various tools” (Spillane, 2005. p. 143; see also Hartley, 2007). Regardless, distributed leadership does not promote leadership activity based on “superhuman actions” (Spillane, 2005; see also Leithwood & Mascall, 2008; Muijs & Harris, 2007). Instead, effective leaders lead the cognitive and affective life of the school, combining structural, political and educational
leadership aspects of the school with symbolic leadership and distributed leadership practices (de Lima, 2008).

The Role of Emergent Leaders

The engagement with collaborative activities distinguishes emergent participant leadership from formal leadership roles (de Lima, 2008; Sugrue, 2009; Thoonen et al., 2011). That participant leadership is recognized in the “interpersonal influence” within the organization to both participate with and affect collaboration (Louis et al., 2013; Harris, 2009a; de Lima, 2008). Because the sharing of knowledge is a defining characteristic of distributed leadership, there is a need for teacher leaders to model and participate in collaboration, and for them to “make” their colleagues collaborate with one another (de Lima, 2008, p. 166; see also Boylan, 2013).

While the sharing of knowledge across the organization is a key element of distributed leadership (Hartley, 2010; van Ginkel & van Knippenberg, 2012), there is a cynical concern that distributed leadership “merely cements” leadership as a hierarchical role to “monitor” participant work (Fitzgerald & Gunter, 2008).

Contrary to that consideration, emerging leadership promotes a “weakening” of organizational status (Hartley, 2007, p. 208) to improve the organization (Pearce, 2004; Day et al., 2004). The leadership activity that participants undertake can be both managerial and pedagogical (i.e. formal) (Muijs & Harris, 2007), and coaching and leading (i.e. informal) (Muijs & Harris, 2007; Pearce, 2004; Gronn, 2002). Emergent leaders cannot be merely re-tasked with administrative minutia, but with substantive
opportunities to affect the organizational structure (Hartley, 2007) with rewards and consequences (Sherer, 2008; Pearce, 2004; Gronn, 2002; Spillane, 2005).

While emergent leadership can be considered as a democratic practice in schools, it neither connects nor builds democratic leadership into the organizational structure. This is in part because emergent leaders are not elected – instead, they must navigate the micro-political aspects of the organization (Kimura, 2013; Hartley, 2007). All participants are neither guaranteed the right nor the ability to demonstrate leadership (Hatcher, 2005); and power is distributed moving from hierarchy to “peer control” (Harris, 2003a, p. 3; see also Sherer, 2008). Passive organizational actors tend to remain passive until trust, cohesion and acceptance for the organization have been demonstrated and reinforced (Woods et al., 2004). Contrary to this, and in recognition that participant leaders often have either limited or no formal authority (Sherer, 2008), if participant leaders are not appointed, but defined on the basis of popular appeal, there can be a resultant “distribution of incompetence” (Timperely, 2009, p. 220) and organizational “incoherence” (Hartley, 2010). In its most positive iterations, leadership emerges across the system – available to all participants, but limited by their individual capacity.

Leadership is a status contingent upon others’ perceptions (Gronn, 2002) – teachers perceive particular tasks as identified with leadership regardless of their network influence or involvement with those tasks (Spillane, 2006). Teacher leadership is often demonstrated informally (de Lima, 2008); and many informal teacher leaders do not ascribe to titular roles (Fairman & MacKenzie, 2012).
The distribution of leadership activities can result in self-promotion and collective-efficacy building, coupled with disagreement between the organization’s needs and what occurs. To that end, three considerations are put forth (de Lima, 2008):

- select or appoint certain teachers for formal roles;
- expect teachers already in middle-management type roles (i.e. department chairs) to fulfill leadership responsibilities;
- promote the exercise of leadership by all teachers.

Leaders – regardless of formal or informal status – must “shape” task representations for participants (van Ginkel & van Knippenberg, 2012; see also Day et al., 2004; Pearce, 2004). This shaping occurs through the sharing of knowledge across organizational boundaries, and considers the complexity (or simplicity) inherent in different tasks, and their relevance to the vision of the organization.

**Implications of Distributed Leadership Theory**

The implications of distributed leadership theory most notably extend to promoting enhanced organizational participant capacity and efficacy. This implication occurs through promoting and developing interdependence amongst participants. Distributed leadership promotes individual capacity simultaneous with a concept of “how one’s behavior” affects the organization and network (Harris, 2009a, p. 177).

However, the implications of distributed leadership extend beyond individual capacity building to the development of the mission and vision of the organization. For schools, these organizational implications are both holistic – school improvement efforts, and practical – increased student achievement.
Distributed Leadership and School Improvement Efforts

School improvement has been described as a “dynamic process” whereby schools develop the “breadth and density of instructional expertise” through collaboration relative to developing the school’s academic capacity [italics in original] (Hallinger & Heck, 2010b, p. 657). This dynamic nature of school improvement arises in “how [leadership] is distributed” [italics in original] (Spillane, 2005, p. 149).

The application of distributed leadership theory in school organizations promotes school improvement efforts (Halverson & Clifford, 2013; Camburn et al., 2003; Davis, 2009; Hallinger & Heck, 2010b; Jacobson, 2011). The notion of emerging leadership within the group encourages individual and group efficacy (Grenda & Hackmann, 2013). As participants of varying skills, knowledge and involvement interact, the subsequent culture and structure encourages “different forms of leadership to emerge and creates” possibility for organizational improvement (Day et al., 2004, p. 859; see also Harris, 2009a; Pearce, 2004).

Because teachers – as leaders – work with their colleagues to understand and realize organizational goals, school improvement efforts are enhanced by “build[ing] internal capacity for development” (Harris, 2004, p. 13; see also Hartley, 2007). This increase in capacity relative to organizational goals (Mayrowetz, 2008; de Lima, 2008, 2010) manifests in organizational commitment, and varies depending on involvement (Hulpia, Devos, & Rosseel, 2009; Hulpia, Devos, & van Keer, 2009).

“Purposeful leadership” promotes sustainable school improvement (Muijs & Harris, 2007, p. 111; see also Hess & Kelly, 2007; Boylan, 2013), and there is a positive
link between the distribution of leadership responsibilities and teacher “self-efficacy and morale” (Harris, 2004; Spillane et al., 2001). Principals who purposefully support distributed leadership efforts promote increased participation in decision-making and increased commitment to organizational goals and strategies (Leithwood & Mascall, 2008) – thereby promoting increased organizational efficacy.

**Distributed Leadership and Increased Student Achievement**

Effective formal school leaders enjoy an indirect positive effect on student achievement (Onorato, 2013; Harris, 2004; Louis et al., 2010; Day et al., 2009; Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008). In the contention that formal leadership “make[s] a disappointing contribution” to increased student achievement (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000, p. 123; see also Moore, 2003) there are “sustained” efforts to question how leadership roles affect a variety of school outcomes including increased student achievement (Hallinger & Heck, 2010a, 2010b; Mascall et al., 2011).

While there is little evidence regarding the direct effects of formal leadership on student achievement, there is ample literature regarding the “soft pathways” of leadership influence (Mascall et al., 2011). There are linkages between organizational support for teacher leadership and student achievement (Lumby, 2009; Margolis, 2008), as well as between individual participant engagement with collaborative activities and increased student achievement (Thoonen et al., 2011).

The assumption regarding formal leadership affecting student achievement is that it “changes teacher behavior.” While there is a connection between leadership and instructional practices (Louis et al., 2010, p. 315), that arises with the sharing of
leadership responsibilities relative to instruction. This gives rise to two questions (Louis et al., 2010; Harris, 2003a; de Lima, 2008):

- Do specific attributes of leadership behavior: sharing of leadership with teacher, development of trust among participants, and the provision of support – affect teachers’ work with each other and their classroom?
- Do these leadership behaviors contribute to student achievement?

Increased student achievement is connected with teacher-based perceptions: “focused instruction, professional community and teachers’ trust in the principal;” but not with principal behaviors: “instructional leadership or shared leadership” (Louis et al., 2010). This suggests that the distribution of leadership amongst participants has a positive effect on student achievement. Thus, teachers would do well to assume responsibility for the operation of the school, while principals should focus their practice on teacher capacity building (Jacobson, 2011).

**Influence of Network Theory**

The understanding that multiple participants within an organization collaborate to further the organizational goals gives rise to the confluence of network theory within the theory of distributed leadership (Boylan, 2013; de Lima, 2008, 2010; Fitzgerald & Gunter, 2008; Anderson, 2010). Networks, both those formal and informal, promote capacity building efforts (Hadfield & Jopling, 2012; Penuel et al., 2009; Hallinger & Heck, 2010a), which in turn, promote student achievement (Hallinger, 2010; Mulford, 2007) and overall school improvement efforts (Daly et al., 2010; Hallinger & Heck, 2010b).
The sharing of knowledge central to distributed leadership occurs through participation in practice and actions that are formal and informal structural elements of the organization (Oshima, Oshima, & Matsuzawa, 2012; Moolenaar, 2012).

Participants within professional networks acquire knowledge, participate with knowledge sharing, and create knowledge (Oshima et al., 2012; Coburn, Russell, Kaufman, & Stein, 2012). Subsequently, the organization improves as individual participants engage with each other in the distribution of that knowledge.

As a systemic response to external and internal pressures, distributed leadership practice promotes teacher leadership (Hadfield & Jopling, 2012; Boylan, 2013). The “closer” organizational participants are to teaching, the greater their effect on student performance (Robinson et al., 2008, p. 664). This runs contrary to the notion of the “trickle down” effect of leadership on teacher classroom behavior and student learning (Hallinger & Heck, 2010a, p. 99). Instead, the actions of distributed leadership are realized in a reversed mediated effects model (Hallinger & Heck, 2010a) considering collaboration the focus of leadership activity (Coleman, 2011). With the distribution of leadership responsibilities, organizations evolve into “social process[es]” with emphasis on “collective and systemic understanding” (Bolden, 2011, p. 252) that directly impact the capacity of the organization (Hallinger & Heck, 2010a; Leithwood et al., 2009b; Robinson et al., 2008).

Additionally, emergent groups within distributed leadership frameworks experience network density. This is because every participant has the opportunity to emerge as a leader, making it “technically impossible for any actor to enjoy high
centrality or to enjoy a high share of the overall centrality of the teacher network” (de Lima, 2008, p. 167). Thereby, distributed leadership systems promote low actor centrality coupled with low group centralization and high participant densities in the networks. This promotes “extended” leadership capability and capacity (Harris, 2009a).

**Barriers to Distributed Leadership**

There are major organizational obstacles – “structural, cultural, micropolitical” (Harris, 2004, p. 19) – that exist within schools making the creation, promotion and maintenance of distributed leadership arduous (Woods et al., 2004). Schools with hierarchies of “position and pay-scale” are unable to “instantly” respond to the fluid and shared reality of distributed leadership (Harris, 2004, p. 20). This is revealed through the challenge on authority and egos (Fitzgerald & Gunter, 2008), as well as on limited financial and material resources (Flessa, 2009).

Distributed leadership practice can appear to “seduce” teachers into assuming additional tasks and responsibilities without increasing resource distribution (i.e. salary, time) (Fitzgerald & Gunter, 2008). Allowing leadership to emerge is “risky” for principals, and as such, distributed leadership may not successfully reinforce commitment to stated organizational values (Spillane & Diamond, 2007). There can be a “tension” in developing trusting relationships and “manipulating” micro-politics in order to meet external expectations (Coleman, 2011, p. 302).

Distributed leadership practice can be hampered by the activities with which the group employing it are either tasked, or choose to task themselves. For distributed leadership to be realized, group performance tasks must be genuine leadership
responsibilities – not merely re-delegation of minutia (Flessa, 2009). The first problem to consider is that groups within organizations do not exist within a vacuum. Their actions and inactions not only have macro-level ramifications, but also are evaluated by others outside of the group (Maxcy & Nguyen, 2006). The second problem to consider is that groups employing distributed leadership are still answerable to formal leadership (Hatcher, 2005; Timperley, 2005; Kimura, 2013).

“Social influence is a two-way affair” (Spillane & Diamond, 2007, p. 9), and all participants, regardless of role, need to be fully invested in the vision of the organization. However, several factors serve as obstacles to the building and maintenance of trust based relationships, these include: individual participant autonomy, changes in traditional hierarchical roles (Gronn, 2002), inevitability of conflict (Flessa, 2009), relinquishment of power by formal leaders (Sherer, 2008), lack of benefit for everyone involved, group capacity, the possibility of groupthink, and external accountability measures.

Considering the benefits of collective action by teachers, many schools employ formalized collaborative structures (Coburn, Mata, & Choi, 2013; see also DuFour et al., 2004, 2008). Formalized collaboration develops a collective identity within small work groups of teachers as they focus their professional actions on improving instructional practices. While formally structured, teacher networks of influence can extend beyond those formal structures (Coburn et al., 2013; de Lima, 2010).

**Influence of Democracy in Education**

The emergence of leadership within a distributed leadership framework mitigates the “alienation and powerlessness” of individual teachers within schools, while
promoting the recognition that the “knowledge required to solve complex problems is dispersed throughout” (Hatcher, 2005, p. 254). Teamwork to counter perceptions of alienation and powerlessness (DuFour et al., 2008; Louis et al., 2010), and consultation to act on dispersing knowledge (de Lima, 2008, 2009) enhance organizational efficiency and denounce heroic leadership in schools. Modern reform agendas “cement” a division between formal leadership and followers by solidifying the role of the principal as the “apex of the school hierarchy” (Fitzgerald & Gunter, 2008, p. 333). External reform agendas reinforce accountability measures, impacting the individual(s) in formal leadership role(s).

Organizational work groups are either structured via top-down (formal) or bottom-up (informal) initiative (Woods et al., 2003; Gronn, 2002), and the leadership of those work groups is a “property” of the group (Woods et al., 2004, p. 449). Groups and organizations must recognize that participants “may or may not be pursuing common goals” (Lumby, 2009, p. 320). Teachers, as individual agents of the school, have the power to exhibit contrary behaviors – anti-organizational behaviors, differing goals, apathy, etc. – that are reflections on their own sense of self and organizational relationships (Kimura, 2013). As such, there is consideration that teachers have overt control over their own work (Pease-Alvarez & Thompson, 2014).

Considering the negative, pedantic view of directive, vertical leadership as a patronizing effort at organizational maintenance, distributed leadership emerges as a “collective democratic control” of organizational participants. Participatory decision-
making arose through a “confluence of post-war social-democratic tradition and ideas about direct popular democracy” (Hatcher, 2005, p. 262).

However, distributed leadership distributes the function of leadership while retaining the role of leadership. This is important to consider in light of external reform measures that hold the formal leadership accountable for the actions of the organization—regardless of the type of leadership activity practiced therein. There are two ramifications of these external pressures. First, the buck ultimately stops with the principal. While the less directive, vertical forms of leadership espouse increasing teacher participation in the management of the system, the principal remains accountable. This inherently promotes a return to heroic leadership (Arnulf et al., 2012). Second, teachers, as agents of the organization, are denied participation because of external pressures. Simplistic views of school and student success reduced to standardized test scores coupled with lockstep instructional and assessment programs, promote the loss of teachers’ “professional integrity” and identity (Mirra & Morrell, 2011; Pease-Alvarez & Thompson, 2014).

Through the emergence of leadership amongst all participants and boundaries, teachers can engage in the civic discourse of improving education and local school reform efforts. Individuals who were previously “invisible” within the organization become “visible” (Lumby, 2009, p. 320; see also Pearce, 2004).
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This study examines whether the collective efforts of teachers engaged in formalized collaborative structures – regarding curriculum, assessment and instructional practices – amount to a realization of distributed leadership. It is a consideration that shared experience must be analyzed from multiple perspectives in order to come to a complete understanding of the particular phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). The phenomenon of distributed leadership is examined within the context of teacher collaboration in existing formalized collaborative structures.

This study examines the question: what are teacher perceptions of leadership within an organization that employs the concept of formalized collaboration? Subsequently, this study examines the following sub-ordinate questions: Are formalized collaborative structures autonomous of an established hierarchy (assuming there is an established hierarchy); and, is distributed leadership able to develop within a traditional school organizational structure (hierarchical, top-down)?

The formalized collaborative structures studied exist at a traditionally organized (i.e. hierarchical) comprehensive public high school within a Midwestern state, and are comprised of those teachers within each academic department who teach the same courses. While the teachers worked as small groups over the previous three years to create and refine mutual course assessments, they enjoyed limited forays into curriculum and instructional practices. The directives to the groups originated top-down, and yet the work and its implementation occurred within each group according to its own needs.
Schools, as collective enterprises, improve and sustain best when teachers are working both in concert and collaboratively (Thoonen et al., 2011; Hallinger & Heck, 2010a, 2010b; DuFour et al., 2008). This is a departure from the traditional organization of roles within schools as top-down and hierarchical. Instead, schools where teachers share and learn from one and another are flatter, with less rigid roles (Louis et al., 2010). Roles are herein defined not as job titles, but as system-wide responsibilities; it is a role within the school system to implement and refine a particular curriculum and best instructional practices. Within formalized collaborative structures, teachers should share not only resources and techniques, but collectively examine practices and results.

As such, this study examines teacher perceptions of leadership within an organization that employs formal collaboration, and whether that amounts to the distribution of leadership responsibilities. The perspective of individual teacher participants is considered in light of emergent leadership, self and peer involvement within professional networks, and self and peer involvement with curricular improvement efforts. Participant responses are considered both individually, and as part of the collective effort. That collective effort is analyzed for its effect on both individual capacity building and the organizational structure. This complements the notion that emergent leadership arises within individual participants across organizational boundaries (O’Gorman & Hard, 2013; Hartley, 2007).

Improvement efforts involve multiple individuals connected with (de Lima, 2010; Anderson, 2010) and within the organization (de Lima, 2008; Daly et al., 2010; DuFour et al., 2008). Teacher leadership arises as both a goal and a support of school
improvement efforts (Sergiovanni, 1992; Mascall et al., 2011), and promoted in collaborative terms (Hallinger & Heck, 2010a, 2010b; Louis et al., 2010). To that end, distributed leadership arises as the leadership theory du jour (Harris, 2010; Hartley, 2007; Leithwood et al., 2009b), a reflection of the political and cultural zeitgeist (Hartley, 2007), mirroring the assumptions and expectations of an ever-democratizing society (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007).

This study is informed by consideration of professional networks within academic departments (de Lima, 2008, 2010) and in secondary school settings (Moolenaar et al., 2012; Coburn et al., 2012; Coburn et al., 2013). As such, this study considers teacher networks within their academic department, professional learning community and the macro-school. Additionally, this study considers how interactions within those networks influence participant capacity development and influence the organizational structure.

**Overview**

This study is considered as a single case study, examining for a specific phenomenon – the distribution of leadership within the context of teacher collaboration in existing formal collaborative structures. Phenomenology is an exploratory approach to qualitative research, “seek[ing] to explore, describe, and analyze the meaning of individual lived experience” (Marshall & Rossman, 2010, p. 19); participants in phenomenological research must describe “how they perceive [the phenomenon], describe it, feel about it, judge it, remember it, make sense of it, and talk about it with others” (Patton, 2002, p. 104).
This study examines the perceptions of teachers regarding leadership within an organization that employs formal collaboration. Participants were asked to reflect on the relationships and interactions of departmental actors regarding professional discourse of curriculum, instruction and assessment. The contention being that with the distribution of leadership responsibility over the organization (Spillane et al., 2001) there is harmony and disharmony – “symmetrical and asymmetrical relationships” (Sugrue, 2009, p. 366).

**Strategy of Inquiry**

The analysis begins with the assumption that there is an “essence to an experience that is shared with others who have also had that experience” [italics in original] (Marshall & Rossman, 2010, p. 19). These identified essences are identified as horizontals; though the primary concern remains with the entire concept, considering it “from many sides, angles, and perspectives until a unified vision” is arrived at (Moustakas, 1994, p. 58).

There is an inter-relatedness of objects and ideas within the world, and each individual’s perception of those objects and ideas is certain and true to his consciousness (Groenewald, 2004). The goal then is to establish what an experience “means” for the individuals involved (Moustakas, 1994, p. 13).

However, each person’s perspective is askew from the collective perception. It is within the askew-ness that the collective arises. The group reality of the experience is akin to chaos – it changes ever so slightly for each participant due to their varying dynamics and interactions with each other (Van der Mescht, 2004).
Research Design

In order to explore for teachers’ perceptions of distributed leadership within an organization employing formalized collaborative structures, a single case study was constructed with multiple participants interviewed. Participation was confined to teachers in three academic departments (an elective department, a core department, and the special-education department) at a large, comprehensive, public high school in a Midwestern state. Participation within the departments was further confined to three teachers each: the department chair, a veteran teacher (15+ years of experience), and a novice teacher (<5 years of experience). Participants were asked questions relative to the experience with curriculum and instructional leadership (both as recipients and providers of that leadership).

There has been a shift from studying how leadership is distributed to a “contextually situated exploration of how distributed and focused forms of leadership interact with one and another within a ‘hybrid configuration of practice’” (Bolden, 2011, p. 263). Accordingly, participants reflect on their horizontal influence within an organization structure established and maintained vertically. Additionally, there are “fundamental questions about why schools are organized around the professional labour of adults” that have not yet surfaced (Fitzgerald & Gunter, 2008, p. 332). As such, this study seeks to understand the influence of individual capacity for leadership responsibility within professional social networks.

This study was designed to examine teacher perceptions of leadership within an organization that employs formalized collaborative structures, examining if they are
autonomous of established hierarchies, and if distributed leadership can develop in traditional school organizational structures. The contention is that the interactions of the individual participants are a key aspect of distributed leadership (Angelle, 2010), and collaboration is the means of moving concepts of school leadership “beyond the heroic and the legendary” (Sugrue, 2009, p. 359). To that end, a consideration of participant influence on peers within both informal and formal structures is important (Daly et al., 2010; de Lima, 2010; Moolenaar, 2012).

**Integrity of Study**

This research is not an analysis of formalized collaborative structures, rather it is an examination of teachers’ perceptions of leadership within an organization that employs the concept of formal collaboration.

Interactions between teachers serve as the foundation for instructional improvement (Louis et al., 2009). The suggestion is that distributed leadership plays a part in building formalized collaboration – “extending leadership responsibility beyond the principal” (Harris, 2009a, p. 176). And there is an importance in examining interactions among teachers (de Lima, 2008; Daly et al., 2010) for effectiveness in capacity development and effecting structural improvement. The emphasis on and importance of teacher interactions gives rise to the need to analyze leadership practice from the group level (Spillane, 2006).

As such, the research question that both frames this research and was initially presented to participants was: what are teacher perceptions of leadership within an organization that employs the concept of formalized collaborative structures?
Subsequently, participants considered the following sub-ordinate questions: Are formalized collaborative structures autonomous of an established hierarchy (assuming there is an established hierarchy); and, is distributed leadership able to develop within a traditional school organizational structure (hierarchical, top-down)?

This study examines whether the collective efforts of teachers regarding curriculum, assessment and instructional practices within formal and informal professional social networks amount to a realization of distributed leadership. The concept of distributed leadership was examined for within the context of formalized teacher collaboration, as it was structured within existing organizational structures.

**Transferability**

One aspect of validating this study was by considering its transferability. While undertaken at one specific site, it is important to consider that because of the design of this study, the concept can be studied with similar results at other similar sites.

Specifically, this study consists of interviews with nine teachers from three different academic departments at one large, comprehensive high school in a Midwestern state. The teachers all had the opportunity to select to participate in this study, and subsequently to review the transcript of their interview and make changes. Beyond the initial interview questions, all subsequent questions arose within the setting of the interview. Thus, interview questions were not prearranged. The transferability of this study rests in the re-creation of the study circumstances: site selection, gaining entre, participant selection, and the use of generalized phenomenological research means in order to validate findings.
It is through the realization of the concept being studied that this study can be transferred. “Sufficient thick description” must be given in order to present a “proper understanding” of the concept being considered (Shenton, 2004, p. 70). Thus, by structuring the participant interviews so that the participants themselves exhausted the subject matter, a thick description of the concept is arrived at. Initial interviews began with the research question and evolved from there as the participants established their perception of the concept. Additionally, participants were afforded the opportunity to review the transcript of their interview, and as requested by either the researcher or participant, subsequent interviews were conducted in a similar manner.

This study is also transferable because it can be recreated. The steps to recreate this study have been carefully outlined in this chapter, including sections on gaining entre, selecting participants and securing their participation, interview methods and questions, and data analysis. The entire study can be recreated at another school site of similar or dissimilar size, or over multiple school sites. The essence of this study is in its analysis of the phenomenon of distributed leadership responsibility within professional social networks as defined by teachers.

Confirmability

Collective teacher efficacy, coupled with individual self-actualization and perception of ability, positively influence improved student achievement (Mulford, 2007, p. 168; citing Ross, Hogaboam-Gray, & Gray, 2004). The effects of collective teacher efficacy on student achievement are stronger than the direct link between socio-economic status and student achievement (Mulford, 2007, p. 168; citing Bandura, 1993; Goddard,
Hoy, & Woolfolk Hoy, 2004). Distributing a larger share of activity to teachers yields a positive influence on teacher effectiveness and student engagement. Similarly, teacher leadership has a significant effect on student engagement that far outweighs principal leadership effects (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000). Additionally, there is a positive relationship between the degree of teachers’ involvement in decision-making and student motivation and self-efficacy (Muijs & Harris, 2003).

This study is confirmable by recreation of the study at an alternate site. It is also confirmable with alternate participants at the same site.

Credibility

Leadership, at all levels of organizations, affects improvement efforts. Thus, leaders must focus their actions on capacity building to develop other leaders within the organization, who, in turn, focus on capacity building of other leaders (Fullan, 2001). In addition to analyzing for how leadership is distributed among staff members within a traditionally organized school that employs professional learning communities, this study adds to the body of literature regarding teacher leadership.

This study was designed to be credible by triangulating research findings. Interviews were conducted with three teachers from three different academic departments. Each of the teachers interviewed, respective of individual academic departments, were from one of three different career tenures: department chairperson, veteran, or novice. Figure 3 shows the triangulation of research findings in order to establish credibility of findings.

| Veteran Teacher | Special-education Teachers |
Because the participants were selected from similar strands, and their responses analyzed both individually and within subgroups, this study maintains credibility.

**Gaining Entre**

Entre to the school site studied was gained via the high school principal with the understanding and permission of both the teachers’ union and the department chairpersons. The researcher, as a former member of the school site studied, understood the informal and formal power relationships within the organizational setting, and how to navigate those relationships in order to gain access in order to interview them.

The researcher initiated contact with the school site via electronic communication with the school principal; who in turn formally announced the study to the school staff via his weekly written communication. Within one week, the researcher contacted the department chairpersons for the three academic departments, explaining the purpose of the study and arranging a time to meet with the members of the respective departments.

Meeting in person with the members of the respective departments, the researcher verbally explained the purpose of the study and solicited volunteers to participate. If no
volunteers were forthcoming, the department chairpersons together with the school principal would have selected participants for the researcher, and their non-volunteer status would have been noted (and considered in the analysis). Any non-volunteers, after meeting with the researcher to review the research process and ethical considerations, would have had the opportunity to decline participation. (There were no non-volunteers.)

It was explained to all participants that there were no known risks associated with participation in this study. Furthermore, it was explained to each participant that he/she had the opportunity to review the prepared transcript of his/her initial interview, and provide any ancillary commentary.

All participants had the opportunity to ask questions regarding the research process. Additionally, all participants were permitted to cease participation at any time.

**Participants**

Participation in this study was both confined to individuals within a specific, pre-determined group, and limited to a specific number of participants. This accounts for the phenomenological view that “the world is a community of persons,” where individuals “experience and know the other, not exactly as one experience and knows oneself but in the sense of empathy and copresence” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 57). Interview subjects were considered as “co-researchers,” exploring the “the features of a whole” concept as well as tangential “horizons” of that shared experience (Moustakas, 1994, p. 53). Accordingly, participants were asked to extend the meaning of horizons to further understanding.

This study was designed as an examination of teacher perceptions of leadership within teacher-based teams and within an organization that employs formalized
collaborative structures. Three academic departments were used for this study: English, Art, and Special-education. The English department was chosen as representative of the core academic departments (English, Math, Science, and Social Studies); while the Art department was chosen as representative of the elective academic departments (Art, Music, Industrial Technology, Business, Family Consumer Science, Career Education). The Special-education department was chosen because it is responsible for teaching subjects in all of the core academic areas for students across grade levels. Because of its wide and disparate teaching purposes, the Special-education department is an anomaly as an academic department – organized not around a singular discipline or collection of related disciplines (i.e. Social Studies); rather, it is organized around the application of different teaching techniques.

Three teachers from each of the aforementioned departments: the department chair, a veteran teacher (15+ years of experience), and a novice teacher (<5 years of experience), were separately interviewed. Participation was secured via written permission with an explanation of the research study, the research questions, and an explanation of any assumed risk and how participants may cease participation. Once commitment was secured, the researcher, who took notes and audio-recorded the interviews, individually interviewed participants.

**Interview Questions**

Because of the generalized phenomenological strategy employed by this study, questions were not prearranged; rather the researcher began the interview with an explanation of the study and the research questions, and then allowed the participants to
individually direct the conversation. Participants were asked guiding follow-up questions relative to their experience with curriculum and instructional leadership (both as recipients and providers of that leadership) within the formal and informal professional networks that they illuminated. Questions were asked to illicit the individual actors’ reflections on leadership responsibility, on the work of the professional learning community to which they belong, their perspective regarding the work within that group, the realization of the groups purpose, and their interactions with other staff members regarding curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices.

Interviews were structured to analyze the individual participants interactions with their professional world (Merriam, 2002). The collection of evidence from research participants was designed to question “all aspects of the construction of reality, what it is and what it is not, how it is organized, and so on” (Merriam, 2002, p. 4). Thus, this study employed a generalized phenomenological design structure. The essence of shared experience – how leadership is distributed among teachers – was shared and analyzed. It was the responsibility of the participants to share their perceptions, and it was the responsibility of the researcher to analyze the “underlying structures” of the experience by interpreting the provided descriptions (Moustakas, 1994, p. 8).

**Verification**

While the importance of data triangulation is well understood, it is important to note that there is a specific rationale to interviewing three teachers – albeit at different tenures in their respective teaching careers, from three – albeit different – academic departments. Data triangulation, through the involvement of three different kinds of
participants from three different academic departments serves to “contrast” and “validate” if similar findings are arrived at (Groenewald, 2004, p. 11). While all of the teachers interviewed for this study had common, organizationally constructed experiences – it is their respective, individual experiences and perspectives which provided both horizons of the analysis, and the validation of the centralized findings. Individual experiences were both formally structured by the organization (within the academic departments and within the prescribed formalized collaboration) and informally structured by participants (horizontal peer influence).

As for the number of participants proposed for inclusion in this single case study, two to ten participants allows for “saturation” (Groenewald, 2004, p. 11; Creswell, 1998). Thus, nine total individuals from three different academic departments allowed for saturation, validation and triangulation of the central phenomenon.

To further calibrate findings, verbatim interview transcripts were returned to the research participants (the “co-researchers”) for verification (Moustakas, 1994, p. 110). “Every intentional experience, regardless of how vague or ambiguous it may appear in its origin, intimates something and designates something” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 56), and those ambiguities may not come to light until re-examined by the participants.

In an effort to further establish verification of the research findings, the researcher presented the data analysis to the school principal and interviewed him regarding the findings. While this study is not an analysis of the effect of formal leadership on emergent leadership and horizontal influence, this additional interview step is included as a means of verifying the findings presented through the interviews with the teachers
Procedures

This study entailed five distinct phases: securing participation, interviews, transcription, validation, and analysis.

Phase one of this study was the identification of participants. This consisted of gaining entrance to the research site, presentation to the entire faculty of the research site via letter of the research study, and presentation to the three academic departments in person. The three participants (with the exception of the respective department chairs) self-selected to participate – though all of the participants had the opportunity, both during and after, to cease their participation. The final aspect of phase one consisted of the researcher explaining the risks of participation to each of the participants and securing their participation. For ethical considerations (Groenewald, 2004), participants were notified, in writing, of any implications.

Phase two of this study was the initial interview with participants. Interviews occurred individually and in a location identified by the participant. The initial interview began with the researcher explaining the purpose of the study and the research questions. The researcher then asked the participants to respond with their thoughts and asked follow-up questions to probe for a greater understanding of their understanding of the phenomenon. General guiding questions were used to ensure that perceptions were exhausted. Interviews lasted as long as the participant was willing to continue discussing their understanding of the concept, but generally lasted sixty minutes.

Phase three of this study consisted of the transcription of the interview. Following the separate interviews, and simultaneous with the preparation of verbatim
transcripts, the researcher memoed his collected thoughts, ideas and perceptions of each interview. This memoing occurred to bracket the researcher’s own presuppositions, and to allow for the concept to arise from the collected perceptions. This was done considering that “perception is regarded as the primary source of knowledge, the source that cannot be doubted” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 52).

As noted, the researcher took notes during the interview, but also transcribed an audio recording of each interview. Transcriptions were returned to each participant for approval and any further questions – phase four of the study: validation. Any subsequent interviews were also transcribed and returned to the respective participants for approval and further questions. This occurred until individual interviews and questioning exhausted an understanding of the concept being researched.

Verbatim transcripts were returned to the individual participants in order that they either acknowledged the completeness of the record, or subsequent horizons could be added. The essence of an experience needed to be adequately described so as to illuminate the “lived quality and significance of the experience in a fuller and deeper manner” (Patton, 2002, p. 106).

Phase five of the study consisted of the researcher analyzing each of the interviews for both common and disparate ideas. Through an analysis of all of the interviews a complete understanding of the concept was articulated.

**Data Collection**

As this study focused on discovering a shared perception, the emphasis in data collection was not on pre-structured sets of interview questions, and there was no
emphasis placed on organizational artifacts (i.e. meeting minutes, interoffice memoranda, organizational policy statements). Rather, the emphasis in data collection was on a well developed, and well-analyzed central research question. The research question was designed to elicit the full, conscious perception of the participant, with subsequent questions serving to support the main question, and the analysis thereof.

The heuristic inquiry process begins with a question that the researcher seeks to understand. The research question then seeks to illicit participant self-perceptions within the greater social construct (i.e. professional social network, macro-organization, etc.). The process is “autobiographic,” while also promoting a shared, collective “social – and perhaps universal” understanding (Moustakas, 1990, p. 15). The researcher engages in a search for understanding “human experiences,” where the participants’ understanding of those experiences rests in their perceptions and lived values. In order to arrive at that understanding, researchers “require a passionate, disciplined commitment to remain with a question intensely and continuously” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 15).

The concept studied was revealed via the research question (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The research question was “carefully constructed, every word deliberately chosen and ordered in such a way that the primary words appear immediately” in order to capture the attention of the researcher and participants (Moustakas, 1994, p. 59). Additionally, the interview between the participant and the researcher began in a manner to create a “trusting atmosphere” (Groenewald, 2004, p. 114). The researcher encouraged the participants to “take a few moments to focus on the experience, moments of particular awareness and impact, and then to describe the experience fully”
This exercise in establishing an atmosphere of trust for the interview was enhanced by the researcher’s prior involvement with the school site.

**Interview Structure**

There are suggestions for two formats to structure the interview session: unstructured, whereby the researcher “suggests” the topic but has few, if any questions prepared; and semi-structured, or focused, whereby the researcher introduces the topic, and then “guides” the interview by asking specific follow-up questions (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p. 5). While questions relative to the concept expected to be studied may be developed in advance, those may be “varied, altered, or not used at all” as the participant shares his experience (Moustakas, 1994, p. 114). The researcher must be responsive, and in the moment, with each participant. Good questions depend on the following elements: luck, relevant knowledge, a sense that “something is missing here,” and sensitivity to what the data says (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 75).

The substance of the interview questions, initiated by the primary research question, must encourage participants to fully develop and present their perceptions as well as emerging horizontals.

This study asked the initial research question to each participant, but asked subsequent, unscripted questions as the conscious response of each participant developed. The verbatim interview transcripts were presented to each participant for review prior to analysis. Subsequent, unscripted questions were asked as individually accorded, and added to the record.
Limitations and Delimitations

This study is limited by the researcher’s former involvement with the school being analyzed. The researcher was employed at the site for thirteen years, six as a classroom teacher, and seven as an administrator. As an administrator, the researcher was a principal of one the schools-within-the-school (during the period of time that the school was thus structurally organized), and an assistant principal.

The only delimitation of this study was its construction as a single case study of teachers’ perceptions of leadership within an organization employing the concept of formalized collaboration. This single case study was at one comprehensive, public, urban high school in a Midwestern state.

Researcher Bias

Regarding bias, as with limitations, the researcher freely acknowledges that he was formerly a participant in the organization studied. While this limitation could be a debilitating bias in other forms of qualitative research, because of the general phenomenological nature of this proposed analysis, the researcher’s involvement actually serves to further the understanding of the participants’ conscious perceptions. Researchers engaging in phenomenological studies “cannot completely divorce” from who they are or what they know (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 47). This involvement adds to the ability to establish a trust-based relationship for the interview, to ask good questions in the moment, and to analyze responses in light of contextual evidence.

In developing the line of reasoning to support phenomenology, Husserl was influenced by Descartes in developing a concept of bracketing each participant’s
perception of the concept. This includes bracketing the researcher’s own perceptions. Researchers also participate in “memoing” in order to capture field notes: “what the researcher hears, sees, experiences, and thinks in the course of collecting and reflecting” (Groenewald, 2004, p. 13). This adds to the “raising of knowledge above every possible doubt” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 26).

While the importance of returning verbatim transcripts of interviews to the participants to promote validation has been established, it is important to note that ultimately it is the perception – analysis – of the researcher that formulates the identified concept. The transcripts are “revisited, freshly, naively, in a wide open sense, from the vantage point of a pure or transcendental ego” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 33). The perceptions of each participant, including the researcher, must be bracketed to analyze for central understandings. There is “crucial value of returning to the self to discover the nature and meaning of things as they appear and in their essence” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 26).

While the researcher in this study was involved in the organization, his perceptions are bracketed and considered alongside the unique perceptions of each of the participants interviewed. The researcher cannot separate from his presuppositions and should not pretend otherwise (Groenewald, 2004). The poetic suggestion is that the subject matter, the participant and the researcher become integrated. The researcher stands alone and amongst the participants, analyzing as if initially seeing and reflecting so as to “awaken … consciousness” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 58).
Analysis of Data

Six phases of heuristic research guide unfolding investigations and comprise the basic research design: initial engagement, immersion into the topic and question, incubation, illumination, explication, and culmination of the research in a creative synthesis (Moustakas, 1990). This section will advance the final three steps: illumination, explication, and culmination.

Explication occurs as the researcher manipulates the collected data. This procedure involves a consideration of every horizon or statement relevant to the topic and question as having equal value, and subsequently labels and clusters meaning units into common themes, removing overlapping and repetitive statements (Moustakas, 1994). Finally, the researcher develops textural descriptions of the experience, and constructs the concept from those descriptions coupled with structural descriptions.

At this stage, the researcher reviewed each transcript for individual themes that emerged from each interview. These individual themes were compared across interview transcripts in an effort to prepare axial coding. From this coding, both common and dissimilar themes between the interview subjects were deduced. Common themes were presented as commonalities across the entire spectrum of interview subjects, across any one of the various subsets (i.e. novice teachers, core academic teachers, etc.), or across a plurality of subjects. Accordingly, the subset of teachers by which a theme emerged (or did not), added to the information considered for analysis.

There are seemingly infinite multiplicities of possible conjectures that relate to the question and can go together in a unified synthesis. An interpretative approach allows
the “socially embedded nature of human consciousness” to arise within the shared experiences and explications of the participants – these experiences are named considering the “subjectivity” they inspired in the participants (Willis, 2004, p. 4).

The empathetic approach to phenomenology affirms the application of bracketing in order to ask participants to “set aside” their experience with the concept and reflect on its value. Thus, participants in this study described their perceptions in a “language as free from the constructs of the intellect and society as possible” (Groenewald, 2004, p. 12). “Borrowed” names for experiences often carry commonly understood meanings and associations (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 115). These can be extended and developed; or they might bias the responses. Naming arises from the “commonality” of the shared experience that is individually iterated, as opposed to a name that is given and defined from the organization to the participants (Willis, 2004, p. 4). While the organization may officially refer to teacher’s planning together as a professional learning community; it is the name that the participants give to that shared experience that is defines the concept.

Data analysis consisted of the following systemic steps: review of each individual transcript for common words and phrases; axial coding of common words and phrases across all transcripts; naming of all coded common words and phrases; and consideration of which participant(s) did or did not proffer which common themes.

**Conclusion**

This study examines teacher perceptions of leadership within an organization that employs formalized collaborative structures, and whether they amount to distributed leadership. Subsequently, this study examines the following question: what are teacher
perceptions of leadership within an organization that employs formalized collaborative structures? Additionally, this study examines the following sub-ordinate questions: Are formalized collaborative structures autonomous of an established hierarchy (assuming there is an established hierarchy); and, is distributed leadership able to develop within a traditional school organizational structure (hierarchical, top-down)?

Nine participants from three departments at one Midwestern public high school were interviewed in order to establish the phenomenon in question. Interviews began by establishing the central research question, but individually evolved depending on the responses of each individual participant. Data was triangulated among the various participants, and transcripts of the interviews were provided to the individual participants prior to data analysis. Triangulation also occurred between initial interviews, researcher memoing, and follow-up and review of transcripts by the individual participants.

The data was analyzed by using methods prescribed by Moustakas (1990, 1994) in order to establish common meanings and to bracket shared experiences. Naming of shared experiences arose from the participants’ shared words. This process of illumination, explication and culmination drew the researcher to the arising perception as suggested by the participants.
CHAPTER IV
ANALYSIS OF THE FINDINGS

This study examined teacher perceptions of leadership within an organization that employs formalized collaborative structures, and whether they amount to distributed leadership. This was done considering the following central research question: what are teacher perceptions of leadership within an organization that employs formalized collaborative structures?

Additionally, this study examined the following sub-ordinate questions: Are formalized collaborative structures autonomous of an established hierarchy (assuming there is an established hierarchy); and, is distributed leadership able to develop within a traditional school organizational structure (hierarchical, top-down)?

The formalized collaborative structures studied exist at a traditionally organized (i.e. hierarchical) comprehensive public high school, and are comprised of those teachers within each academic department teaching the same courses. The formalized collaborative structures have been working over the previous three years to create and refine mutual course assessments, but their engagement with curriculum and instructional practices has been limited. The creation and organizational structure of the formalized collaborative structures originated with the building principal, but the maintenance and implementation has been left to the teachers within their respective departments. Similarly, the directives to teachers come from the building principal, typically delivered via the respective department chairperson. The curricular work, and its implementation, has occurred within each department according to its own perceived needs.
Research Design

Nine participants from three academic departments at one Midwestern public high school were interviewed in order to analyze for the phenomenon of distributed leadership. Interviews began by asking the central research question, and then allowing the interview to evolve as participants responded. Subsequent interview questions asked participants to discuss their involvement with curricular work, their peer’s curricular work, and how that work amounted to a demonstration of leadership responsibility within the organization.

Data were verified by providing transcriptions of the interviews to the participants for review and additional questions. Participants were each provided with the transcript of their initial interview, and asked to review for concerns, omissions, or additional considerations. Presented as part of the research findings, additional comments from participants are noted as such. Triangulation occurred among the various participants (considering their membership in different demographic groups: length of tenure, department affiliation), and between initial interviews and researcher memoing.

Data were analyzed using methods to establish common meanings and to bracket shared experiences (Moustakas, 1990, 1994). Naming of shared experiences arose from the participants’ shared words – for example, “trust” emerged as a shared experience of informal collaboration. Participants were asked the central research question and the interview evolved along the participant’s terms from that. The researcher guided the conversation by asking follow-up questions for additional consideration, either in the initial interview or in subsequent interviews. This process of illumination, explication and culmination drew the researcher to the emergent themes as suggested by the participants and their perceptions of the phenomenon.
Site Description

The site used for this study was a large, comprehensive public high school in an urban environment. Situated within the contiguous borders of its eponymous city (itself an inner-ring suburb of Cleveland, Ohio), the school site was the only public high school within the school district. Approximately 2,000 students were enrolled in the high school, grades 9-12; and the high school had a four-year graduation rate of 93%. Eighteen percent of the student population was enrolled in the free and/or reduced lunch program. Eighty percent of the graduating class (2012) went on to study at a four-year college or university. The student population was 80% African-American and 20% Caucasian.

There were 135 certificated staff members of the high school site (including administrators, guidance counselors, school psychologists, and teachers), and the average tenure of teaching experience was 14.2 years. Eighty-four percent of the certificated staff had a Master’s degree or higher. Teachers were responsible for teaching five classes daily, with no more than three of them being different courses.

While all teachers were supervised and evaluated via a vertical hierarchy, for the purposes of logistics, communication and curricular work, they were organized by academic departments (Art, Business, English, Family & Consumer Sciences, Foreign Language, Health & Physical Education, Math, Music, Science, Social Studies, Special Education, and Technology). Additionally, there were several unique programmatic offerings that the school offered, the majority of which were offered in concert with a consortium of nearby school districts as college and career programs.
Structure of the School

At the time of this study, the school was four years removed from a short-lived re-structuring as six smaller schools-within-the-school. This era of small schools began in 2003 with three years of extensive study and analysis conducted under the auspice of Knowledgeworks, Inc. with the financial support of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, followed by implementation in 2006. Dissolution occurred five years after implementation, when the district leadership determined that there had been no improvement in student achievement as a result of the reform effort.

School Improvement Efforts

Latent through all of the participant interviews was the constant organizational need to improve student achievement. The school consistently scored below average on statewide rankings. In 2011-2012, (the first school year after the dissolution of the small schools era, and the first with the school-wide emphasis on formalized collaboration) the school earned a Performance Index score of 86.5 out of 120, a distinction of being in “Continuous Improvement.” Additionally, the average composite ACT score was a 17.9, and the average total SAT score was 1286 (on a 2400 point scale).

Small Schools Era

All participants, including the principal, reflected that the school had been “searching for” (Bob) a “solution” (Sandy) to improving student achievement for many years. The grant-funded opportunity from Knowledgeworks, Inc. allowed the school to consider a holistic reform of the entire organization of the school’s staff. During the small schools era, the school site attempted to create and sustain six distinct schools within the physical plant of the one site.
While the small schools, as they were referred to, were supposed to be distinct, that distinction was relegated to separate areas of the building, separate student populations, and separate principals. The teachers, divided among the six small schools, continued to meet on a department level for the entire school site. Their organization as separate faculties was for evaluative purposes and implementing unique experiences for the students in their respective small schools (i.e. field days, field trips, speakers, etc.).

All but one of the participants (Timmy) had been on the staff of the school site during part, if not all, of the small school era. Participants noted that there had been two purposes for attempting small schools: increased personalization of the school for students, and improved student achievement. Participants suggested that the first purpose was realized (although no data could be referenced to support that contention), while improved student achievement remained elusive.

**Reform Efforts**

While this study is not an analysis of small schools, it is important to reflect, as participants did, that improvement efforts during the small schools era consisted of encouraging teacher leadership by decreasing hierarchical layers, as well as increasing professional development regarding specific collaboration strategies.

**Hierarchical layers.** Many participants noted that during the era of small schools they were able to speak with their respective principal whenever they had an issue. Participants used phrases such as “great,” “easy to speak with,” and “problem-solving” to describe their interactions with their respective principal. Contrarily, several participants noted a lack of “consistency” in the management of the comprehensive school site. (Only Laura and Timmy, the newest of the participants, did not make this remark.)
The ease of communication allowed participants, and their colleagues, to individually work with their principals to solve unique, individual problems (e.g. “how to help a particular kid on an IEP” (Sandy), “a new course idea” (Mary), how to acquire resources (Bob)). Yet, they also allowed for different teacher-principal interactions depending on the situation. While the participants enjoyed increased approachability and communication with their respective principals, they longed for greater machination of processes and procedures (e.g. “a kid could do something and be from one school and get suspended, and in another school not get any discipline” (Bonnie Jo), “we were a disjointed faculty” (Sandy)).

**Professional development.** Participants reflected that during the small schools era, they and their colleagues were offered opportunities to participate in a variety of professional development opportunities. Five of the participants noted that the era began with teachers traveling to “look at” small schools in various parts of the country (Mary, Sandy and Linda each remembered that they had each participated in one of these trips).

Participants had difficulty recalling the names of any of the professional development experiences. “We were supposed to be critical of our friends in one that I attended” noted Bonnie Jo. However, they each noted that the professional development experiences were “open” to anyone (Bob and Cindy), that many occurred during the school day, and that many of them had “follow-up” trainings (Bonnie Jo and Ellen). Seven of the participants noted that “they” (the respective principals) were “always asking” for staff to participate in different professional development. Bob and Sandy each additionally noted that teachers who attended professional development would be asked to present on it at a subsequent small school faculty meeting.
Structure Post-Small Schools

Upon the dissolution of the small schools era, the high school site began undertaking a different organization to improve student achievement. While there had been six principals (one for each small school) during the small school era, upon reorganization, the school district superintendent named one building principal. The building principal was a graduate of the high school, had begun his teaching career at one of the district middle schools, had begun his administrative career at the high school prior to the small schools era, and had recently been principal of another of the district’s middle schools. He had not been a part of the small schools era at the high school.

He built his administrative team with four of the former small school principals, placing one in the role of Assistant Principal for Athletics and Student Achievement, and the other three in the roles of Assistant Principal (each for a respective grade level). (The other two remaining former small school principals were reassigned to administrative roles in the district’s middle schools.) To complete the high school administrative team, the building principal promoted a middle school teacher to fill the role of Assistant Principal for the remaining grade level.

Over the course of the three years between the dissolution of small schools leading up to this study, three of personnel in assistant principal positions changed. Two of those personnel changes were for purposes of retirement, and the third left for a building principal position in another school district.

Implementation of Formalized Collaboration

Upon being promoted, the building principal immediately announced his intention to implement professional learning communities at the high school. While the collective
high school staff had studied professional learning communities during the small schools era, both the depth and fidelity of implementation differed by both individual teacher involvement and particular small school affiliation. Bob, Mary and Linda recalled discussing professional learning communities within the context of small school faculty meetings, although they each could not recall actually engaging in formalized collaboration efforts during the small schools era. Cindy, Ellen and Bonnie Jo (all of whom had belonged to the same small school) did not recall discussing, learning, or hearing about professional learning communities, but did recall discussing formalized collaboration techniques (again, they did not recall actually engaging with those techniques during the small schools era).

**Training.** To that end, the building principal immediately arranged for a group of staff members to learn about professional learning communities. All department chairs of the core academic departments (including Special-education and Foreign Language), as well as a representative of the guidance counseling department, a school psychologist, and two teachers (from different, but core academic departments), as well as each assistant principal, were invited to attend a multi-day, out-of-state conference regarding professional learning communities (keynoted by Richard DuFour, Rebecca DuFour, and Robert Eaker (see also DuFour et al., 2004, 2008)). Each staff member was purposefully chosen to attend based on perceived leadership capacity – titular or informal.

The principal and two department chair participants who had attended this professional development opportunity (Mary and Sandy) noted that while the direct effect of this exercise was to learn and understand the purpose of formalized collaboration, the indirect effect was to “come together” (Mary) after being “disjointed” (Sandy) during the
small schools era. All three remarked that sharing, meeting, and “just being together” (Mary) was important for promoting a shared identity and purpose as leaders within the building. However, while Mary and the principal both considered that shared identity and purpose extending to awareness and on-going appreciation (Mary) of professional learning communities (and their respective and interrelated roles in promoting that), Sandy fell short of that. Instead, she suggested that the shared identity and purpose demonstrated the respect for department chairs (from the administration) and the importance of a collective, school-wide faculty identity.

In the subsequent two years, the principal organized similar professional development opportunities for additional faculty. While both he and the assistant principals participated in those events, different staff members representative of each of the core academic departments attended each year. When considering why he had stopped organizing these trips, the principal at first suggested financial restraint, but also noted that both a critical mass of teachers with a conceptual understanding of formalized collaboration now existed, as well as a dearth of existing teacher leadership. “We were sending people who weren’t leaders back at school,” he stated.

Only two of the participants in this study participated in any of the professional development trips to learn about professional learning communities and formalized collaboration. This was an omission not lost on Ellen (the department chair for the Art department, nor on her departmental colleagues (Bonnie Jo and Cindy). “I’m not invited to all of the meetings,” Ellen stated. “How does he expect us to do it if [she’s] not part of the discussion,” echoed Bonnie Jo. However, the principal countered that all department chairs were expressly invited.
**Implementation.** Returning to the school from the initial professional development trip, the principal worked with the department chairpersons to implement the concept of professional learning communities as a means of improving upon the school and increasing student achievement via a formalized collaborative structure.

Meeting with all of the department chairs (from every department) in the summer (after the trip), and then monthly during the school year, the principal established a procedure for formalizing professional collaboration. The first part of this procedure was a structural change to the building calendar. Departments would now be expected to meet three times a month. Department chairs were expressly instructed to refrain from “talking to” (Mary) their colleagues for those meetings. Instead, department members were to be sub-organized by the various courses they were responsible for (e.g. English teachers teaching Freshmen College Prep English meet together, English teachers teaching Sophomore College Prep English meet together, etc.). Those teachers responsible for singleton courses (i.e. the only teacher responsible for Freshmen Honors English) were to meet with “the most appropriate” sub-group or the sub-group for their other course(s).

In addition to the structural calendar change, one of the grade-level assistant principals (the one whom the principal had promoted from the middle school) presented first to the department chairs and then to the entire faculty on the importance of organizing course curricula around “essential skills or knowledge.” In subsequent meetings, she discussed how to decide on those essential skills/knowledge, and how to organize instruction towards supporting students in acquiring those skills/knowledge (and
how to communicate those goals). Participants all reported working through (“struggling with” (Mary)) those ideas the new organizational structure.

**Naming of the organizational concept.** While a group of teachers had attended a conference for the express purpose of learning about professional learning communities, that name did not adhere to the concept as implemented at the site. Instead, every participant in this study – including the principal – referred to the departmental sub-groups of teachers as “teacher-based teams.” Participants were unsure as to where, or from whom, that name arose.

However there appeared to be representative power for teachers within the name. Participants, especially from the English department noted that there was “real support” (Mary) within the teacher-based team; that it was “genuine” (Laura), and “focused” (Bob). Teachers in the Special-education department did not reflect as positively on the teacher-based team concept within their own department, but did note its application in their perceptions and interactions with teacher-based teams in other departments. The teachers in the Art department only had one shared curricular offering around which to organize; thus their concept of a teacher-based team was “muddled” (Ellen) and still reflective of traditional department meetings.

Subsequent references to the specific structure of formalized collaboration at the site will use the nomenclature of the participants – teacher-based teams.

**Structural Influence of Leadership Responsibility**

The school site studied engaged a formal means of vertical influence on organizational participants. Directives originated with the building principal, occasionally disseminating through assistant principals, to either department chairpersons
and then to all teachers, or directly to the entire staff. Assistant principals were primarily responsible for student discipline, monitoring and evaluating teacher work, and occasional building logistics (both at the direction of the principal or their own undertaking, according to their individual disposition).

Department chairs were primarily responsible for managing department budgets; maintenance, ordering and organization of department materials; and suggesting class schedules for each department member. They completed those activities while teaching five classes (although department chairs in core academic departments (including Special-education) only had four classes to teach.) As a collective group, department chairs served as an advisory group to the building principal. This occurred primarily in monthly, group meetings where the principal relayed his expectations regarding the curricular work of the teachers, and department chairs reviewed their department’s work either “against” (Ellen) or “with” (Mary) that of other department’s.

Individual teachers met as a collective faculty once a month in a whole-school staff meeting. Three times a month they met within their teacher-based teams, which were arranged within their respective academic departments. The organization of individual teacher-based teams was left to the arrangements of the department chairperson, who typically worked in concert with department members to ensure that everyone was in the teacher-based team for his/her primary course, and that all teacher-based teams had ample participation. Figure 3 shows the macro-organizational hierarchy of influence and leadership responsibility within the high school site studied.
Those lines marked as such (                       ) denote evaluative influence of leadership responsibility.

Those lines marked as such (                       ) denote non-evaluative influence of leadership responsibility. In these relationships, leadership influence is restrained to progress monitoring, and communication of organizational goals.

Figure 3

Hierarchy of Influence and Leadership Responsibility at the School Site

While teachers typically taught up to three different courses, they could only feasibly belong to one teacher-based team. Additionally, several teachers had the sole responsibility for particular courses (herein referred to as singleton courses). As such, those teachers not assigned to participate in teacher-based teams for particular courses (either by exception or individualism) were forced to either structure their own means of collaborative support (informal networking) or forego it. Figure 4 shows the influence of leadership within each of the academic departments.
Those lines marked as such (\[\rightarrow\]) denote evaluative influence.

Those lines marked as such (\[\cdots\longrightarrow\]) denote non-evaluative influence. In these relationships, leadership influence is restrained to progress monitoring, and communication of organizational goals.

**Figure 4**

Influence of Leadership within Academic Departments

The Special-education department was the exception to this organization being that it’s collaborative structure was contingent upon teacher assignments. Those Special-education teachers assigned to co-teaching roles (working with colleagues one-on-one in other departments) met with their co-teaching partners’ teacher-based team twice a month. Those Special-education teachers assigned solely to intervention courses (where the curriculum was so significantly modified that students enrolled were not receiving the general education curriculum) met twice a month. Regardless of individual assignment, the department met once a month to review procedures (i.e. rules, laws, procedures, etc.)
Participants

Solicited from three different academic departments, participants represented the English, Art and Special-education departments. Demographic information on each of the participants is presented in Table 1: Demographic Information on Participants.

Table 1

Demographic Information on Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Academic Department</th>
<th>Teaching Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ellen</td>
<td>Art</td>
<td>26 years of teaching experience; Department Chair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bonnie Jo</td>
<td>Art</td>
<td>25 years of teaching experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cindy</td>
<td>Art</td>
<td>12 years of teaching experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>28 years of teaching experience, 25 in this school district, 15 at this school; Department Chair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bob</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>18 years of teaching experience, nine at this school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laura</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Eight years of teaching experience, five at this school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandy</td>
<td>Special-education</td>
<td>27 years of teaching experience; Department Chair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linda</td>
<td>Special-education</td>
<td>25 years of teaching experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timmy</td>
<td>Special-education</td>
<td>Four years of teaching experience; three at this school</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Emergent Themes

Three major themes emerged regarding the primary research question. Participants repeatedly discussed varying levels of understanding regarding the meaning and effectiveness of the work that they were engaged with. Similarly, there was a wide disparity in the definitions of leadership that emerged from participant responses. Finally, participants perceived disconnect between teachers and administrators; a disconnect grounded in perceptions, but reinforced in the distributed and evaluation of the work.

In consideration of participant reflections on teacher-based teams and the organizational structure, it became important to consider participant reflections of both formal and informal collaborative structures, as well as participant leadership within both of those structures. It was through an examination of both formal and informal collaboration that the aspects of distributed leadership emerged as a part of organizational structure. To that end, distributed leadership, as considered by the participants, emerged only in respect to informal collaboration, as one teacher leading another and vice versa. This is contrary to literature regarding distributed leadership, which considers that leadership must emerge from organizational participants (Harris, 2009) and be stretched over the organization (Spillane, 2005). According to participants, there were no opportunities for this to occur within this school site.

The final emergent themes were relative to the subordinate research questions: is formalized collaboration autonomous of an established hierarchy (assuming there is an established hierarchy); and, is distributed leadership able to develop within a traditional school organizational structure (hierarchical, top-down).
In a subsequent interview with the principal, distributed leadership was considered as a “by-product” of the work of teacher-based teams. To the principal, it was far more important that teachers collaborate within their teacher-based teams on the work of identifying and analyzing the effectiveness of their instruction and assessment practices. While he was certain not to dissuade leadership amongst teachers, the primary intent of formalized collaborative efforts was not to enhance leadership opportunities for individual staff members, but to increase student achievement.

The answers to each of the research questions arose within the context of the emergent themes. The emergent themes and answers to research questions are detailed in Table 2: Questions, Emergent Themes and Answers. Answers to the research questions suggest that teachers did not perceive their own (or their colleagues’) leadership within the operation of the school. Instead, teachers recognized informal peer collaboration as the primary means of soliciting and receiving assistance relative to curriculum, instruction, and/or assessment. Leadership was viewed as the purview of those with titular authority, and separated from the responsibilities of those involved with teaching.
Table 2

**Questions, Emergent Themes and Research Answers**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
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| What are teacher perceptions of leadership within an organization that employs the concept of professional learning communities? | Purpose, effectiveness, and benefits of collaboration                         | • Improved practice  
• Process, procedures, resources  
• Support and advice | There is disconnect between formal leadership and teachers.  
Leadership is both the sharing and managing of resources (including knowledge).  
Leadership is associated with formal, titular roles. |
|                                                                                   | Leadership                                                                     | • Self-efficacy  
• Group frustration  
• Trust  
• Titular authority  
• Advocacy |                                                                                      |
|                                                                                   | Disconnect with administration                                                 |                                                                              |                                                                                      |
| Are professional learning communities autonomous of an established hierarchy?     | Benefits of informal collaboration over formal collaboration                    | • Common subject  
• Respect  
• Mutual free time  
• Knowledge  
• Co-teaching | Effective collaboration cannot be forced.                                      |
| Is distributed leadership able to develop within a traditional school organizational structure? | Leadership within teacher-based teams                                          | • Structure  
• Distributed leadership  
• Collaboration versus leadership | Not unless ordained by formal leadership and supported by teachers.             |
Teacher Perceptions of Leadership

Participants reflected on their perceptions of leadership, within themselves, their colleagues, and formal (titular) leaders. They defined leadership in terms of specific attributes and roles, recognizing it within personnel with titles associated with leadership roles (e.g. principals, assistant principals, department chairs, and instructional coaches). However, the amount of credibility and authority attributed to colleagues was not dependent on title, but on perceived value in the interactions.

For example, defining leadership as “one person directing another,” “or guiding another,” Bonnie Jo recognized leadership within her department chair – she “kind of directs our conversations and keeps it flowing.” However, she also recognized leadership in other colleagues because of their “helpful[ness]” and knowledge, and in still other colleagues because of their willingness to take risks coupled with sharing those lessons with others in a non-demonstrative manner.

Similarly, to Cindy, leadership was characterized by sharing and creating – “being able to bring new ideas to the table. Being able to introduce new things in our classrooms, and share it with the group.” However, she coupled that with an acknowledgement of leadership that moved beyond creativity and sharing, instead focusing on authority – “having some control over what we’re doing.”

This delineation between leadership characteristics separated collaboration from leadership. Collaboration, as it emerged from participant responses, became associated with sharing of knowledge and time, while leadership was more often associated with managing processes, procedures and resources.
The definitions of leadership that emerged from the participants varied with their departmental affiliation. The participants from the Art department each demonstrated a desire for leadership that organized and maintained clear management tasks, and checked frequently for correctness. This was exemplified in Ellen’s (department chair) reflection on how she used to lead the department (“ordering supplies, organizing display cases”) and her confusion with the current collaborative structure (“I feel stupid,” “I don’t know if we’re doing this right,” “I just tell them [her department] I don’t know.”)

Similarly, the participants from the Special-education department noted group frustrations with confusing procedures and a sense of being overwhelmed. They stated a desire for heavily involved central leadership coupled with the time to talk through frustration with each other (free of evaluation). And, just as the department chair for the Art department suggested equating her titular leadership role with completion of management tasks, so to did the Special-education department chair. Sandy went further, noting that an assistant principal assumed the responsibility for both creating the agenda for department meetings, and “running” the meetings. The Special-education department, so fixated on proper completion of “procedures” (Timmy) and “forms” (Linda), completely deferred its leadership responsibility and management to administration, but retained the leadership responsibility for advocacy and efficacy. Sandy noted that she has “had to advocate on behalf of teachers” with both the administration and the teachers’ union, while Linda noted it was important to have “a voice.”

The participants from the English department were alone in considering their own and their colleagues’ (beyond the department chair) involvement with leadership in
positive terms. Each of these participants noted initial confusion with the process of formalized collaboration, but also reflected on how they worked through that confusion within their teacher-based teams and with the support of their department chair (she in turn gave credit for support to her teacher-based team and to other department chairs).

Participant responses to the central research question suggest that there was a disconnect between formal leadership and teachers; that leadership is associated primarily with formal, titular roles; and that when collegial, teacher-based leadership is acknowledged, it involves sharing and managing resources.

**Personal Leadership**

The responsibility and execution of leadership activity was considered as it did or did not manifest in the individual participant, with participants reflecting on the self-efficacy and knowledge necessary to personally realize the responsibility of leadership. In this light, leadership was considered as an activity that anyone could demonstrate; however, participants suggested that it was reserved for those in formal, titular roles.

Mary reflected on her personal leadership within three distinct contexts:

- as a collegial participant in a team – “we take suggestions from anyone”;
- as an instructional coach – “there are so many ways you can be helpful. It’s not necessarily academics, it’s filling the need. And you need someone like this in a big school – who runs interference for the teachers; and
- as a formal leader – “communicating [the principal’s vision],” “you have to run these meetings, and you have to do this, and you have to do the budget, and you
have to do the inventory, and all this other stuff – stamp those thousands of books that come in.”

These three contexts neatly arranged the paradigm of personal leadership: co-participant, coach, and manager.

**Self-efficacy.** The self-awareness necessary to effect change and management of the curriculum, instruction and assessment process was something that each participant reflected on at length. Depending on both tenure and departmental affiliation, participant responses ran the gamut from fully aware of both their individual potential and responsibilities, to those individuals either unaware of how to be involved or unwilling to become involved in leadership.

As an example, despite acknowledging a “consistent” central leader, Linda proffered that “anyone” within the Special-education department could assume a position of departmental leadership. While she did not want this mantle of responsibility herself, she did want to be respected by “younger” teachers as a “teacher who has wisdom.” Similarly, she did not want to encourage other teachers within the department to attempt demonstrating leadership, as that could create “splintering,” and the rise of “cliques.”

Thus, leadership, to her, was reserved for those in specific roles, or fulfilling specific responsibilities. The activity of leadership, by her declaration, was equated with managing task completion (“putting together a universal form”), while the function of leadership was to be respected. “Anyone” could act as a leader, but only those with “wisdom” actually fulfill the expectation. This suggests that leadership was not distributed amongst the department members, but instead was both appointed by the
administration, and emergent. Coupled with Timmy’s assertion that “there [were] always teachers willing to do something” and Sandy’s consternation that there were “certain others who can be relied on,” Linda’s declaration on the role and function of leadership is simple – anyone could be a leader, but leadership was recognized in those with wisdom (who completed tasks and shared their efforts) and those with a title. Thus, leadership was reserved for those few willing to act on and with it.

**Experience.** This concept of leadership manifested in wisdom was echoed in other participants who suggested that veteran teachers (especially, as Laura noted, those “who like kids”) had expertise to offer others. This was voiced specifically by Mary and Laura in the English department, Sandy and Linda in the Special-education department, and Bonnie Jo in the Art department. Contrarily, Bob and Timmy suggested emergent leadership among younger teachers with “energy” (Timmy) and “shared values” (Bob).

Contrary to the assertion that leadership could emerge from “anyone” Linda, Cindy, Laura, and Bonnie Jo, each shrugged off the notion that they personally could assume that role. Each of these participants divided leadership into responsibility and role; and while they were each willing to act with the responsibility (“with my team” (Laura), “in the department” (Bonnie Jo), “help[ing] the department chair” (Cindy)), they were not willing to assume the role. Both Cindy and Linda grew frustrated with the questioning – suggesting that leadership was a hollow term (“I feel like the more we talk about it, the less it means” (Cindy)); while Laura and Bonnie Jo each pondered why any teacher would look to them for leadership. Instead, participants (including Bob, Mary, and Sandy) preferred to be respected by their colleagues, without assuming a formal role.
Both Bonnie Jo and Laura suggested their personal leadership was manifested in their willingness to try new things within the confines of their own classroom. However, on further questioning, they neither perceived themselves as leaders, or as being viewed by others as leaders. This became a situation of a lack of self-efficacy, as they also reflected that they perceived others as leaders because of how they taught (“I think they’re good teachers, so I must think that they’re good leaders” (Bonnie Jo)). While they respected demonstrations of good teaching, and equated that with collegial leadership, neither Bonnie Jo nor Laura desired to share their personal trials, positive or negative, with their respective teacher-based teams – they feared being perceived as “showy” (Laura).

**Knowledge.** In addition to self-efficacy, participants reflected that knowledge was an integral attribute in order to demonstrate leadership. Ellen noted that “true collaboration” entailed teachers of the “same subject” “help[ing] each other out.” This “help” involved “brainstorm[ing] strategies,” “look[ing]” at [each other’s] “assessments” and “data analysis,” and “tell[ing]” them, based on our knowledge, what … to approach differently.” On further questioning, Ellen added “appreciation” both for each other, and for “what they have” to her list of requirements for collaboration.

Thus, in order for a teacher to be recognized by her peers as a leader, she had to be both perceived as knowledgeable, and self-aware of her knowledge. Linda referred to this as “wisdom” inherent in “veteran teachers;” while Bob suggested that “younger” teachers “hopefully” viewed him as someone with good ideas.

Alternatively, Linda recognized the joint leadership evident in her co-teaching relationship based in the mutual respect they each had for the other’s knowledge (he for
her knowledge of interventions, and she for his knowledge of content and classroom management. While she stated a disagreement with formalized collaboration (lamenting the inherent “messiness”), she also reflected on the fruitfulness of collaboration within her co-teaching partnership – “collaboration happens almost automatically.”

Bob also noted his personal leadership in attempting – over the course of his tenure at the school – to change the curriculum. Recent changes to the curriculum he attributed to the “equality” experienced by all participating teachers, as well as “cultural changes” within the school and “pressure” from the state and federal governments as well as the community. Subsequently, he experienced an increase in his personal leadership – there was “less push-back” to his suggestions for curricular change.

However, Bob believed he was perceived as a leader by his colleagues regarding educational technology, not curriculum. It was not until later – when defining the qualities of a teacher leader – that Bob again referenced his work in curricular change. And this he did in passing by use of the personal pronoun “we” to connect himself with “younger teachers” – with whom he might “share” common “values” for the department.

Thus, self-perceptions and awareness of knowledge were important to establishing and reinforcing a perception of personal leadership. Those participants who did not perceive their self-awareness and knowledge base, downplayed their opportunity to demonstrate leadership, either as role or as a responsibility.

**Peer Leadership**

Participants expressed discomfort considering their own personal leadership, but had less difficulty locating the role and responsibility (often intermingled) in their peers.
There was a desire to note leadership within others: Bob noted he was “looking” for leadership; Linda lamented that her department “had asked” for others to demonstrate leadership, and Mary noted that teachers had the “opportunity to participate.”

Peer leadership emerged both in informal collaboration and formal collaboration relationships. The difference in the trend was in the sub-group that the participants belonged to: neophyte teachers found leadership in informal collaboration, while veteran teachers (including department chairs) considered it in both formal and informal collaborative relationships. This was despite veteran teachers desiring to be respected for their “wisdom” (Linda) beyond formal collaborative structures.

As a young teacher, Timmy noted that he “listened” to what his co-teaching partner suggested for lesson planning, but “just sat there” in both his formal teacher-based team and department meetings. Laura considered that she “looked” to teachers who “had been around” and who were willing to “share” materials (especially if “they liked kids”). Her involvement with her teacher-based team was to “move [discussions] along,” and ensure that forms “gets filled out.” Cindy described informal collaboration as a “real rich time” where she learned “practical” ideas from others to “immediately implement” in her classroom, while her involvement within the formalized collaborative structure was stilted by her lack of direct involvement with the shared curriculum.

Alternatively, veteran teachers considered that there was leadership potential in both their informal collaboration colleagues (“they always have ideas for me” (Bonnie Jo), describing it as a “marriage” with mutual sharing (Mary), “he shares what he knows with me” (Ellen)), and in their formal collaborative structures.
**Group frustration.** As an aspect of peer leadership, participant frustration with their respective groups arose as an obstacle to formal collaboration. Frustration also served as motivation for informal collaboration, encouraging participants to seek professional fellowship by their own means.

Considering the leadership required to facilitate formal collaboration meetings, Ellen noted that it was “very frustrating,” and voiced specific frustration maintaining the “focus” of her colleagues. Like the other department chair participants, she adroitly noted that while she had no authority to compel followership, she was expected to orchestrate the completion of departmental tasks – summarily, a concern that department chairs had been given “way too much responsibility.”

Ellen’s perception of “too much responsibility” was clarified in her perception of a lack of “training” to support the execution of that responsibility. Leading the Special-education department, Sandy’s lament with her colleagues was the diasporic nature of their curricular offerings – “we’re a fractured department.” And Mary, leading the English department, was frustrated with the varying amounts of fidelity with which different teacher-based teams engaged with the curricular work. She noted that as the department chair, it would be useful if she could be a part of each teacher-based team discussion, but it would not be “practical.”

The department chairs were frustrated leading a process with no formal authority, having teachers involved in many simultaneous projects, and not feeling adequately trained. Teachers also were frustrated with the group construct of formalized collaboration, mirroring those of their respective department chairs.
In the Art department, both Bonnie Jo and Cindy expressed frustration with other department members for “not doing the work,” “being off-task” and “having no clue.” This echoed Ellen’s frustration with managing the group discussion. It was also interesting considering that the Art department had one teacher-based team organized around their one shared course. Of the three participating teachers, only Bonnie Jo taught that course, yet all three were frustrated with the perceived lack of collegial engagement.

In the Special-education department, both Linda and Timmy noted a similar lack of engagement among teachers. Linda suggested that “anyone” had the opportunity to lead, and suggestions (regarding any number of departmental issues) were solicited. Alternatively, when asked if he felt he had a voice in his department meetings (as opposed to the teacher-based teams with which he affiliated due to academic content), Timmy responded: “I feel like I am heard. I don’t know if necessarily what I say does good. I don’t think it goes anywhere past that room.”

Within the English department, Bob and Laura each noted concerns with differing levels of fidelity of implementation among teacher-based teams. Laura noted that the collaborative process empowered individual teachers to affect instructional and curricular change. Her lament was in the “routine[ness]” of the prescribed process, noting that the prescribed process was the empowering vehicle for enhancing teachers professionally. Her particular teacher-based team often went through the prescribed steps, and then discussed off-task topics – the “routine” led to “boredom” and “it doesn’t mean as much.” Contrarily, Bob suggested that the process “structured the discussion,” and that
“it helps to have the department chair as part of your teacher-based team.” He suggested that other groups had issues with “fidelity.”

**Trust.** Just as frustrations with the group construct affected peer leadership, so did individual perceptions of trust. Participants, regardless of tenure or department, consistently described collaborative relationships in terms of “trust.”

Timmy cautioned that collegial trust was paramount to the successful functioning of the group. When expounding on a shared lack of self-efficacy, he suggested that he (and other Special-education teachers) would “go to someone [they] can trust, that you don’t have to worry about going behind your back, saying: hey this person doesn’t know what they’re doing.” Laura echoed this concern regarding peer perceptions – “going behind your back” – in her consideration of whom she informally collaborated with, and Mary’s consideration of providing coaching for “younger” teachers.

Linda’s disdain for the term leadership was countered by her reflection on her co-teaching partner, whom she described as “great.” He had, by her recollection, insisted on her demonstrating increased presence in a core academic classroom, unequivocally stating, “let’s put you up there front and center.” As such, by his leadership and trust in her ability, she grew professionally. For that to occur, that trust had to be reciprocal – “I trusted his judgment.” The reciprocity of trust was also suggested by Bob, who noted “learning from other teachers “and hoping” they learned from him; and Cindy who “shared” with her friend, noting they “bounced ideas off each other.”
**Respect.** The concept of “respect” in effective collaboration was intermingled by participants with “comfort[ability]” (Cindy). These two terms were not mutual, rather distinct. To that end, Bonnie Jo suggested:

I just like to be able to share my thoughts and opinions without being…with respect. I don’t like someone shooting down your ideas and being close-minded. Just having that freedom to exchange thoughts and ideas. Because when there is someone shutting you down and not listening, or always trying to make sure that they’re … what they have to say is the most important or the right answer, it kind of makes you feel like oh, well, okay. And that I think, would break it down a lot.

While she did not state mutual respect, mutuality is suggested in her use of the word “exchange” to describe the action of the collaborative environment.

Laura was one of the few participants who noted that “some teachers are weird about sharing things,” and so formalizing the benefits of informal collaboration were difficult. She described this conundrum as the “wrong people in the wrong place” and emphasized that if she and her informal collaborative partner were on the same team, they would benefit from both mutually “sharing resources” and the rigorous analytical process of the formal collaboration. Bob, while quick to foresee the “benefit” to formalized collaboration, noted that informal collaboration was more fruitful because it was more “interesting” and “voluntary” – “mutual interests [are] already established.”

While most reflections of trust emerged from informal collaborative considerations, the three department chairs suggested that because “anyone” could...
demonstrate and assume a leadership role within the department, they trusted their colleagues. Sandy stated that the intent of formal collaborative meetings was to “feed off each other’s brain for help.” Ellen suggested that she “asked” others to take on tasks, and Mary noted that within her teacher-based team, all participants “could participate – have a voice.” However, each of their reflections of trust, within the construct of formalized collaboration, were based in the assumption of understanding, belonging, and respect. They each identified separate informal collaborative relationships, grounded in reciprocal “trust” where they could voice “new ideas,” raise “questions” and be free of “judgment.”

As such, they captured the disconnect between the two types of collaborative relationships. Formal collaboration is professionally rigorous, but not based in mutual sharing and appreciation. Informal collaboration is genuine and supportive, but only as rigorous as the participants want it to be.

**Formal Leadership**

Ultimately, participants reflected on leadership as it manifested within those with formal, titularly-recognized authority: administration and department chairs. Additionally, a few participants (Mary, Sandy, and Timmy) included the identified role of instructional coach in their consideration of leadership manifest in formal leadership.

In general, participants suggested a diminishing of trust and collaboration as the leadership manifest in evaluative authority and understanding and communication of the formalized collaborative process increased. As an example, Bob suggested that the line between leadership and collaboration was “grey,” but he listed individuals with positional, titular authority as leaders, and reflected that his respect for them was based in their
“willing[ness] to give up some power so that there is collaboration.” Thus, he saw power as being antithetical to collaboration, and power as being based in the authority of formal leadership. This was despite his reflection that leadership involved affecting evolutionary change and motivating others.

Role of the department chair. Participants in each of the departments noted the authority manifest in department chairs. That leadership was demonstrated by communicating the principal’s vision and the process for formalized collaboration, participating in that process along-side their colleagues, and managing both the process and other recumbent administrative tasks. It was hampered by the simultaneous lack of knowledge and closeness to administration, and the lack of evaluative authority.

Both Bonne Jo and Cindy noted that Ellen’s leadership was situated in her communication and “organization” of the formal collaborative process. However, they also noted she was hindered – as the department chair of a non-core academic department, by a lack of engagement with the principal and lack of professional development on the process. Bob and Laura, who noted Mary’s knowledge of the process and “expectations,” also explained this contention of a department chair’s leadership being manifest in communication.

Similarly, Bob and Laura noted appreciation for (“respect” (Bob)) Mary’s participation in the formalized collaborative process. As the role of the department chair was inclusive of teaching, department chair’s had no choice but to participate in the process. Thus, this “respect” is interpreted as a means of separating the participatory leadership of the department chair from the hierarchical leadership of administration.
While department chair enjoyed a position of participatory leadership, it came at the collegial price of deference. Both Bob and Mary (department chair) were a part of the same teacher-based team. Bob, despite his stated intentions to affect curricular change, noted that he deferred to her within the larger group and the teacher-based team.

This sense of deference was uncomfortably noted by each of the department chairs, who noted that their work with affecting curricular change was in establishing and managing the process and ensuring the allocation of resources. They each noted that all teachers should exercise their voice with respect to curricular work. The frustration for the department chairs was in the lack of involvement, which they each felt they had no power to manage, instead reliant on administration to effectively manage.

Thus, department chair’s couched their own leadership in terms of advocacy. In Sandy’s experience, leadership was neither an identity nor a philosophy but an action. “I’ve had to advocate a lot for the [department’s] teachers.” She established this action of advocacy both relative to administration and her colleagues in the school – “I’ve had to take things to the union that could have been uncomfortable taking to the administration.” And she defined this advocacy on behalf of her department, as being “aggressive for what’s best for teachers.”

This consideration of leadership manifest in advocacy was also stated as a benefit of collaboration. Participants reflected on the importance of both sharing resources, and having awareness of how to procure those same. All of the participating department chairs suggested that they had had to advocate on their departments behalf to administration in order to procure supplies, time, or information. Mary reflected that “in
a big school, it’s important to have someone to do that for teachers.” And Ellen suggested that she has “had to sit down with [the principal] to see how this [process] applies to [non-core academic departments].”

**Role of administration.** All participants noted the leadership of administration, but reflected that the effect of administrators on affecting curricular change was minimal. The process and product were controlled at the teacher-based team level, buried within the department. Administrators evaluated individuals, but not teacher-based teams.

The process of formalized collaboration was monitored by administration. Mary noted that “[her]” principal could “look at” the work any time. Laura went further, suggesting that his monitoring was akin to a teacher ensuring students were on task with an assignment, but not checking for accuracy and mastery. She stated: “he comes in, sits down, tells a joke, asks a question, and moves on. It’s up to us to do something – or not.”

Alternatively, both Sandy and Cindy noted that there was a specific assistant principal not only assigned to the Special-education department but also involved with them. This assistant principal, in both of their reflections, “structured” their work and “set the agenda.” Linda suggested this was because the department had recently been audited, while Sandy – as department chair, stated, “there are a lot of questions” regarding “consistent procedures” within the department.

There was a group of participants who expressed the desire for administration to consider promoting informal collaboration over the formalized structure. However, most of those participants also noted that administration barely had the authority to monitor formal collaboration let alone the fidelity of informal collaboration.
While administration voiced the vision and established the procedural structure for formalized collaboration, their leadership was hampered by their inability to evaluate for fidelity of implementation.

**Autonomy of Formalized Collaboration**

The secondary research question for this study was: is formalized collaboration autonomous of an established hierarchy?

Autonomy, as considered by the participants, was dependent on the collective efficacy of the teachers engaged in collaboration. While the participants from the English department noted high collective efficacy with regards to formalized collaborative measures, participants from both the Art and Special-education departments consistently noted low efficacy manifest in confusion and frustration with the prescribed process. The collective efficacy of the English department arose through their early acceptance of the formalized collaborative measures (as a core academic department, they were involved – via their department chair – from the onset); the active, yet not over-bearing involvement of their department chair (she participates as “an equal” (Bob)), their willingness to try new processes and amend existing ones, and their collective response to external pressures – (“we’re all feeling a little bit of pressure with the tests” (Mary)). However, the Special-education department also had external pressures but did not vocalize collective efficacy.

Subsequently, the autonomy of the various teacher-based teams was dependent on the department within which they were situated. Teacher-based teams within the English department experienced greater autonomy compared with teacher-based teams in the
Special-education department. The Special-education teachers, and by default their teacher-based teams, were subject to administrative oversight and focused on “procedures” (Sandy, Timmy) and “forms” (Linda). This was a reaction to a recent audit (Sandy, Linda) and meant to facilitate departmental consistency (Sandy, Linda and Timmy).

Timmy noted that meetings with the Special-education department were strictly “procedural,” “it’s truly tasks – it’s not instructional.” His colleague, Linda, stated that the Special-education department was “focused on how we can best service the kids, and how we can make sure we’re doing every form correctly and consistently.”

Both Linda and Timmy stated that the implicit purpose of the formal collaboration meetings was to create and maintain structure and “procedures.” They both noted that the product that was most often created in the Special-education collaboration meetings was a “universal form.” Linda noted (in her comparison of formal collaborative meetings in both the Special-education and Social Studies departments) that while the Special-education department focused their collaborative efforts on forms and procedures. The Social Studies department, in her perspective as an outside observer, “[was] more driven by the test-driven CFAs [common formative assessments] and the curriculum.”

Similarly, two English teachers suggested that the purpose of formalized collaboration was to enhance the curriculum for the best of the students. Bob suggested that it was based in a realization that curricular change was more “than any one person could legitimately handle.” While recognizing the group effort required to improve curriculum, instruction and assessment practices, Bob did not connect that with
leadership. Instead, he continued to consider that effort as solely collaborative, and devoid – for all practical purposes – of formalized leadership.

Additionally, teachers from the Art department also considered that the inherent purpose for the collaborative work (within the formalized meeting time) was to correctly input information regarding their teaching practices onto mandated forms. There was a very real disconnect between these teachers and the principal regarding the purpose of the formalized collaborative meetings. Each of the Art teacher participants reflected at length on the need to correctly complete the form – “the binder” – and to have the requisite data included. They relentlessly harped on doing the work correctly, rather than on engaging with the work.

Considering the perceived emphasis on procedures, the effort of formalized leadership was to direct a specific – byzantine – process; not to enhance curriculum, instruction, or assessment practices.

The Art department – and its singular teacher-based team – emerged as an anomaly. Each of the Art department participants noted that because the prescribed process required teacher-based teams to be organized around the same course, and because there was only one shared course in their department, they could not effectively participate in the process. Each of the participants suggested that they felt constrained (“stuck to” (Cindy), “have to” (Bonne Jo), “need to” (Ellen)) by the prescribed process of formalized collaboration – which they each also noted was given by administration.

Many of the participants suggested that the teacher-based teams were organized based on which teachers were teaching which subjects. The principal supported this
simplistic notion, adding that this occurred within each department. At his recollection, this was a decision left to each department to consider on its own accord.

A drawback to the organization of teacher-based teams was highlighted from all three participants from the English department. “You kind of have to take whatever that TBT – the one you’re not normally in – you have to take whatever they say as kind of the law, so to speak” (Bob). Laura suggested that organization of the teacher-based teams had been to the discretion of the individual teachers, while Mary adroitly noted that “everyone has a TBT, and they also have courses for which they don’t work with anyone.”

This lack of logistical ability to fully participate in multiple teacher-based teams also arose – though in a different manner – from the participants representing the Special-Education department. Both the department chair and the veteran teacher intoned that the their efforts – and the efforts of the entire department – were being stretched because of the professional and logistical need to participate in teacher-based teams in other departments because of co-teaching assignments. Timmy suggested that participation in the teacher-based team for his co-teaching subject was more fruitful than that for the Special-education department. “That’s my only real teaching collaboration.”

The participants from the Art department were alone in not vexing on the issue of teaching courses without fully participating in teacher-based teams for those courses. All three participants from the Art department noted that there was one teacher-based team for the entire department, as there was only one shared course. Subsequently, only one of the participants actually taught that course, the other two taught stand-alone courses.
(Although Ellen suggested that she participated in a quasi-teacher-based team with other teachers, because of the career-tech courses that she taught.)

While the participants from the Art department did not particularly complain about participating in work dedicated to courses when they had other courses to be concerned with, they did complain about the sharing of the work. Ellen noted that some members of the department were more apt to engage with the ideas than other teachers.

However, while they felt constrained by an administrative decree, they also felt ostracized (“left out,” “ignored,” “forgotten”) in their status as a non-core academic department. Thus, they were simultaneously autonomous and beholden to administration.

At the most localized level, the individual teacher-based team, monitoring was left to the individual participants according to their individual buy-in. One teacher noted with chagrin that not all teacher-based teams within the English department were implementing the same “structure[s]” with “fidelity,” and suggested “it helps to have the department chair on your TBT [teacher-based team].” Similarly, his departmental colleague (on a different teacher-based team) noted that her team’s work often dissolved into discussing the weekend and looking at cat videos.

As a department chair, Mary suggested that “the guidelines” structured the collaborative work of the teams, and that the process was something that teachers were “still improving upon.” As she reflected on this, and the growth that teachers were making in using the process, she stated “he [the principal] wants that improvement - which makes sense, now that we’re getting comfortable with that.”
Mary noted that a joint understanding and working with external “pressures,” led to a shared sense of purpose (“we’re all in the same boat”). On further questioning, as she reflected on the method of the work, she noted that teachers were analyzing the strengths and weaknesses of both their assessments and their instruction – “now that we’re familiar with it we need to go a little bit deeper.”

Laura suggested that routine collaboration was driven by “identifying the strengths and weaknesses” of instruction through assessment analysis. Bob noted that curricular change was the driving force for formal collaboration.

Cindy countered “we really have to follow the textbook so heavily, because the test is based on the textbook.” However, upon further questioning, she noted that the test was neither randomly, nor arbitrarily assigned. It was a test that the department members – all of whom pre-date the use of collaborative meeting structure – decided to use as a summative assessment piece in the foundational course.

The perceptual difference for Cindy was the reflection that administration had decreed that every course had to have a summative evaluation; the choice on how to structure that summative exam, and what principles, standards, and benchmarks remained with the department. It had been the work of several whole-school faculty meetings to discuss and come to an understanding of what essential learning was and how that understanding could be transferred to the various courses – specifically to be scaffolded from foundational to subsequent courses.
Bonnie Jo noted that while the test was based on the text, the department teachers had chosen to use the textbook’s provided test as the summative assessment. And, Cindy noted “there needed to be this sort of common ground with what the kids were learning.”

While not altruistic, Ellen pragmatically offered that “pressure” from other influences was driving collaborative efforts. As she reflected on this, she noted that every person involved in the academics of the school, from the principal through the department chairs to the teachers, was under pressure. The only way to alleviate the pressure would be “if everyone stopped bitching and did their job.”

On later examination, Bob considered that the benefit of collaboration was to “push you to perform at your best,” and to “see the best for kids.”

Mary suggested that collaboration served to unify teachers - “binds us together,” “you start to feel a little more unified.”

**Autonomy of Informal Collaboration**

While not specific to the question of autonomy of formalized collaboration relative to the organizational hierarchy, informal collaboration emerged as the default means of autonomous professional dialogue for all participants.

Participants noted differences between formal collaboration, occurring during prescribed times and with a prescribed process; and informal collaboration that occurred as individual teachers deemed best.

Noting this difference between formal and informal collaboration, Bonnie Jo suggested that formal collaboration occurred “after school, every week;” while informal collaboration occurred during mutual “free time” when “you need [it] and when you’re
there to solve a problem.” Informal collaboration was noted for its lack of structure – “very casual” (Cindy), compared to formal collaboration with its “binders” (Ellen, Mary).

The perception of informal collaboration “where everyone is on equal footing,” (Bob) included four parts:

- “common[ality]” - “working together on a common cause” (Bob, Ellen, Bonnie Jo)
- problem-solving - “essentially working through problems together” (Cindy, Bob, Timmy, and Linda)
- “creativ[ity]” - “being creative together” (Mary, Bob, and Laura)
- “collective” skills-based - “It’s kind of that collective genius thing” (Sandy, Linda, and Timmy).

The formalized process directed teachers to focus collaboratively on what they taught (via the formalized process), but not on how they taught. That, in the estimation of participants, was a weakness of the administratively decreed and monitored structure.

Despite recognizing increased collegial discourse in the formalized setting, Bonnie Jo still requested more opportunities for informal collaboration. “It feels more real. I don’t like things to be so forced,” she lamented. When pressed to consider an option to structure her pairing with her colleague of choice, she stated that the structure would be too “rigid” and “it would take it away.”

Participants suggested with chagrin that effective collaboration could not be formalized. The informal, “spur-of-the-moment” collaboration, Bonnie Jo defined as “the real rich times.” Cindy echoed, that the benefit of informal collaboration (with those
defined parameters) is that “it’s when you need and when you’re there to solve a problem.” Necessary characteristics of utopian collaboration were established as:

- a “common subject”
- mutual “free time”
- “knowledge”
- “respect,” “appreciation,” and “trust.”

**Autonomy of Co-teaching**

Co-teaching, a Special-education teacher teaching in concert with a general education teacher, emerged as a concept to be considered concurrent with both informal and formal collaboration. There were several co-teaching arrangements, all formal, throughout the school, and three of the participants were directly involved with this structure. Accordingly, co-teaching was recognized as a unique form of collaboration. The two teachers worked together, to various degrees of fidelity, to promote an integration of the general education standards as well as specific intervention strategies. The fidelity of implementation was dependent on both the two teachers involved, as well as administrative support.

Bob noted that his experience with co-teaching had been less than perfect. Due to unforeseeable personnel issues, he had worked with three different Special-education teachers, when it should have been one. He established that successful co-teaching was based in “self-identify[ing]” a mutual desire to work together. While his experience began positively, because of the multiple personnel changes, it denigrated. “You’ve got people in here who maybe didn’t know the culture, didn’t know the curriculum, didn’t
know the model, didn’t go through the training.” As such, all of those are identified as important qualities of the co-teaching collaborative dynamic.

While Timmy suggested that his co-teaching collaboration was his most “fruitful” professional work, he also reflected that he was dependent on his partner for establishing the lessons, assessing the students, and managing the class. His co-teaching partner had assumed primary instructional responsibilities, while he retained responsibility for personalization of the classroom – “I have rapport with the kids, that’s what I bring.” Timmy’s concept of both collaboration and leadership emerged to reflect a positive regard for positional authority.

While Timmy and his co-teaching partner worked in proximity to each other daily (they taught three classes together), and coached an athletic team together, they did not formalize their professional relationship. Timmy did not suggest that he and his co-teaching partner discussed, either formally or informally, the curriculum, instruction, or assessment of their shared classes. From this perception, effective informal collaboration involved two teachers “just talking – just working through it [the day-to-day issues of the class].” This suggests that the fruit of informal collaboration is not in monitoring the curriculum, but in managing the daily operations.

On the other hand, Linda described her co-teaching in uniquely idealistic terms. She described her co-teaching partner as “great” because he encouraged her to take a leadership role within the classroom. “He was the one who said let’s put you up there front and center.” Her self-efficacy relative to the seemingly mundane professional
practice of instructing a whole-class was evident as she continued: “I’m the first one that they see. I’m the first one they hear. I’m the one running the show at the beginning.”

Her daily collaboration with her co-teaching partner was in fluid state between formalized (after school every Monday, with other department members, and involving the five-step process decreed by administration), and the informal (when either was available or needed it). Their collaboration took place on a set calendar (“every day,” “third period”), with a prescribed though general agenda (“by what we are doing in the classroom, but ours is more … its data”), and involved a review of several forms of assessment (“observing,” “examining the test questions,” “who got it”). Additionally, they reviewed their curricular goals, assessed students’ progress and their own instruction, and made modifications in the form of individualized interventions.

They were, by her acknowledgement, practicing the formal collaborative process without formalizing it or using the administrative jargon. Both teachers in Linda’s co-teaching relationship exhibited enhanced leadership. Hers was manifest in her leadership with the students, while her co-teaching partner demonstrated leadership by facilitating her professional growth. In reflecting on recognizable leadership from her colleague, Linda demurred. The relationship was not leadership and followership, rather “more of an equal, as a partnership.” And she noted that her own role was “evolving,” it was continuing to get “bigger and bigger.”

**Distributed Leadership**

The third research question considered in this study was: can distributed leadership develop within a traditional school organizational structure?
Participants established that the school site used for this study maintained a traditional, hierarchical organization. Participants also established that formalized collaboration was not autonomous of the established hierarchy. Therefore, it remained to be considered if leadership responsibilities were distributed across the organization.

All participants, regardless of title, tenure, or departmental affiliation, were asked to consider their own and their peers interaction with leadership (as a task and responsibility). Additionally, participants were asked to consider those interactions as they involved (or did not involve) those in formal, hierarchical leadership roles.

As perceived by participants, only those organizational actors in formal leadership roles had the opportunity to engage in leadership tasks and responsibilities. However, participants also noted that that engagement was only made possible through the combination of formal role with teacher support.

In limited situations, participants suggested some emergent (not distributed) leadership. However, this was generally situated in content or procedural knowledge.

Participants responded to this research question with considerations regarding: disconnect with administration, leadership within teacher-based teams, and emergent leadership. Ultimately, the discussion of leadership returned to consideration of informal collaboration as an effective means of personal development.

**Disconnect with Administration**

Participating teachers suggested disconnect with administration regarding the effective monitoring and improvement of curriculum, instruction and assessment practices. This was attributed to a lack of shared value for formal collaboration.
Participants representing the Art department suggested a complete lack of participation with administration regarding the implementation of formalized collaboration specifically, and school improvement efforts in general. Ellen perceived this was because they were a non-core academic department. In her role as department chair, Ellen suggested that her disconnect with administration arose because of a lack of invitation: “I was never invited to any of the workshops. So I’ve been doing it [leading collaboration] wrong.” This feeling of relentlessly spinning her wheels hoping to be on the right track, filtered throughout her responses.

All three Art department participants suggested that their department, and subsequently their department chair, were not provided with the attention paid to core academic departments. Bonnie Jo stated this separation as: “We’re not getting the full – our leader’s not getting all of the information that we need in order to be very productive.”

Her veteran colleague, Bonnie Jo, suggested that the department deferred to the positional authority of formal leadership, and longed for clear direction. In suggesting how she perceives the structure of formal collaborative meetings to be arrived at, Bonnie Jo intoned that the agenda is driven by, but not necessarily micromanaged by administration. She described the process as “whatever we feel the administration wants us to achieve.” On further questioning, she explicated on her use of the word “feel”: “We do what we think we’re supposed to be doing – but a lot of times we don’t really know what we’re supposed to be doing.” Thus, in her estimation, teachers were to defer to formal leadership, and in the absence of direction, hope for the best.
Even a seemingly simple thing as material resources to support improvement procedures, were upsetting to each of them. Ellen stated: “we were all supposed to get binders. But the only people who got binders were core people.” Her confusion with the ordained improvement procedures (the formal process, the organization of teacher-based teams, etc.), the perceived lack of administrative support, and the existing organizational obstacle to implementing teacher-based teams within her department (there was only one common course), each encouraged her sense of defeatism (“I can’t figure it out”) and antagonism (“I didn’t do it,” “I don’t have time to do it”).

And she summarized her sentiment as: “how am I supposed to tell other people how to do it when I don’t know what I’m doing myself,” noting “if you don’t feel appreciated, you don’t want to do it [more work].”

Cindy reflected on these ideas as well, suggesting that the agenda for the formal collaborative meetings was set by administration, but the department chose the direction for the agenda. “Mostly it’s the administration that determines … but then we have to come up with maybe the sub-topic of how we’re going to work it in.”

The neophyte participant representing the Art department, Cindy suggested that much of the actual work of the collaborative meetings was “a lot of jumping through hoops, it’s the stuff that we do anyway. But, I know that it’s being implemented by the state and everything, so we have to do those things.” That consideration of formal collaboration as “jumping through hoops” highlighted the lack of shared value regarding the relevance of both the process and the product. This lack of shared value was echoed by the neophyte participants in both the Special-education and English departments.
Across departments, participants noted that the administration directed departmental work establishing the vision and process for collaborative work, and subsequently monitoring and reviewing that amongst administrators. This was met with varying states of concern. Neophyte participants indifferently shrugged this off (“we do what we’re told” (Timmy)), while veteran participants perceived this as a micro-managing sleight, and a usurping of the department chair’s leadership (“I don’t know why they feel the need to come in [to department meetings]” (Bonnie Jo), “[the department chair] has to run the agenda by [the administrator] before sending it” (Linda)).

Participants in the Special-education department noted administrative oversight with relief because they had recently been audited for legal compliance. However, the audit, and the subsequent administrative oversight may have exacerbated the emphasis on competing procedural issues. Regardless, all participants from the Special-education department noted that the effective leadership (realized in the constant organization of formal department meetings) occurred at the direction of the administration.

Linda suggested there was less disconnect between Special-education teachers and administration with respect to department work because “we’re all conscious of being so consistent.” She praised the administrator who works directly with the Special-education department. “[She] is moving us in a different direction” that would be “more efficient, and how can we get more data to help our kids.” However, the direction of the administration with leading the Special-education department was relative to legal procedures, not with respect to affecting curricular change.
Reflecting on an instructional change occurring in her department, Sandy suggested that the change occurred because of “some collaboration” between various administrators. From her perspective, she was only “brought in after the fact” to assuage her departmental colleagues – “I just dealt with the freaking out.”

Asked to reflect on how she “dealt” with this decree to change practices, Sandy noted that her first response was to go to the “union to see if this was something allowable.” After that failed (“obviously” in her words), she acknowledged that her colleagues give the “appearance” of compliance.

In contrast, participants from the English department suggested that while administration “provided” the “structure” for collaboration (the five-step process), the department (as a whole) “tweak[ed]” it (Bob) to fit their needs.

Mary, when asked to identify those colleagues she viewed as leaders, succinctly noted, “I view my administration as my leader. They’re my bosses.” However, she noted that her primary lamentation was in the amount of work being expected – “there is so much thrown at us at once.”

Both Bonnie Jo and Linda reflected that the structure of formal collaborative meetings was both pre-ordained and evaluated by administration. Bonnie Jo reflected that the department chair was a “facilitator, leads the meeting, writes up an agenda, leads us through the process of whatever we feel the administration wants us to achieve during our meetings.” And Cindy noted the balance between administration “determin[ing]” the agenda, and department members driving the agenda “select[ing] sub-topics” and completing busy-work “we have to fill out a five-step process form.”
She stated a concern that the administrative emphasis on collaborative approaches to academic meetings was somehow adversely affecting the systematic and progressive operation of the school, stating: “Tell me what you want, I’ll do what you want me to do. I can’t – the wishy-washiness of things that go on – as far as decision making – it drives me crazy.” However, her lament at not being told exactly what to do was contradicted several times in her unwillingness to proceed with the administratively decreed process for improvement. Instead, she was perceiving “cloudiness” in administrative decrees.

This perception appeared to follow with administrative decisions with which teachers were not inclined to participate, versus those that they agreed with in both theory and execution. Participants, particularly veterans, suggested administrative decisions were best established in black-and-white terms (i.e. ordering materials, setting schedules, etc.), whereas administrative decisions had moved to include those items plus procedures for curricular analysis. The “cloudy” area was the self and group analysis of both product and process. No longer were teachers (and department chairs) viewed as assembly line workers to follow concise directives (i.e. show up at X time, fill out Y form). Instead, teachers (and department chairs) were now expected to use a set process to examine their practices (and ultimately to work together to improve those processes).

Department chairs assigned blame for the lack of shared leadership to a number of aspects: lack of time, lack of procedural knowledge, lack of physical resources, lack of administrative support, contradictory and competing agendas. The closest that department chairs got to accepting ownership was with the suggestion that their colleagues were disinterested in the process and product, and thus, their collective lack of
shared leadership negatively affected the individual participants willingness and ability to both collaborate and lead.

**Leadership within Teacher-Based Teams**

Participants described several variations of leadership as it emerged within their respective teacher-based teams. The primary form of leadership, which teachers were deferential to in every situation described, was hierarchical. The deferential respect for formal authority maintained, at least in the perception of the participants, an effective means of monitoring the improvement efforts of the school in the arena of curriculum, instruction and assessment. However, participants did not perceive that reliance on formal, hierarchical authority to be efficient in communicating the processes and goals of the school, nor in distributing resources. Instead, participants noted that they learned to navigate the bureaucracy to their own benefit for resource allocation – and that one aspect of distributed leadership was in sharing that systematic knowledge.

The principal referred to the system of leadership among teachers as shared, but described it in terms of transformational. He relied on communicating his message in a systematic manner to all organizational actors, and then monitoring for the effectiveness and fidelity of implementation at each level of hierarchical control over the process.

This reliance on the hierarchical levels of control supports the fidelity by which the English department perceived implementing the process of curricular change, and disconnect between the process and product in the Art department. It also supports the difference in product from teacher-based team to teacher-based team, supported by statements from all three participating teachers from the English department.
Professional learning communities do not typically anoint formal leaders. All three of the participants from the Art department and two of the participants from the Special-education department exemplified the struggles with formalized leadership. All of them noted that there was reluctance on other teachers to demonstrate leadership. Interestingly, all of these participants were in the non-core academic departments – the same ones that were experiencing disconnect with the other departments (and by default, the mission of the school).

Participants suggested three types of formal collaborative structures emergent among the teacher-based teams: inclusive, wherein all members actively participated; exclusive, where only member actively participated; and procedural, where all members of the department were grouped in one teacher-based team.

The logistical issue for the Special-education department was that they, as a group, met irregularly. Many of their members were affiliated – through co-teaching assignments – with other academic departments. When they did meet as a group, their agendas focused not on academics, but on procedures. And as for the Art department, their size served as an obstacle to subgrouping – and thus ancillary issues arose to impede personal leadership growth: the department chair was directly involved in all meetings (and the meetings were held in her room); there was only one shared course, which not all department members taught; and there was an insinuation of personality and philosophical differences between department members.

Only the participants from the English department suggested that there was shared and evolutionary leadership amongst the department members. Bob, who affiliated with
the same teacher-based team as Mary, noted the measured way in which she, as department chair, participated in the discussions. “I’ve always been made to feel it’s an equal process.” He also noted that within his particular teacher-based team, there was both a sharing and “familiar[ity]” with the various specific roles. Regarding Mary’s involvement with the teacher-based team, he noted, “she’s always more than willing to sit back and let somebody else be the facilitator.”

He suggested that her measured response was neither calculated nor reflective of task avoidance. Rather, her measured responses were purposeful – to allow room for all members of the teacher-based team to participate. Mary echoed this, reflectively noting “I feel in the sophomore TBT, of which I’m a member, that there is trust. And we will take suggestions from anyone.”

Timmy, who participated in teacher-based teams with the Math department (in addition to those with the Special-Education department), noted that while one person would “run” those meetings, all of the teachers “are interjecting, stating their opinions.”

Laura noted that in her teacher-based team, no one was defined as being in charge, and that the participants constantly switched roles. Asked if work is accomplished, she suggested yes with the caveat that the group rarely returns to a re-examination of the assessment after further instruction. Thus, her group constantly focused on task completion for the sake of task completion, rather than task completion for the sake of renewal and development. She defined this as “a weakness” that she attributed to the group moving items along: “let’s move it, we’ve got bigger fish to fry.”
Emergent Leadership

The final emergent themes were relative to the subordinate research questions: are formalized collaborative structures autonomous of an established hierarchy (assuming there is an established hierarchy); and, is distributed leadership able to develop within a traditional school organizational structure (hierarchical, top-down).

It was through an examination of both formal and informal collaboration, that the concept of distributed leadership emerged as a part of organizational structure. However, the form of distributed leadership realized at the site studied existed within the organization of teacher-based teams and within the departments. It was leadership that emerged from within the ranks of the teachers, not leadership that was distributed from the central organizational leader.

Bob noted that he “looked to” other teacher-based teams within his department, specifically “younger teachers,” to “push the values we’d like to see in this program, in this department.” When he noted this, he also reflected that by “looking to” he was in fact “hoping” for their leadership. But the “leadership” which he defined was more followership (or at least subscribing to) the values which he espoused. His use of the collective pronoun “we” grouped him with an indeterminate number of other teachers with a collective mission for the department.

Whether this collective mission was supported by all “younger” teachers remained undetermined – through both the responses of Bob and Laura (the neophyte participant). Laura reflected that among one teacher-based team comprised almost solely of “younger” teachers, one teacher “tends to be overly vocal” and another “flies under the
radar.” Similarly, Laura, reflecting on her perception of that same other teacher-based team, noted that she informally collaborated with one particular colleague because that team’s work was often disjointed.

In consideration of emergent leadership, Linda reflected on the opportunity for teachers to participate in the development of a department process, specifically considering the delineation between collaboration and leadership.

Anybody? If they want … Well, we’ve asked for a lot of different – like do you want to … [The department chair] has asked people to be in charge of different things, if I recall. But we’re overwhelmed and I don’t see people stepping up and saying I want to do this. I think we’re pretty much in need of time, more than wanting to be in charge, wanting to take over the department. … But, yes, at any part they can say: I want to take charge, may I do this or may I do that. They can ask.

While she was initially thrown off by the question, Linda noted that leadership, in her perspective, was equated with being in charge of the group – “wanting to take over the department.” From that, she suggested that permission to lead would have to be sought and presumably granted – “they can ask,” “may I do this.” As a veteran teacher, Linda positioned herself (use of the collective pronoun “we”) with formal leadership of the department, and suggests that leadership has been sought from others, but to no end – “we’ve asked.” How strong a case for greater leadership, or how often leadership was solicited, was not answered. Finally, Linda suggests in her response that time is the enemy of both collaboration and increased leadership amongst colleagues.
Collaboration as Leadership

While leadership among teachers remained elusive – whether distributed, shared, or emergent – collaboration presented opportunities for teachers to jointly engage in leadership through guidance, support, and sharing.

Defining collaboration as “working together,” Bonnie Jo alternatively noted its inherent leadership application as “one person directing another,” adding “or guiding another.” The nuance, she allowed, suggests that collaboration can be leadership – “but then again, when you’re collaborating, you’re guiding each other.”

Cindy noted that meetings used to be less formal, and thus allowed for more sharing. She continued that sharing and discourse have been a “benefit to all this having been implemented.” Noting that the teachers were “all pretty open to hearing other people’s ideas,” Linda supported this notion. When asked, who in the department was a leader, Cindy suggested, “[they] all have leadership.”

She defined the difference between collaboration and leadership as creativity and communication versus authority. “Collaboration, I believe is coming together and sharing ideas and taking something from each person. And leadership is one person heading it up. Or, one person taking charge.”

As a department chair, Ellen defined leadership as “control,” while she defined collaboration as working “together” with someone else on “mutual interests.”

Timmy suggested that his colleagues looked to him for leadership in the same manner that he looked to them. “You look for someone you can trust,” he stated. This need for trust, in his perspective, was because of dearth of procedural knowledge.
Most of the participants struggled with conceptualizing leadership, especially their involvement with it. Linda and Cindy both expressly stated their distaste for the word itself. Timmy, Laura, Bobbie Jo, Bob, and Linda all noted that they looked to others for leadership. Bobbie Jo, Sandy, Cindy and Linda all questioned if anyone would look to them for leadership. Even those participants with formal authority struggled with the concept. Mary, Sandy and Ellen all looked to others, placed the burden of leadership on formal leaders, or looked to processes and procedures to provide leadership.

Linda situated her struggle with the concept of leadership – “I’m not sure I’m comfortable with that word” – in both defining the concept, and with accepting times to be led, times to lead, and times to co-labor. She reflected positively on the leadership provided by her co-teaching partner in increasing her professional self-efficacy, and yet refused to define his actions in terms of leadership, instead situating that action and relationship in collaboration. She repeatedly stated a desire for “task oriented” meetings with “set agendas,” but also suggested that she relished a “group effort.”

In describing how her teacher-based team collaborated, Laura suggested a task-oriented view of leadership, noting that they did not want to put the “onus” of leadership of any one teacher. This supported her view of collaboration as a task to be completed. “Sometimes it’s just something that we try to get done. … We go through the worksheet and we put it aside and talk about our weekend.” This perception of the work of collaborative meetings as a task emanated from her viewing the work as “routine.” However, Laura also noted, “there has to be leadership in order for collaboration to work.”
Within the same department, however, Bob suggested that the process of formalized collaboration worked in part because of the “structure[s]” put in place, but more importantly, because of the “equal process.” Differentiating between leadership and collaboration, he noted that the characteristics he looked for in his colleagues to lead:

- “tact;”
- “a certain amount of aggressiveness;”
- “some humility” - “the ability to accept when you are wrong or at least to listen to other folks and their opinions;”
- “recognition of other people’s skills;”
- and knowledge of “how to leverage those skills.”

This list differed from his list of qualities for people with whom he would choose to collaborate with:

- “open-mindedness;”
- willing to try (and meaningfully test) new things - “willing to approach a new mindset” and not “revert back to whatever their thing is;”
- “critical in a friendly sort of way;”
- somebody to “push you … to perform at your best;”
- somebody who “wants the best for kids.”

Mary’s traits for effective collaboration included: “trust” and “comfort[ability].”

While Bob foresaw “benefit” in the formalized structure of collaboration, he noted the informal collaboration was often more “interesting.” He attributed this both to informal collaboration being voluntary (“mutual interests already established”) and the newness
(“we’re learning from our mistakes”) and possible inconsistent applications of the formal structures (“if you’re not consistent on message – it can fall apart”).

**Conclusion**

Answers to the research questions for this study emerged through participant interviews. Participants were asked to reflect on leadership, collaboration and organizational structure. Their responses were analyzed, using the their own language, to establish common meanings and to bracket shared experiences.

Discussing their perceptions of leadership (within themselves, their professional learning communities, their academic departments, and the school), participants suggested that there is disconnect between those organizational actors in formal leadership roles and teachers. Participants also suggested that the act and responsibility of leadership involves sharing and managing resources; and that leadership is associated with formal, titular roles.

Answers to the primary research question highlighted a lack of organizational ownership amongst teachers. Leadership was perceived as actions that occurred to the teachers instead of with the teachers. It was primarily within the consideration of their involvement with informal collaborative relationships that participants considered their own involvement with leadership activity – and at that, leadership was perceived as both mutually beneficial and mutually exclusive.

Accordingly, leadership was perceived as something that teachers were the recipients of, not something that they interacted with. Leadership was perceived as a limiting force on collaborative teacher interactions, encouraging those collaborative
relationships perceived as being meaningful to exist informally and outside organizational control. Alternatively, leadership as a force on collaborative teacher interactions, encouraged and routinized bureaucracy in an attempt at improved practice. What remains to be noted is which form of teacher collaboration effects greater positive improved practice – informal collaboration or formal collaboration.

Similarly, it also remains to be noted if the formalized distribution of leadership responsibilities amongst teachers (within teacher-based teams) would affect improved practice. As suggested by participant responses, the distribution of leadership was not effectively enhanced by the introduction of formalized collaborative structures. For the most part, those teachers with leadership before the implementation of teacher-based teams continued to retain leadership responsibility and authority. That responsibility and authority was vested in their particular titles. The little leadership responsibility that did emerge within the formalized collaborative structure did so as a result of individual teachers either seeking efficient means of task completion or task avoidance.

Thus, while teachers answered the subsequent research questions, they noted the inherent lack of distributed leadership within the formalized system of collaboration. Instead, teacher leadership – beyond that relegated to formal roles (i.e. department chairs) – emerged in response to group specific needs. This is contrary to the concept of distributed leadership where participant leadership affects the macro-organization.
CHAPTER V
DISCUSSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study was an examination of the application of formalized collaboration as a potential vehicle for distributed leadership practice. This study sought to understand if distributed leadership was inherent within organizations employing formalized collaborative structures. The school site studied employed those structures as a means of improving curriculum, instruction and assessment practices. Additionally, this study sought to understand if distributed leadership was able to develop within a traditionally organized, hierarchical school.

The primary research question for this study was: what are teacher perceptions of leadership within an organization that employs the concept of formalized collaborative structures? Additionally, this study examined the following sub-ordinate questions: Are formalized collaborative structures autonomous of an established hierarchy (assuming there is an established hierarchy); and, is distributed leadership able to develop within a traditional school organizational structure (hierarchical, top-down)?

Summary of Findings

Reflecting on the formalized collaborative structures of the school, participants presented and discussed their perceptions of organizational structure and leadership, both their own and their colleagues’. Each of the nine participants referred to the formalized collaborative structures at the school site as teacher-based teams. They were asked to reflect on the organization’s structure, the implementation of formalized collaboration,
and their roles within both their teacher-based teams and the organization as a whole.

Three answers emerged in response to the primary research question:

• There is disconnect between teachers and those individuals in formal leadership roles.

• Leadership involves both the sharing and managing of resources (including knowledge).

• Both the authority and responsibility of leadership is associated with those organizational actors with formal, titular roles.

In response to the primary research question, participants considered the purpose, effectiveness, and benefits of collaborative structures (both formal and informal), and leadership roles and responsibilities. Analyzing participant reflections on collaboration and the organizational structure, it also became important to consider reflections of both formal and informal collaborative structures, as well as leadership within both of those structures. Participants reflected on their practice as affected by collaboration; the processes, procedures and resources used in collaboration; and the distribution of support and advice between teachers. Similarly, participants reflected on issues of self-efficacy, group frustration, trust, and advocacy – sub-themes that arose in response to leadership (both as a role and as a responsibility).

These reflections, while demonstrative of the distribution of leadership amongst teachers, were neither found to be systemic nor systematic. However, considering those reflections within the theoretical context of leadership, it was found that leadership activity was distributed and occasionally shared, while leadership responsibility was
hierarchical and occasionally transformative.

The organizational inability to establish effective collaboration resultant from a formalized collaborative structure emerged as the answer to the second, sub-ordinate question regarding the autonomy of formal collaborative structures from the established hierarchy. As with the primary research question, participant responses suggested differences between formal and informal collaboration, as well as their involvement with leadership activities and responsibilities in those types of collaborative structures. Participants considered the effect that common courses, mutual free time, respect, and knowledge had on the autonomy of collaborative structures. Additionally, those participants involved in an additional type of collaborative structure – co-teaching – considered the autonomy of that structure within the greater organizational structure.

The final answer emerged in response to the subordinate research question: is distributed leadership able to develop within a traditional school organizational structure (hierarchical, top-down)? Participants reflected on the leadership within their respective teacher-based teams, including their own involvement with the role and responsibilities of leadership. Participants considered the structure of their teacher-based teams, and considered that collaboration was different from leadership.

Recognizing that the application of distributed leadership makes schools flatter organizations, whereby the school efficiently incorporates individual teacher decision-making, participants suggested that the organization did not purposefully employ distributed leadership. In their statements, leadership was static and reserved for those with formal titles, while followership consisted of adhering to an established process.
However, their perceptions regarding their interactions with both their colleagues and their work suggested that both leadership activity and responsibility emerged (typically within informal collaborative structures) and were shared (typically within formal collaborative structures). Thus, the opportunity for leadership was distributed across all organizational actors.

**Research Design**

The very nature of the qualitative design of this study allowed for inherent messiness in participant responses. Participants were asked the initial research question at the beginning of the first interview; subsequent questions were presented in response to individual participant responses. While one participant may have begun with a response regarding his own experience with leadership, another might provide a historical overview of leadership within the organization. Each participant’s responses were valid and important, and needed to be considered alongside the both the researcher’s and the building principal’s understanding of the organization.

Accordingly, while this study was not designed as an analysis of small schools, participants noted that their perceptions of both leadership and collaboration had been altered by their involvement with reform efforts during the small schools era. At the time of this study, the school was three years removed from that era having returned to a traditional organization as a large, comprehensive high school. However, eight of the nine participants had been on staff for part of that era, and seven of the participants pre-dated even its implementation. As such, their perspectives were affected by that experience.
Context of Findings

This study established a conceptual framework of distributed leadership and its ancillary trends and traits, considered alongside a basic premise of social network theory – the theoretical contention being that social networks within schools amount to mere contrivances (de Lima, 2010). This is important considering the importance of informal collaborative structures to participants. While Bolden (2011) called for a “contextually situated exploration of how distributed and focused forms of leadership interact” (p. 263), Fitzgerald and Gunter (2008) suggested that there are “fundamental questions about why schools are organized around the professional labour of adults” that have not yet surfaced (p. 332). This study considered both of those charges, and sought to find meaning in the leadership perceptions of teachers engaged in formalized collaboration.

There is ample evidence in the literature noting the importance of collaborative relationships to enhance curriculum, instruction and assessment. However, there is limited evidence of the effect of formalized collaborative structures on school improvement efforts. Louis et al. (2009) state “teacher-teacher relationships are even more important as a foundation for the way in which teachers work to improve instruction” (p. 319). De Lima (2008, p. 166) contends that there is an importance in examining interactions among teachers. And Spillane (2006) emphasizes, “interactions [between teachers] are key” (p. 56).

In consideration of distributed leadership, Gronn (2000) divided resultant practice into two camps: as a “the consequence of individual agency,” or as “the result of systems design and role structures.” Within this study, leadership emerged as the “consequence
of individual agency” within individually and informally designed collaborative structures. Individually, teachers assumed the mantle of leadership, either for task completion (or avoidance) or for mutual support. As that individual display of leadership demonstrated – neither the activity nor the responsibility of leadership extended to the entire organization. As such, teacher leadership is neither heroic nor transformational.

However, as described by participants, the emergent leadership did not extend beyond either informal collaborative dyads or individually operating formalized collaborative structures. While these arrangements allowed for leaderships at all levels (Fullan, 2001; Crevani et al., 2010), the demonstrated leadership did not extend beyond its most localized structure (whether formal or informal) beyond formal, titular roles associated with the established hierarchy. This is in contrast with the contextual acknowledgement that distributed leadership is situated in knowledge transcendent of position (Woods et al., 2004; Harris, 2004) to affect organizational change (Gronn, 2002). While there is ample evidence suggesting that leadership emerges through participant interactions (Spillane et al., 2001), there is a lack of evidence that emergent teacher leadership had a system-wide effect (Bolden, 2011).

While the answers to the research questions suggest that teacher leadership emerges within formalized collaboration and can exist within a traditional school organizational structure, that same leadership does not necessarily enhance nor expressly incorporate school improvement efforts. Similarly, emergent teacher leadership was not purposeful (Mascall et al, 2011) beyond task avoidance or completion. Thus, leadership remained mired in managerial tasks rather than systemic organizational transformation.
However there was overwhelming participant generated evidence emphasizing the importance of informal collaborative relationships. Informal collaborative relationships were depicted as being important to both the maintenance and improvements to the curriculum, and instructional and assessment practices. Whether describing their informal collaborative relationship as a friend, lunch-partner, buddy, or marriage, every participant was able to succinctly detail the qualities of work that their informal collaborative partner brought to the relationship, and how that joint work was different from – and in their perspective, better than – formal collaboration within the established teacher-based teams. Thus, their own leadership was limited to its effect within the informal collaborative paradigm, rather than stretched over the whole school, or even individual academic departments (see also Robinson, 2001).

While Harris (2009a) suggested that distributed leadership plays a part in building formalized collaborative structures – “extending leadership responsibility beyond the principal is an important lever for developing effective” collaboration (p. 176) – there was limited suggestion from study participants to support that. Instead, participants were confused and even concerned regarding the perceived inflexibility of the work with which they were to engage in their formal collaborative assignments as assigned by the principal. Accordingly, teacher leadership, as it emerged through participant responses, was a by-product of collaboration (formal or informal), and not a propellant of a particular structure. However, because of the participants’ overwhelming positive reflections regarding informal collaboration, emergent leadership arose as a means of “extending leadership responsibility.” This extension of leadership responsibility was
limited to the dyadic relationship of informal collaboration.

Several participants noted their leadership in orchestrating the task completion for the formal collaboration. Similarly, several participants suggested their leadership within the formal groups was a means to an end. As such, this study continues the reasoning that distributed leadership is:

- top-down (Hallinger, 2010) – there is a distinct need for organizational factors to support and encourage leadership amongst teachers;
- bottom-up (Hargreaves & Fink, 2005) – teachers must recognize and acknowledge leadership within both themselves and their colleagues;
- organic and chaotic (Mascall et al., 2011, Gronn, 2009b; Bolden, 2011) – leadership emerges as organizational actors need direction, and is a response to the specific needs of groups; as such, there can be no set agenda.

The concept of emergent leadership that arose from participant responses was that of an individual possessing both qualities of leadership and followership depending on both the task and fellow participants. This concept of teacher leadership aligns with the suggestion that teacher leadership “is usually thought of as a network of both formal and informal influential relationships in a school” (Louis et al., 2010, p. 310). However, as noted, there was more evidence within this study that teacher leadership emerged within informal collaborative relationships. And when it emerged within formalized collaborative structures, was limited to individual teacher-based teams.

**Interpretation of Findings**

While participants articulated the importance of their collaborative work and its
anticipated effect on school improvement and student achievement, they repeatedly expressed confusion with the process and procedures with which they were expected to formally collaborate. In conjunction with disconnect between the process and the work, participants expressed a strong desire to co-labor in a manner that they individually (i.e. free from administrative control) found satisfactory.

Participants expressed frustrations with the formalized process of collaboration, with administration (for both establishing the formalized process and not promoting the individually satisfying informal collaboration), and with colleagues with whom they formally collaborated.

The answers to the research questions suggest that formalized collaborative structures are not autonomous of established hierarchies. This was highlighted by disconnect between participants and administration. This was also highlighted by the widespread confusion among participants regarding the process of the work with which they were formally involved with in their respective teacher-based teams.

Instead, there is evidence supporting the idea that formalized collaborative structures are contingent on established hierarchies within the organization.

Additionally, there were overwhelming responses that the product of the informal collaborative relationships was not contingent on the established hierarchy within the school. Those informal collaborative relationships described, while uniquely powerful, were dependent on mutual attraction rather than hierarchy, position, or individual authority. In considering this finding, it is important to note that this study did not seek to identify individual participant centrality within the organization, or within systems
within the organization.

The answers to the research questions also suggest that there is some evidence of distributed leadership developing within a traditional school organization structure. Participants considered both their own and their colleagues’ collaborative efforts in terms of demonstrating leadership – and subsequently, where that leadership responsibility arose from and extended to. Within informal collaborative structures, there were generalized positive reactions regarding the effects of collaboration, and participants noted that leadership within those arrangements was both reciprocal and mutual. Summarily, teacher leadership, as it was demonstrated in formalized collaboration, focused on task completion and/or avoidance; was often shared, but not reciprocal; and remained mutual. However, within formal collaboration, teacher leadership did not extend beyond the teacher-based team. Ultimately, despite not consistently demonstrating all of the markings of distributed leadership, the individual leadership actions described by participants were aligned with the concept of distributed leadership.

Teachers were more likely to reflect on their own peers’ involvement in positive terms when considering leadership within the informal collaborative arrangements. This differed from reflections on peer involvement in formalized collaborative arrangements; participants reflected on those in either neutral or negative terms. In considering peer leadership (and followership) in formal collaboration, teachers were more likely to see it as a hindrance to task completion, as opposed to in informal collaboration wherein teachers viewed it in terms of mutual guidance and mutual appreciation.

Similarly, teachers reflected on their own leadership within formal collaboration
as either task oriented or task avoiding. However, their perceptions of their own leadership within informal collaborative arrangements often minimized their involvement and focused instead on followership. While teachers perceived both their own and their colleagues’ leadership as being distributed, because of the lack of evidence supporting system-wide effect it was more aligned with traits of shared or collaborative leadership. Participant perceptions of teacher leadership within both informal and formal collaboration are shown in Table 3: Teacher Perceptions of Distributed Leadership.

Table 3

*Teacher Perceptions of Distributed Leadership*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher perceptions of peers</th>
<th>Within Informal Collaborative Relationships</th>
<th>Within Formal Collaborative Relationship</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher perceptions of peers</td>
<td>Positive Guiding Mutually Appreciative</td>
<td>Negative Neutral Either Negative or Neutral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher perceptions of self</td>
<td>Focus on followership Desire to please Desire to support</td>
<td>Task oriented Task avoiding</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participants also viewed the leadership of their peers in informal settings in transactional terms. They received as much from those relationships as they put into them, and demonstrated awareness that there were times to lead, times to follow, and times to co-labor. The resultant product of informal collaborative relationships was based in the immediate needs of the participants. And the follow-up was based in the continued validity of the work.

On the other hand, participants viewed the leadership of their peers in formal
collaborative structures as task avoiding. Participants noted that they only received as much from those formal relationships as they put in, often choosing to put in little effort because of a communal lack of vested interest in the results. Within teacher-based teams, teachers were expected to discuss and analyze the essential knowledge and skills of their particular course curriculum. However, disconnect between expected product and resultant practice arose with confusion and animosity regarding administratively decreed process. Bureaucracy stifled, or at least negatively affected, emergent leadership.

The difference between both the product of informal collaboration and formal collaboration, and the teacher leadership inherent in each structure, was the perceived value participants placed on the separate processes. Participants reflected that their informal collaborative structures (and their partner therein) responded—almost immediately—to their needs. There was value where needs were met. Alternatively, within formalized collaborative structures, the needs were as yet, unidentified.

Leadership within both of these structures responded similarly. Within informal collaboration, participants reflected that their partner met their needs, held them accountable, motivated them, and provided assurance and guidance. However, within formal collaborative structures, because those external to the structure, in formal, titular leadership roles—administrators, decreed tasks and purposes, the resultant teacher leadership focused on the efficient completion of those tasks. Teacher leadership in this structure was neither visionary, nor reflective. It was task oriented.

Consideration of this dichotomy must include reflection on Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs. Within informal collaborative structures, participants sought out, and thus
exhibited trust in their co-participant. Thus, as a system, they were more advanced in self-actualization than they were when involved in formalized collaboration. Similarly, the same holds true considering participant understanding of the systematic purpose within the informal structure, participants create and monitor the purpose; whereas, within in formal structures, the process is assigned and monitored by non-participants.

**Sources of Potential Bias**

The primary source of potential bias for this study was the researcher’s prior involvement with the school site being analyzed. While the researcher was no longer involved with the school site, he had been – as both a teacher and an administrator.

The researcher’s prior involvement provided access to both the school site and the individual participants. In introductory interview comments, many participants expressed their familiarity with the researcher and acknowledged their resultant comfort in discussing their perceptions with him. Additionally, at various times in individual interviews, participants presented their perspectives in a manner that suggested the researcher’s familiarity with the organization, the subject, and other organizational actors.

This perceived familiarity also served as a hindrance. Several participants responded to questions assuming the researcher’s familiarity with the subject. The researcher was forced to re-frame the initial question, probe for additional information, search for context clues in other responses, or ask for clarification from subsequent participants. All of these served as additional means of triangulating the research findings for verification purposes.
Limitations of Findings

The limitation of this study was its construction as a single case study of teachers’ perceptions of leadership within an organization that employs the concept of formalized collaboration, at one comprehensive, public, urban high school in a Midwestern state.

This study was also limited by the research design employed. In addition to strategies to find shared meaning (Moustakas, 1994), the researcher presented transcripts of the initial interviews to each participant for review, and subsequently conducted follow-up interviews. These subsequent interviews allowed for, and encouraged, further presentation by the participants of their perceptions. Several participants noted that they had not considered that their initial statements would focus on certain specifics until they reviewed them in written form. In the subsequent interview, they reflected on why they perceived they had initially had that particular focus.

This is akin to the methodological suggestion that “every intentional experience, regardless of how vague or ambiguous it may appear in its origin, intimates something and designates something” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 56). Those ambiguities do not always come to light until re-examined by the participants themselves.

Participants

While designed as an examination of teacher perceptions of leadership within an organization that employs the concept of formalized collaborative structures, this study involved limited participants. A total of nine teachers – three each from three academic departments – were directly solicited for involvement in this study.

While there were unique subjects that arose within individual interviews, few of
these suggested a need to consider the perspective of participants outside of the design of this study. As an example, the participants from the Special-education department each individually presented perspectives that suggested their unique, group, feeling of having a collaborative focus on bureaucratic work. This was juxtaposed with the curricular work that the other departments were engaged in (as demonstrated both by the participants from those departments, and the perspective of the Special-education department participants). As supported by the perspectives of participants from other departments, this was a unique organizational quality of the Special-education department, and would not arise in the perspective of any other academic department (core or elective).

However, the participants from the Art department each individually presented perspectives that suggested their unique, group, feeling of being a second-class department within the entire school organization. While not overtly verified by participants in other departments, this perspective appeared to be supported by ancillary statements from the department chairs of both the English and Special-education departments. As department chairs, both of those participants had the unique perspective of engaging with and observing their representative colleagues from other departments. There may have been benefit in exploring this perspective among other elective departments for further verification. However, this study, as designed, did not intend to consider network centrality of departments within the school.

Interview Questions

Because of the generalized phenomenological strategy employed by this study, questions were not prearranged. Rather, the researcher began each interview with an
explanation of the study and research questions, and allowed the participants to individually direct the conversation.

This coupled with presenting the participants with transcripts of their initial interviews and subsequently re-interviewing them, allowed for examination of the unique perspectives of each participant as individuals. The individualized attention to perspectives allowed for, and encouraged, an analysis for shared meaning.

**Transferability**

While designed as a single case study, this study can be transferred with similar results at similar sites.

Unique to this study was the particular structure of the organization site (large, comprehensive high school in a Midwestern state), employing the concept of professional learning communities. However, emergent themes and answers suggest that the structure not withstanding, similar results would have emerged so long as teacher perceptions of distributed leadership were the focus of the study.

Similarly, the particular design of the study has been purposefully outlined, including gaining entre, selection of participants, interview methods and questions, and data analysis.

This study was purposefully designed as an analysis of the phenomenon of distributed leadership as defined by teachers.

Additionally, unique to this study was the particular, and recent, history of the organization site (three years removed from a large-scale, purposeful reorganization from small schools to a traditional, comprehensive high school). While there had been
turnover amongst the school’s staff, all but two of the participants for this study had been involved in the small schools era. As such, and in consideration for the reform efforts of that organizational structure, the findings of this study must account for that history.

While this study was not designed as an analysis of small schools, participants noted that their perceptions of both leadership and collaboration had been altered by their involvement with reform efforts during the small schools era.

**Importance of Findings**

The implications of the findings of this study are related to two areas: theoretical implications and practical implications. This study analyzed the organizational structure of a school employing the concept of formalized collaborative structures.

**Theoretical Significance**

Considering the several theories informing this study, there are a few theoretical implications from this study. These implications are a reflection on distributed leadership theory, democracy in education, and social network theory.

**Distributed leadership.** Appreciated as a democratic approach to collective organizational improvement efforts (Spillane, 2005), distributed leadership theory builds upon earlier concepts of transformational leadership (Hartley, 2010). While the goal of both transformational and distributed leadership is to change the organization through the actions of the group, the goal of distributed leadership emerges from individual actors and is promoted across the organization, while the goal of transformational leadership is promoted from the organizational hierarchy and subsequently promoted downward.

This study contends that distributed leadership is an organizational quality which
every organizational actor has equal opportunity to engage. However, individual organizational actor engagement with leadership responsibilities is limited by a variety of factors. These factors are both individually determined, based on the perceptions, actions, and interactions of individual organizational actors; and organizationally determined, based on the structure of the organization at various levels. Table 4: Factors Limiting or Encouraging Distributed Leadership shows these factors.

Table 4

Factors Limiting or Encouraging Distributed Leadership

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Individual Factors</th>
<th>Trust</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Perceived Respect</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Perceived Knowledge</td>
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<tr>
<td>Organizational Factors</td>
<td>Common Subject</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mutual Free Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Organization of the Teacher-based Team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Involvement with Co-teaching Assignment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The individual factors limiting or encouraging distributed leadership are a matter of individual actor efficacy, and subject to individual internal control. However, the organizational factors are externally controlled, whether hierarchically (common subject, mutual free-time, involvement with co-teaching) or collegially (mutual free time, organization of the teacher-based team). In attempting to engage with and/or demonstrate leadership, individual actors can only affect within their defined structure (whether formal or informal), and then only as they perceive mutual acknowledgement.

Accordingly, the quality of distributed leadership is affected both by the organizational structure and the individual organizational actor’s willingness to
participate in leadership activity and responsibility. Describing their various collaborative relationships, participants noted that obstacles to participation arose not only from the organization in the form of administration (lack of clarity on the purpose or process, lack of resources, miscommunication of goals, micromanagement, lack of involvement), but also from the organizational actors themselves (lack of involvement, over-involvement, lack of resources, miscommunication, differing goals from the group).

The reluctance of the organization to promote leadership, and the reluctance of individual organizational actors to accept leadership (or followership) affect the quality of the reform effort that the organization is involved with. The two are not mutually dependent on each other.

**Followership.** Followership emerged as a distinct aspect of leadership within both informal collaborative relationships and formalized co-teaching relationships. As an implication of this study, followership is not a response to leadership, rather a part of leadership.

Participants involved in successful, on-going collaborative relationships noted their need to allow their partner to lead, coupled with their own need to lead. In this regard, leadership as reflected by the participants amounted to shared leadership in its simultaneous leadership-followership paradigm (Muethel & Hoegl, 2012; Pearce & Conger, 2003; Marks & Printy, 2003). However, while theory holds that shared leadership focuses on the followership dimension (Erkutlu, 2012), participants reflected equitably on both aspects and how their role altered with the work (see also Zhoe et al., 2013). When asked to reflect on who is the leader within her co-teaching relationship,
Linda shrugged the question off with disdain for the term “leader.” Laura, in describing her informal collaborative relationship, referred to it as a “marriage.” And Bonnie Jo, when asked to consider leadership and informal collaboration, responded that the word “leadership” had lost any meaning because it was bandied about so much.

Leadership in on-going, collaborative structures is mutually acknowledged and reciprocal. The consideration between leadership and collaboration blurred until participants considered that leadership involved vision, while collaboration focused on task management.

Each participant involved in successful on-going collaboration noted that within their relationship, they were both a leader and a follower, and sometimes simultaneously both. As such, successful professional collaboration allows for the organic nature of transformational leadership coupled with the chaotic nature of followership. Accordingly, participation in successful, on-going collaboration transcends both leadership and followership – meeting the demands of both.

**Democracy in education.** The theoretical implications of this study suggest that organizational citizenship should be purposed on common interests. In her contention that corporate forged management techniques are continuously brought to schools in top-down arrangements, Shipps (2000), suggests that “rather than focusing on economic dichotomies that divide” (p. 104), organizational citizenship should be repurposed on common, public interests.

Within the context of describing their formal collaborative efforts, study participants repeatedly noted that when the organization of teacher-based teams was
purposeful (around the teaching of common subject and courses), the product was more fruitful. Similarly, in describing the product of informal collaboration, teachers noted that common interests – classroom management, course material, or even similar styles – positively affected the collaborative relationship. One participant noted that she had been involved in other informal collaborative relationships before, but the one she was currently in worked because of mutual respect and similar work ethic.

This study finds that collaboration as a part of organizational citizenship is an organizational marriage. While organizational citizenship involves – at a base – passive respect; organizational marriage involves – nay, relies on – active respect.

This does not imply that principals should be party hosts ensuring that every teacher has a dance partner. While participants repeatedly lamented the perceived lack of flexibility in arranging formal collaboration to involve all affected parties, they were also resilient in finding ways to work around that problem. Many teachers, especially those describing formal collaboration in positive terms, suggested informal means to involve teachers not involved in their teacher-based team. As such, the informal collaborative relationships again arose as means of reinforcing organizational culture.

**Professional networks.** Individuals have connections with each other, and the stronger their connections, the stronger the network between those individual actors. Connections are measured by any number of different aspects relative to interpersonal relationships: the perception of the relationship, the number of interactions, the intensity of the interactions, and the relation to the organizational purpose.

Participants repeatedly noted the importance of their professional relationships in
both formal and informal collaborative arrangements. Relations were defined in terms of both external locus of perception: geographic location and availability (i.e. mutual time); and internal locus of perception: respect, trust, work ethic and knowledge.

Regarding the embeddedness of individual actors, those participants engaged in co-teaching assignments noted – without using the word “embedded” – their inherent connections to other academic departments, and to other manners of instruction. The embeddedness of individual actors also arose in the reflections of the department chairpersons – who reflected on their connections with both administration and each other in understanding the purpose of the formal collaborative assignments, and the collective reform effort.

Similarly, the social utility of connections was raised in comments from participants across the academic spectrum. Utility of connections was explored on several levels: from a participant who noted he and his co-teaching partner were “friends” but lamented the breakdown in classroom tasks between them, to a veteran teacher remarking on her informal collaboration as a “marriage – it works because we both work.”

Additionally, this implication is supported by the contention that the lower an actor’s centrality in the network, the higher their conceptualization of the centrality of other actors. Throughout this study, novice teachers demonstrated a prescient awareness of the centrality of their department chair (within both the department and the school-at-large). Both veteran teachers and the department chairs often supported these perceptions of network centrality in off-hand remarks.

There are conflicted results around the idea of structural patterning of social life
within organizations. The formal collaborative relations were structured by administration in a top-down, but not micro-managing manner. The specifics of the teacher-based team structures were left to the design of the department chairs, who in turn left those team designs to the individual teachers. While the initial concept for the formal collaborative enterprise was rendered by administration, the individual actors created the final arrangements. Their content or disconnect was at their own hand.

**Practical Significance**

The practical implications of this study are also several-fold. As noted in the limitations, the researcher was formerly directly involved with the school being analyzed, and as such had a unique context for the findings.

The main applied implication is how to develop and distribute leadership amongst teachers. Principals would be well served to consider the understanding and consensus of teachers in the implementing the redistribution of leadership tasks. While consensus is a term bandied about in relation to collaboration, it can serve to limit a principal’s effectiveness in managing reform efforts. As such, principals would do well to promote an organizational culture encouraging joint leadership and followership amongst teachers.

While this study did not specifically analyze for participants’ understanding of the reform effort, it became readily apparent that they experienced disconnect with school administration regarding the structuring of the collaborative arrangements. Many of the participants focused on the lack of understanding regarding the prescribed process of collaboration, or focused on perceptions of associated busy work.

In contradiction of existing literature, this study did not find that purposeful
leadership – as demonstrated amongst teachers – amounted merely to redistribution of management tasks (Hallinger & Heck, 2010a). Instead, participants noted that they were engaged in discussing curriculum, instruction, and assessment methods. (The notable exception to this perception was with the participants representing the Special-education department, who – to varying degrees – commented on their department’s engagement with regulations (i.e. forms).)

While this study was not expressly designed to examine for connections between distributed leadership and increased student achievement, previous studies have (Moolenar et al., 2012). In light of their findings, this study contends that because participants noted their active involvement with their colleagues in discussing curriculum, instruction and assessment practices, teacher leadership, as it emerged, would have a positive effect on student achievement. Purposefully employing distributed leadership within their organizational culture principals should align practice with purpose so as to not merely rearrange deck chairs.

Distributed leadership emerged as more than redistributing specific work responsibilities, or management-oriented tasks (Hallinger & Heck, 2010a, O’Leary et al., 2010). However, if the goal of the school is to continuously refine itself through internal collaborative efforts, then collaboration must involve the distribution of leadership responsibilities beyond management tasks.

Put another way – if the expectation is for teachers to collaborate with each other in order to enhance their individual instruction, then they must also collaborate in order to enhance the curriculum and assessment practices. And they must have a voice in
determining those, for leadership involves a voice.

Participatory leadership also arises as an organizational response to the polarizing nature of heroic and/or hierarchical leadership in traditional organizational structures. While distributed leadership is an organizational practice (not an individual attribute); Spillane (2005) cautions that it is “a product of the interactions of school leaders, followers, and their situation” (p. 144).

Within the context of this study, the leadership demonstrated by individual organizational actors did not expressly involve purposeful interactions between teachers and administrators, but did amongst teachers. Where there were limited or no interactions, there was disconnect. But were there were interactions, there was generally trust. Thus, this study supports the contention that leadership is the product of interactions. Teachers noted that they viewed their colleagues – at least those for whom they had trust and respect – as leaders. Disconnect arose in executing management tasks associated with leadership roles with limited understanding of the purpose.

The trust, communication, and purposefulness of relationships with administrators – important factors for demonstrating and accepting collegial leadership – were not evident. This led to misunderstanding and disconnect. Each of the department chairs lamented both their lack of power associated with making decisions, and their lack of time to complete their assigned management tasks – yet their colleagues viewed them as leaders because they had a network linkage to the administration, and they had knowledge of both the subject and the management tasks. Their colleagues also viewed them as leaders because of their titular roles – and the formality associated therein.
Recommendations for Future Research

This study can be extended in several directions. While this study examined for teacher perceptions of leadership within a school employing the concept of formalized collaborative structures, there are still fundamental questions regarding the organization of professional labor of adults within schools. While distributed leadership theory suggests teacher involvement in the leadership responsibilities of the school, it is important to consider the role of followership in distributed leadership paradigms.

While disconnect between administration and teachers arose as a subset of responses to the research question for this study, additional research should further this understanding. Questions arise regarding the role of labor organizations (i.e. teacher unions) in the distribution of leadership responsibilities. While leadership - in all veins - has traditionally been the purview of administration, teachers have increasingly called for involvement in those responsibilities. While Spillane (2005) cautioned that distributed leadership often amounts to distribution of management tasks, that runs contrary to the responsibility to engage teachers in enhanced curricular, instructional and assessment decisions. Accordingly, the involvement of professional labor organizations should be considered in the distribution of leadership.

Conclusion

John Donne wrote in his Meditation XVII: “No man is an island entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main.” Teachers within their individual classrooms – even when teaching singleton courses – are not islands, but a part of the whole school. Moustakas (1994), explaining Husserlian Phenomenology
suggested that, “the world is a community of persons” (p. 57).

As repeatedly demonstrated by the participants in this study, teachers want to be connected with each other. The dispute arises when the connections are foisted upon them. But the natural connections that happen everyday within schools encourage enhanced instructional techniques. These natural, informal, connections occur for a variety of reasons: mutual appreciation, mutual free time, common subject, respect in each other’s work ethic and knowledge, and mutual trust.

School reform efforts are not the sole responsibility of only one person, or even one entity – they are the responsibility of everyone within the school. Administration has the responsibility to promote, communicate, and monitor a unified vision of the school. Teachers have a responsibility to each other to support, promote and monitor that same unified vision. Both parties have a responsibility to secure the support of the other in the creation of a unified vision focused on improved education for all students.

This was neither a study of school effectiveness nor school improvement. Rather, this was a study of teacher leadership and collaboration considering the value of education in our democratic society and the vitality of teachers in affecting organizational improvement. The role and results of teacher leadership have far-reaching consequences.

The balance of leadership and collaboration between teachers and administrators, and between teachers and their colleagues is an on-going, omnipresent process that involves each individual regardless of title or tenure. Ultimately each organizational actor is both a leader and a follower, often both simultaneously. “And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.”
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