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MICROPOLITICAL INFLUENCES ON TEACHER LEADER SELECTION & ENACTMENT

by

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of  
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## ABSTRACT

### MICROPOLITICAL INFLUENCES ON TEACHER LEADER SELECTION & ENACTMENT

Jennifer Lynn Arthur Thomason  
Old Dominion University, 2021  
Director: Dr. Karen L. Sanzo

The teacher leader phenomenon is plagued with uncertainty but has potential to be a catalyst for building school capacity and increasing school improvement. Questions remain about defining teacher leadership, roles of teacher leaders, and how they carry out a quasi-leadership role in a traditionally hierarchical system. Research on micropolitics in education, specifically how micropolitical influences within an organization affect teacher leader selection and enactment, is lacking. This phenomenologically informed study explored micropolitical influences on teacher leader selection and enactment through the shared experiences of teacher leaders and administrators. Purposeful, criterion sampling was used to select administrator and teacher leader participants. Interviews were the main source of data and were transcribed and coded using in vivo, descriptive, and causation coding. Findings were consistent with previous research on teacher leadership and identity. However, two starting points for teacher leader selection emerged that placed more emphasis on administrator influence and less on teacher leadership preparation programs than previously suggested by research. The administrators' influence was found to affect other micropolitical factors, creating a domino effect that allowed teacher leadership to thrive or collapse. Implications for school, district, and collegiate levels are discussed suggesting these levels must work together to alleviate uncertainty around teacher leadership. A universal teacher leader preparation program would establish a common understanding of the role as well as training and preparation for administrators to prepare them to

identify, select, and develop teacher leaders. With better understanding of teacher leadership, micropolitical influences that have an adverse impact can be curtailed.

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I dedicate this dissertation to several people who have provided me the support and strength to continue on in my educational endeavors: my grandmother, Pearl; my son, Joshua; my husband, Josh; and my late mother, Mary Ann. The words “thank you” do not come close to the gratitude I have for each of you. Thank you and I love you!

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Teacher leaders' impact on teacher efficacy and student achievement is a topic at the forefront of education and even more so today due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has further exposed the importance of teachers taking on leadership responsibilities (Berry et al., 2020). There are increasing arguments for why teacher leadership is vital to a successful school culture and school improvement (Smylie & Eckert, 2017, p. 556). Understandably, districts across the country have many questions about teacher leaders, ranging from defining teacher leadership to implementing policies that bolster school improvement. School administrators' collaboration with teacher leaders has been beneficial in managing school improvement; further, teacher leaders "support a culture of continued growth and ongoing learning in schools and can help colleagues improve their teaching practice" (Ado, 2016, p. 3). However, the path to become a teacher leader has not been heavily researched and explored and is a component in understanding teacher leadership within an organization. In this study, I investigated how teacher leaders were selected, enacted their role, and what enabled or constrained their efforts at the school level.

#### **Statement of the Problem**

The concept of teacher leadership is "not something new" as teachers have "historically assumed certain formal leadership in schools and school districts" (Smylie & Denny, 1990, p. 237). It was not until the 1980s that the concept of teacher leadership was formalized as a way to support school improvement (Weiner & Woulfin, 2018). Since that time, "there have been ever growing calls in the United States and abroad to advance teacher leadership through professional development and changes to school structure and resources" (Weiner & Woulfin, 2018, pp. 212-

213). However, teacher leadership is still evolving mainly because most teachers “have too little voice in teaching and learning policies as well as limited time and space to learn from each other” (Berry et al., 2020, p. 14). Although teacher leadership has been studied extensively, it still lacks a single clear definition, which has resulted in overlapping and sometimes contradictory definitions (Struyve et al., 2014).

The lack of clear understanding of the role of a teacher leader plays an important part in their selection and role enactment. The question remains How are teachers being selected for or assuming the role of a teacher leader? Many teachers and administrators have “ventured forth courageously into the uncharted waters of shared leadership, genuinely hoping to improve teaching and learning” for students (York-Barr & Duke, 2004, p. 292). Likewise, there are teachers who want leadership roles but lack the support, tools, and formal authority to be successful (Will, 2019). Along with their lack of formal authority, there is also little known about how principals and other teachers interact with teacher leaders (Mangin, 2007, p. 319). Despite these challenges, teachers are becoming teacher leaders -even during a pandemic- to support other teachers and students by “finding ways to incubate novel pedagogical and policy ideas, test them for effectiveness, pivot when needed, and spread them to their colleagues” (Berry et al., 2020, p. 11). Research on micropolitics in education, specifically the potential effects it can have on teacher leaders is lacking. Micropolitics refers to the daily interactions and negotiations that are made within the school or division over control, goals, policy, and decision-making (Bacharach & Mundell, 1993). Ultimately, there is little known about how micropolitical influences within an organization affect teacher leader selection and enactment.



### **Research Purpose**

Teacher leadership has gained momentum in educational discourse, specifically related to policy-making aimed at school improvement. However, few researchers have “examined how and why teachers who assume these positions define and perform their new roles” (Smylie & Denny, 1990, p. 238). In addition, there is little research that documents how “other teachers respond to teacher leadership and how those responses might function among other organizational factors in shaping the development and performance of these new roles” (Smylie & Denny, 1990, p. 238). Micropolitical influence is inherent in the school organization (Bacharach & Mundell, 1993). It is important to analyze how this influence affects how teachers are selected to become teacher leaders and how they enact their role.

Research on the micropolitics in education, specifically the potential effects on the selection and role enactment of teacher leaders is sparse. Despite the development of micropolitical theories in education “that have brought about significant studies on organizational life, the micropolitical perspective in education is seldom used to study individual and group interactions and behaviors in school settings” (Brosky, 2011, p. 4). Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore the shared experiences of teacher leaders and administrators to better understand how the micropolitics of the local school setting influenced how teacher leaders were selected and enacted their role. This study was guided by the following questions:

- How do teachers become teacher leaders?
- How does the micropolitical culture of the school influence teachers in becoming teacher leaders?

## **Rationale and Significance**

The study adds to literature on micropolitics in education and teacher leadership; has both theoretical and practical significance and is valuable for educational leaders, current and future teacher leaders, and programs that prepare school leaders. The results from this study have added to the growing body of knowledge on teacher leadership and micropolitics in education. In addition, the results have contributed to a deeper understanding of the use of power and influence in a hierarchical school setting, specifically focusing on the principal-teacher and teacher-teacher relationships in the teacher leader phenomenon. Results also added to the understanding of how teacher leaders are selected and enact their role. Results from this study are significant in the practical sense as it helps to inform what individual school administrators can do to grow and develop teacher leadership within their building. In addition, the findings also offer insight into teacher leadership preparation programs and their overall impact on teacher leadership. Overall, this study responded to the gap in literature around the topic of micropolitics in education, specifically its influence on teacher leadership selection and role enactment.

## **Conceptual Frameworks**

Two conceptual frameworks guided this study and provided a deeper understanding of the selection of teacher leaders and how they enact their role. These two conceptual frameworks were sensemaking theory and complexity theory. Sensemaking theory was used to help understand how teachers make sense of their teacher leader role. Complexity theory was used to understand the complex relationship between the various actors and the role power plays in the teacher leader phenomenon. Both theories are further explained below.

## **Sensemaking Theory**

Sensemaking theory provides a lens for studying how and why teachers become teacher leaders, as well as how they understand, carry out, and respond to that role (Weiner & Woulfin, 2018). Sensemaking is central to identity development and action (Weick et al., 2005). How teacher leaders make meaning of their environment (ideas, rules, and environmental pressures) can affect “the nature and depth of change” (Weiner & Woulfin, 2018, p. 215). The identity transition between a teacher and teacher leader will require change to occur. Depending on how the teacher makes sense of their role will affect this change process. Weiner and Woulfin (2018) propose “that actors’ sensemaking of teacher leadership, including their definition of this role and their conceptions of the norms and routines of teacher leaders, matters for teacher leaders’ work in school improvement” (p. 215). Therefore, teachers can construct different meanings related to the elements of teacher leadership which can “steer teacher leaders’ work as well as other practices and processes in their schools” (Weiner & Woulfin, 2018, p. 215). Individuals, such as teacher leaders, “make sense of policy within macro- and micro- contexts and are influenced by the dynamics and perceptions of their immediate colleagues, as well as the larger professional norms of teacher and schools as organizations” (Weiner & Woulfin, 2018, p. 215). Ultimately, the structures inherent in the organization “shape opportunities to learn, exchange ideas, and shift practice” (Weiner & Woulfin, 2018, p. 215). Sensemaking theory encourages “focus on how and why social and organizational context in the sampled teacher leaders’ school” influenced the selection and role enactment of the teacher leaders (Weiner & Woulfin, 2018, p. 215).

## Complexity Theory

The system of education is not linear. It is a very complex system in which “policies emerge and adapt (emergence, change, homeostasis) as reiterations (fractals) of precedents (sensitive dependency on initial conditions), as a function of the timing (butterfly effect, self-organized criticality), competing voices (feedback), and competing values (strange attractors)” (Shoup & Studer, 2010, p. 24). The selection and role enactment of teacher leaders operates within the complex context of education in which power plays an important role. Yukl (1998) identified two major domains for understanding the origin of power related to teacher leadership: positional power and personal power. Teacher leaders can operate out of both formal and informal roles. Therefore, depending on their role, the type of power utilized differs. Formal leadership roles rely on positional power, which represents control over resources, rewards, punishments, and information (S. M. P. Scribner & Bradley-Levine, 2010, p. 495). Positional power affords “leaders’ authority that can be based on deference, compliance, legitimacy, coercion, incentives, and access to information” (S. M. P. Scribner & Bradley-Levine, 2010, p. 495). Informal roles utilize personal power which is “derived from expertise, friendship and loyalty, and (arguably) charisma” (S. M. P. Scribner & Bradley-Levine, 2010, p. 495). Personal power “draws its authority from the extent to which leaders have a reputation for and are depended on for reliable advice. Leaders also garner authority through their personal relationships, depending on the degree to which others identify with, trust, and respect them” (S. M. P. Scribner & Bradley-Levine, 2010, p. 495). Various types of formal and informal power influence organizational culture. The power of those involved in education is contingent upon the social context. Some actors are considered more powerful than others depending on the context, their authority, and available resources. However, those who are considered weaker actors are

not powerless (Fowler, 2013, p. 23). Each educational actor has types of power and power resources accessible to them (Fowler, 2013, p. 36). As Fowler (2013) states, “Power permeates the education system, and although some actors are more powerful than others, all have power” (p. 36). The role of power in the educational hierarchy has the potential to have profoundly affect teacher leader selection and role enactment.

### **Overview of Methodology**

A phenomenologically-informed qualitative study was conducted to investigate how teacher leader selection was influenced by the micropolitics of their educational organization. Qualitative research refers to “research about persons’ lives, stories, behavior, but also about organizational functioning, social movement, or interactional relationships” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 17). The aim of phenomenological research is to understand social and psychological phenomena based on the lived experiences of those involved (Groenewald, 2004). This phenomenologically-informed, qualitative study targeted the effects of the micropolitics of an organization on the selection and role enactment of teacher leaders.

### **Research Questions**

1. What is the relationship between school level micropolitics and teacher leader selection and enactment?
  - a. How is the phenomenon of teacher leader selection perceived through the lens of a teacher?
  - b. How is the phenomenon of teacher leader selection perceived through the lens of an administrator?

2. What are the school-level micropolitical factors, such as school culture, school structure, school leadership, and collegial relationships, affecting teacher leader selection as well as role enactment and growth?

a. What role does micropolitics play in teachers becoming teacher leaders as well as enacting and growing in their role?

In this phenomenologically-informed, qualitative study, I collected data on the micropolitics of a specific school district to investigate and understand the effects on teacher leader selection and role enactment. Bayside School District (a pseudonym), which is located in a Mid-Atlantic state, was the location for the study. To explore the effects of micropolitics on teacher leader selection, purposeful, criterion sampling was used to select participants. All instructional and administrative staff from elementary schools at Bayside School District, approximately 650 people, were contacted via email to determine interest and selection. Teacher leaders were selected based on their leadership experience and whether they self-identified as a teacher leader. Since teacher leadership is not well defined in the literature, I reached out to all elementary teachers in order to garner a sample of both formal and informal teacher leaders as well as those with positional and personal power. In both of these situations, the teacher leader had to self-identify as a teacher leader based on the following definition of a teacher leader: A teacher leader is a teacher who maintains “K-12 classroom-based teaching responsibilities, while also taking on leadership responsibilities outside of the classroom” (Wenner & Campbell, 2017, p. 140). In addition, teacher leaders had to meet the following criteria: a full-time classroom teacher at a public elementary school and hold a professional teaching license. Likewise, administrators were selected based on their willingness to participate in the study and whether a teacher leader from their school was also selected. Participation in the study was voluntary. For

the purposes of this study, teacher leadership was defined as both formal and informal leadership roles that teachers assume and is grounded in the key premise that a teacher leader is able to influence others to “contribute to school improvement and educational practice” (Cheng & Szeto, 2016, p. 141). Formal teacher leadership roles include specific positions that may come with an additional contract or stipend. These roles include: department chairs, grade-level leaders, instructional leaders, and committee chairs (Harris, 2003; Lovelace, 2019; & Patterson & Patterson, 2004). Informal teacher leadership roles can include “classroom-related functions such as planning, communicating goals, and regulating activities, mentoring preservice teachers, developing curriculum, sharing materials, engaging in curriculum and leading workshops” (Pucella, 2014, p. 17). These informal roles usually do not come with an official title, contract, or stipend (Lovelace, 2019). Those who responded to the initial email with interest in participating in the study completed a questionnaire to determine demographics and alignment to the key terms of teacher leader and teacher leadership to determine selection for the study. Recall that for the purposes of this study any teacher who self-identified as a teacher leader was considered for selection.

## **Interviews**

Interviews were the primary source of data collection. In addition, data was also collected from the questionnaire interested participants initially completed. Once participants were selected to continue on in the study, a formal semi-structured interview was conducted with each participant as well as follow-up interviews as necessary. The purpose of these interviews was to gain insight into the shared experiences of the teacher leaders and administrators on teacher leader selection and role enactment. In hermeneutic phenomenology, an interview serves two very specific purposes: “it may be used as a means for exploring and gathering experiential

narrative material” that may help to deeper the understanding of the human phenomenon and it “may be used as a vehicle to develop a conversational relation with a partner about the meaning of an experience” (van Manen, 1997, p. 66). The initial questionnaire took interested participants approximately 30 minutes and asked demographic questions as well as questions about the participant’s understanding of teacher leadership. From this questionnaire, 24 participants were approached (fourteen self-identified teacher leaders and ten administrators) to continue as participants in the study. Out of those 24 participants that were approached, 20 were eligible to continue on with the study (eleven teacher leaders and nine administrators). The teacher leaders were matched with administrators from the same school, either in pairs, triads (one administrator and two teacher leaders), and in one case a quartet (two administrators and two teacher leaders). These 20 participants participated in a semi-structured interview that lasted approximately 60 minutes. After the interview, a second semi-structured follow-up interview was conducted with participants if necessary. This second interview or email correspondence served as an optional, follow-up interview to the first if needed for data saturation. Each interview was audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Participants received the interview transcript to review for validity. Throughout the interviews, I kept a notebook to record memos and observations. I established emerging codes and themes by analyzing data from each interview. This was done by searching for patterns among each interview in the form of keywords and phrases and then between the interviews using in vivo, descriptive, and causation coding. These coding methods will be described in further detail in Chapter 3. Through the teacher leader and administrator interviews, I was seeking to understand how the micropolitics of an organization affected the selection and/or role enactment of teacher leaders.



## Definition of Terms

The definitions of key terms, that may be unknown or unfamiliar to the reader, are included to aid in the overall comprehension and understanding of the study. A list of these key terms with their definitions is provided below:

- **Teacher Leader:** An educator who leads “within and beyond the classroom, identifies with and contributes to a community of teacher learners and leaders, and influences others towards improved educational practice” (Struyve et al., 2014, p. 206). A teacher leader is a teacher who maintains “K-12 classroom-based teaching responsibilities, while also taking on leadership responsibilities outside of the classroom” (Wenner & Campbell, 2017, p. 140).
- **Teacher leadership:** Includes both formal and informal leadership roles that teachers assume and is grounded in the key premise that a teacher leader is able to influence others to “contribute to school improvement and educational practice” (Cheng & Szeto, 2016, p. 141). Formal teacher leadership roles include specific positions that may come with an additional contract or stipend. These roles include: department chairs, grade-level leaders, instructional leaders, and committee chairs (Harris, 2003; Lovelace, 2019; & Patterson & Patterson, 2004). Informal teacher leadership roles can include “classroom-related functions such as planning, communicating goals, and regulating activities, mentoring preservice teachers, developing curriculum, sharing materials, engaging in curriculum and leading workshops” (Pucella, 2014, p. 17). These informal roles usually do not come with an official title, contract, or stipend (Lovelace, 2019).

- **Micropolitics:** “The internal and external organizational systems found within the school building” (Conway et al., 2015, p. 24). Micropolitics also refers to the daily interactions and negotiations that are made within the school or district over control, goals, policy, and decision-making (Bacharach & Mundell, 1993).

### **Organization of Study**

Five chapters make up the organization of the research study. Chapter 1 served as an introduction and overview of the study, including the research purpose, study significance, and key terms. Chapter 2 presents a review of the literature related to the evolution of teacher leadership and micropolitics in schools as well as the theoretical framework of micropolitical theory. Chapter 3 discusses the design of the study and methodology, including participant selection and data collection and analysis. Chapter 4 presents the findings of the study as well as draw conclusions based on the findings. Finally, Chapter 5 concludes the study with an analysis of the findings, contextualized within relevant literature, and present implications for practitioners and researchers.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **Overview**

The study explored the relationship between school level micropolitics, the selection of teacher leaders, and the enactment of their role through the lived experiences of teacher leaders, and administrators. A review of current and relevant literature is presented in this chapter. The literature review focuses on the following components of teacher leadership as it relates to teacher leader selection: the evolution of teacher leadership, teacher leader identity and development, political influences at the school level, and the theoretical framework of micropolitical theory that serves as the foundation to understanding how teacher leaders are selected and how they enact their role.

#### **Teacher Leadership**

##### **The Evolution of Teacher Leadership**

The concept of teacher leadership is not new; teachers have “historically assumed certain formal leadership in schools and school districts” and their leadership is viewed as a useful strategy to increase teacher efficacy and student achievement. (Smylie & Denny, 1990, p. 237). The evolution of teacher leadership has been slow because the “system has not been organized to treat teachers as leaders” and there is no clear definition to frame the role of a teacher leader (Brosky, 2011, p.3). Teacher leadership is both the formal and informal leadership roles that teachers assume, grounded in the key premise that a teacher leader is able to influence others to “contribute to school improvement and educational practice” (Cheng & Szeto, 2016, p. 141). Overall, the lack of understanding of the teacher leader role by administrators, members of the board of education, parents, and teachers “adds to the obstacles teacher leaders face” in assuming

and enacting this role (Brosky, 2011, p. 3). Despite this lack of clarity, teacher leadership has continued to develop over time.

Ultimately, teacher leadership developed as a response to shared decision making between teachers and administrators and efforts to “decentralize decision making in the areas of teacher staff development, curriculum and program development, and program and personnel evaluation” (Smylie & Denny, 1990, p. 237). York-Barr and Duke (2004) have described the development of teacher leaders as occurring in three waves. In the first wave, teachers served in formal roles, such as a department head, to increase the efficiency of school operations. The second wave saw teachers appointed to roles in which their instructional expertise could be utilized. These roles included curriculum leaders, coaches, mentors, and specialists. Finally, the third and current wave encompasses the first two waves as well as the teacher leader’s critical role in school culture. In the third wave, teachers are leaders both in and out of the classroom (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Over time, researchers have determined that teacher leadership emerged “from dissatisfaction with the current conditions in education” and is a critical component in teacher efficacy and school improvement (Struyve et al., 2014, pp. 204-205). More recently, the COVID-19 pandemic has “ripped off the band-aid of top-down reforms of the past, and made more clear about the kind of teacher leadership that is needed, now and in the future” (Berry et al., 2020, p. 18). The third and current wave is the focus of this study because the micropolitics of the school organization potentially have a profound influence on the selection of teacher leaders who assume leadership responsibilities in and out of the classroom.

### **Teacher Leader Model Standards**

The Teacher Leader Model Standards were “developed to encourage discussions about the competencies required for teacher leadership as a means for school transformation”

(Cosenza, 2015, p. 82). In addition, they are intended as program guidelines to help prepare and develop teacher leaders (Teacher Leadership Exploratory Consortium, 2011). Teacher leaders may have formal or informal roles and responsibilities, and the Teacher Leader Model Standards acknowledge keep that by providing

a set of guidelines that generate influence and respect through being continuous learners, being approachable, using group skills and influence to improve the educational practice of their peers, model effective practices, exercise their influence in formal and informal contexts, and support collaborative team structures within their schools. (Cosenza, 2015, p. 82)

The seven Teacher Leader Model Standards (Teacher Leadership Exploratory Consortium, 2011, p. 9) are:

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

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

Domain III: Promoting Professional Learning for Continuous Improvement

Domain IV: Facilitating Improvements in Instruction and Student Learning

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

Domain VI: Improving Outreach and Collaboration with Families and Community

Domain VII: Advocating for Student Learning and the Profession

The Standards have the potential to impact teacher leader selection and enactment through role appointment by administrators and/or through the development of a teacher preparation program in which teacher leaders can participate.

## **Teacher Leader Identity**

For the purposes of this study, a teacher leader will be defined as an educator who leads “within and beyond the classroom, identifies with and contributes to a community of teacher learners and leaders, and influences others towards improved educational practice” (Struyve et al., 2014, p. 206). More specifically, a teacher leader is a teacher who maintains “K-12 classroom-based teaching responsibilities, while also taking on leadership responsibilities outside of the classroom” (Wenner & Campbell, 2017, p. 140) and is able to influence others to “contribute to school improvement and educational practice” (Cheng & Szeto, 2016, p. 141). This definition highlights the several identities that a teacher leader may have within an organization. Ultimately this is because teacher leadership “blurs the traditional division between teaching and leading” which forces teacher leaders to rethink their conceptions of who they are professionally (Struyve et al., 2014, p. 207). Teacher leaders can be reluctant to identify as a leader as they have reported internal conflict over their role as it begins to expand beyond their classroom (Carver, 2016). Likewise, teachers can be reluctant to identify as a leader if their role does not align with their previous understanding of the hierarchical view of a leader so they hold on tight to their teacher identity (Heikka & Waniganayake, 2011; Muijs et al., 2004). Some teachers believe that becoming a leader will grant them access to power they do not necessarily want (Mevawalla & Hadley, 2012) or feel that if the teacher leader role does not come with a formal title and will not be recognized as such (Grarock & Morrissey, 2013). Role transformation from teacher to teacher-leader is difficult; those teacher leaders who fail to “identify as leaders may never realize their leadership potential” (Carver, 2016, p. 177). The transition from teacher to teacher leader is challenging because teachers have to “let go of earlier role conceptions” and embrace their leader identity (Carver, 2016, p. 160).

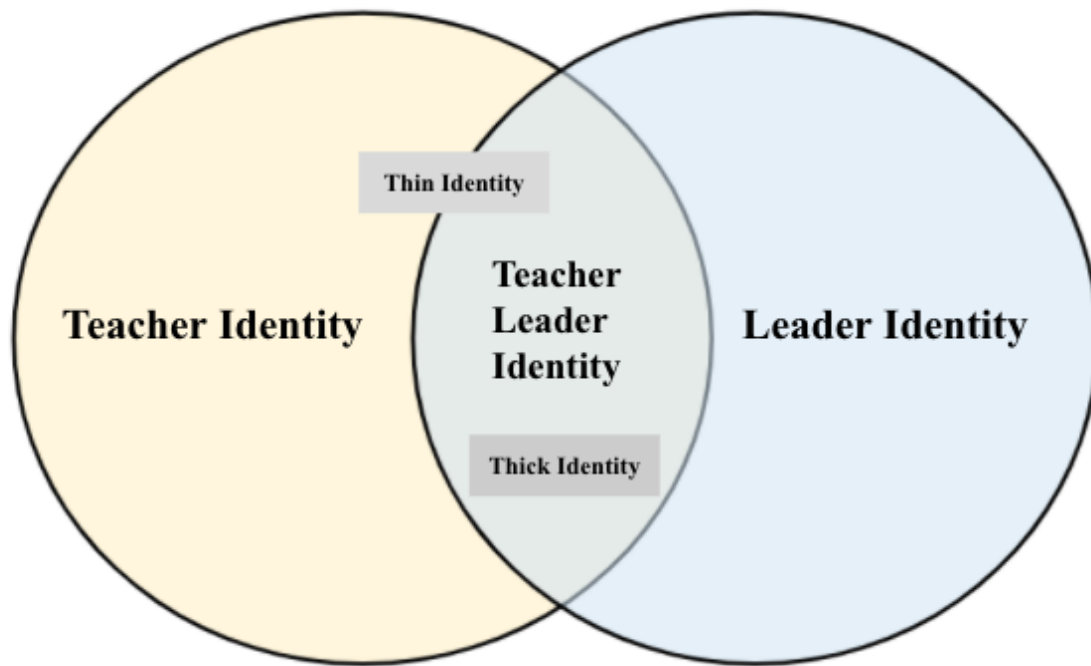
Although there is considerable research on identity, specifically teacher and leader identities (see Beijaard et al., 2004; Carroll & Levy, 2010; Coburn, 2001; D. V. Day & Harrison, 2007; D. V. Day & Sin, 2011; DeRue & Ashford, 2010; Gee, 2000; Gee & Crawford, 1998; Geijsel & Meijers, 2005; Jones & McEwen, 2000; Shoup & Studer, 2010), this review will focus on two main types of identities when discussing the transition from teacher to teacher leader: teacher identity and leader identity. These two identities come together to form the teacher-leader identity. Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) suggest in order to understand teacher identity, one must rely on the understanding of self and the understanding of self in relation to others. This conceptual understanding of self and self in relation to others is central to teachers understanding their role as a teacher within the organization (Cooper, 2020). The teacher identity is a social identity. This means the identity is constantly being shaped and reshaped based on the relationships formed (Campbell et al., 2019). Likewise, the work of a teacher-leader stems from the teacher identity and remains very much socially-constructed evolving with social interactions (Sfard & Prusak, 2005). Cooper (2020) has suggested the identity work of teacher-leaders involves many facets:

the interweaving of competences (skills, knowledge) and performances (actions, interactions); linkages between external recognition (others recognizing teachers as leaders) and internal recognition (recognizing oneself as a leader); overlapping communities of practice (enacting teacher leadership across different contexts); and understanding key influences on teacher leadership practices, such as a teacher lens (a commitment to teaching responsibilities), dispositions (e.g., interpersonal skills, ability to collaborate), and structures (e.g., policies, cultural norms). (p. 3)

An individual can have more than one identity at the same time and these identities are constantly evolving, overlapping, and even competing. Therefore, teachers can hold a teacher identity concurrently with a leader identity. One must realize that both identities are in practice in order to identify as a teacher leader (Cooper, 2020).

The teacher leader identity can be expressed in two ways: *thick* or *thin* (Wenner & Campbell, 2017). A thick identity is one in which a “passion for leading” is rooted in who the individual is all of the time, marrying their personal and work roles and responsibilities (Wenner & Campbell, 2017, p. 15). Thin identity is based on the notion that the teacher views himself or herself as a teacher-leader only occasionally when called to lead (Wenner & Campbell, 2017). Thick identities are seen as more effective for leading because they allow “teacher-leaders to maintain their vision of progressing the organization while being consistent in their action”; thin teacher-leader identities are viewed as less effective because they encourage teacher-leaders to “compartmentalize their work and to shift in between competing agendas” (Cooper, 2020, p. 4). Teachers may enter a leadership role with a thin identity until they have gained enough experience and support to establish a thick identity (Cooper, 2020). In order to move from a thin to thick identity of a teacher leader, the teacher needs to internalize this identity as part of their self (Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016). When a teacher begins to embrace the role of leader and the responsibilities that come with the role they begin to move from a thin to thick identity as a teacher leader (Carver, 2016; see Figure 1).



**Figure 1***Teacher Leader Identity*

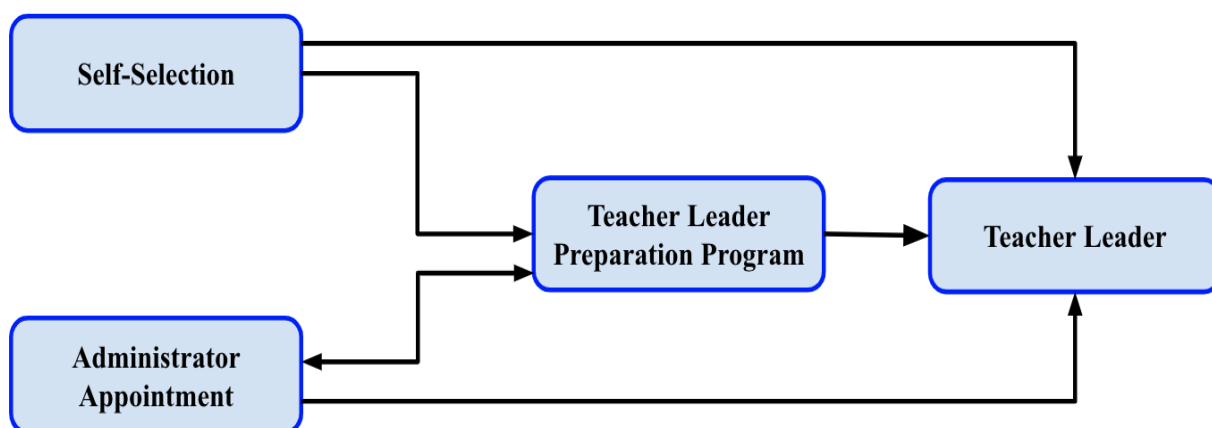
Struyve et al. (2014) suggested that “taking on formal leadership responsibilities as a teacher involves not just obtaining and using new knowledge and skills but also continuously switching between teaching and leading, as well as commuting between individual classroom and broader school practices” (p. 207). Ultimately, the transition from a teacher to a teacher leader can be “particularly challenging identity work” (Osmond-Johnson, 2018, p. 67). The organizational hierarchy that is present in many schools can challenge teacher identities (Connell, 2009; C. Day, 2002; Naylor, 2011; Osmond-Johnson, 2018).

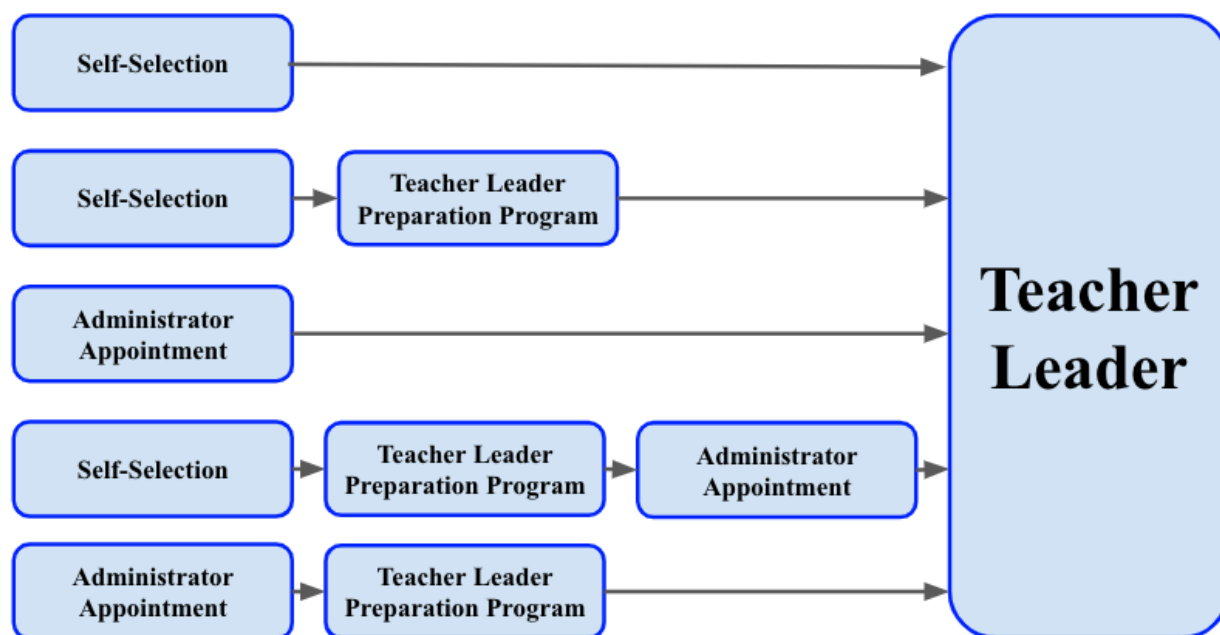
## Teacher Leader Pathways

There are two main pathways a teacher can take to become a teacher leader: appointed by an administrator and self-selection. In addition, there is another component to these two paths which is the participation in a formal preparation program (Figure 2). However, these teacher leader pathways are not as linear as they might seem. The various pathways often overlap and merge in the direction of a teacher being selected as a teacher leader (Figure 3).

**Figure 2**

*Teacher Leader Pathways*



**Figure 3***Teacher Leader Pathways Extrapolated***Appointed**

Today's educational culture often encourages administrators to “distribute leadership work, involving teachers in decision-making and school improvement” (Smylie & Eckert, 2017, p. 1). Therefore, new leadership positions are created to which “teachers are appointed and ‘anointed’” by their administrator to assume responsibilities outside of the classroom, often with limited preparation and training to build the necessary skills of a teacher leader, such as the ability collaborate, develop an environment of trust among colleagues, listen, lead, present, facilitate, analyzing data, communicate, provide constructive feedback, and curriculum and instructional expertise (Smylie & Denny, 1990, p. 237). Administrators must determine and influence who “engages in teacher leadership development and practice” (Smylie & Eckert,

2017, p. 570). However, this pattern of elevating only a select few teachers to leadership positions can have unintended consequences, like burn-out for those chosen and leadership potential squandered for those who are not chosen (Barth, 2001). Subsequently, teacher leaders are often selected without any formal preparation in leadership but rather because they display a “dedication and enthusiasm for teaching” (Gerstenschlager & Barlow, 2019, p. 19). The administrator who holds close to the hierarchical structure of the organization, will use their power to control which teachers are given leadership responsibilities. Therefore, administrators carefully select those to whom they delegate responsibilities. These selections are often based on who will support “the principal's agenda and who will not divert attention or energy by pursuing their own” (Barth, 2001, p. 447). Barth (2001) spoke with one teacher participant who shared, “The administrator’s task is to influence a *chosen few* and have them advocate his position on issues indirectly” (p. 447). Administrators identify the formal teacher leaders and appoint them to formal positions, such as department heads, grade-level leads, mentors, and so forth (Patterson & Patterson, 2004). The tendency for the administrator to use their power in this way can sometimes inadvertently give “rise to that guerrilla teacher leader, who, because he or she will never be invited by the principal to lead, must work surreptitiously” (Barth, 2001, p. 447). Therefore, the teacher working independently to acquire additional responsibilities and become a teacher leader without being appointed tends to merge with the path of self-selection.

### **Self-Selection**

Another pathway that teachers take to becoming teacher leaders is that of self-selection or self-initiative (Smylie & Eckert, 2017). On this path, teachers usually assume additional leadership responsibilities or roles outside of their normal classroom duties. Teacher leaders who assume these leadership roles are often left to develop these positions (Smylie & Brownlee-

Conyers, 1992). Those teachers who self-select to become teacher leaders are often viewed as teachers with extensive classroom experience or have in some way been recognized as “someone who has the qualities necessary for more formal leadership roles” either by colleagues or administrators (Nolan & Palazzolo, 2011, p. 305). This recognition by colleagues or even administrators, influences the teacher to self-select informal teacher leader responsibilities. Informal teacher leaders “are those recognized by their colleagues because of their credibility, expertise, or relationship-building skills” (Patterson & Patterson, 2004, p. 74). These teacher leaders might “offer support to beginning teachers, design and implement staff development activities, make recommendations regarding new teacher candidates, write grants to gain needed resources, or even act as technology experts within the school” (Patterson & Patterson, 2004, p. 74). They might also self-initiate collaborations between colleagues and help to review colleague’s instructional practices and assessments (Harrison & Killion, 2007). Reeves & Lowenhaupt (2016) found that even pre-service teachers desired leadership roles after as few as 5 years in the classroom and were “considering task diversity and leadership opportunities as a common aspiration” (p. 183). Although some teachers self-select and begin taking on informal teacher leader responsibilities, others self-select to take part in a more formal leadership preparation program to build efficacy and increase their chances of being selected for a formal teacher leadership position.

### **Teacher Leader Preparation Programs**

A lesser-known path that teachers can take to leadership, once they self-select or have been appointed by an administrator, is through teacher leadership preparation programs. This is the “intentional, systematic, systemic development of teachers’ capacity for leadership and teachers’ leadership practice” (Smylie & Eckert, 2017, p. 557). This potential component to a

pathway is different because it involves the intentional development and preparation of the teacher into a teacher leader, whereas the other two do not. In education systems that are focused on reform, prioritizing teacher leader development “will result in those systems achieving in school improvement, better student learning outcomes, enhanced teacher learning and increased staff retention” (Struyve et al., 2014, p. 205). Partnerships between school districts and institutions of higher education sometimes offer course work on becoming a teacher leader. Institutions of higher education have implemented programs for both pre-service and veteran teachers. Within the district, cohorts or academies of teacher leaders are created to bring together teachers who aspire to take on additional leadership roles and become teacher leaders (Teacher Leadership Exploratory Consortium, 2011). The school district provides the training for this type of teacher leader preparation and can make it a consistent program across the district. However, teacher leader preparation and development programs rarely address the leadership “skills designed to counter traditional norms and cultures” (Carver, 2016, p. 160).

It should not be assumed “that all teachers who are appointed to or who self-initiate leadership have already within them the capacity to succeed” (Smylie & Eckert, 2017, p. 557). Rather, teacher leadership development should be “considered as a matter of learning and individual and social-organizational change, and that efforts to develop teacher leadership should be informed by relevant theory and research” (Smylie & Eckert, 2017, p. 560). Development should be tailored to the needs of the teacher or cohort of teachers. For instance, “leadership development might need to help beginning teachers overcome their sense of concern about their own practice so that they are able to gain the skill and confidence needed to work effectively with more experienced colleagues on instructional improvement” (Smylie & Eckert, 2017, p. 560). Likewise, the professional development for teacher leaders should focus on the content

knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, and leadership abilities (Wenner & Campbell, 2017).

### **Factors Affecting Teacher Leader Selection and Role Enactment**

Teacher leadership is grounded in the premise that a teacher leader can influence others to “contribute to school improvement and educational practice” (Cheng & Szeto, 2016, p. 141). The relationships teacher leaders form increases their influence on school improvement and the educational practice of other teachers (Brosky, 2011). Therefore, a wide variety of formal and informal activities and responsibilities fall under the teacher leader umbrella. In addition, there are four main factors within the school that affect the selection of teacher leaders and enactment of the role. The four main factors are school culture, school structure, the school leadership, and colleagues (See *Figure 4*). Overall, little attention has been given to the micropolitical influences of these four factors and the aspect of teacher leadership (Brosky, 2011).

#### **School Culture**

Schools are complex organizations with cultures “shaped by their histories and the interactions of the people in them” (S. M. P. Scribner & Bradley-Levine, 2010, p. 497). Numerous organizational factors enable the selection, development, and practice of teacher leaders and the implementation of “teacher leadership mandates have important consequences for the social-professional relations in schools” (Struyve et al., 2014, p. 207). The organizational context of schools “provides its members a context-specific set of beliefs, values, and assumptions over time” (S. M. P. Scribner & Bradley-Levine, 2010, p. 497). Consequently, the construction of teacher leadership will be shaped by the culture of the school (S. M. P. Scribner & Bradley-Levine, 2010).

Conditions must be present to support teacher leadership, such as “an environment where trust is present, where dialogue can occur openly, and where there are values and vision in support of shared instructional practices” (Ado, 2016, p. 5). There are teachers who want leadership roles but lack the support, tools, and formal authority to be successful; few school districts have formal teacher leadership roles that come with recognition, title, power, and compensation (Will, 2019). In addition, the extra responsibilities that teacher leaders take on beyond their normal classroom responsibilities can lead to “burnout, disaffection, professional conflict and disappointment at the same time” if a supportive school culture is not in place (Struyve et al., 2014, p.205). Previous research on teacher leadership suggests that re-culturing schools through supportive leadership and professional culture is paramount in growing teacher leaders (Carver, 2016; Lieberman, 1988; Margolis & Huggins, 2012; Muijs & Harris, 2007; Smylie & Denny, 1990). The culture of a school has to be one in which accepts teachers as leaders and promotes collaboration while rejecting the norm of working in isolation in order for teachers to become teacher leaders and successfully carry out their role (Teacher Leadership Exploratory Consortium, 2011).

### **School Structure**

Successful teacher leadership is contingent upon support structures and routines (Smylie & Denny, 1990; Muijs & Harris, 2007). Schools that have learning communities, teachers taking on leadership roles, and opportunities and time for collaboration are those in which teacher leadership can thrive and positive change can occur (Beauchum & Denith, 2004). However, most schools are not structured as such to promote teacher leadership. Ultimately this is because teacher leadership does not operate within the traditional school structure (Silva et al, 2000). Therefore, teacher leadership in schools “leads to reshaping the existing structures and



expectations of teacher roles in order to legitimize roles beyond the classroom” (Struyve et al., 2014, p. 207). The reshaping of structure is necessary because the teacher leadership roles “challenges established authority patterns and intervenes with many professional norms” and can introduce role conflict and confusion as people become uncomfortable with knowing who has power and authority (Struyve et al., 2014, p. 207).

Recall from previous discussion that teacher leadership includes both formal and informal roles. In formal teacher leadership, teacher leaders can work within their own classroom for part of the day and be relieved from teaching duties for the other part to enact formal responsibilities. Other teacher leaders may continue to have their full-time teaching obligations and enact leadership responsibilities in addition to those obligations (Struyve et al., 2014). Further, these tasks “can be entirely located within the school or can exceed the borders of the organization” (Struyve et al., 2014, p. 205-206). The lack of understanding surrounding teacher leadership by administrators, members of the board of education, parents, and teachers only “adds to the obstacles teacher leaders face” (Brosky, 2011, p. 3). Ado (2016) found that putting in place structures that support “collaboration, teacher-driven, contextualized professional development, and reflective practice” are critical pieces to teacher leader development within a building (p. 5). Teachers can find it difficult to engage in leadership development if the proper structures and values are not in place and instead there is a “legacy model that values isolation over collaboration and where failure is still viewed as a bad thing” (Berry et al., 2020, p. 21). More “room to move in and out of different roles, take on more or less responsibility, focus on more or fewer students, and serve in and out of cyberspace, as well as in and out of their school buildings” will be required to rethink school structure (Berry et al., 2020, p. 21). The structure of

a school (time, recognition, authority, and support) can have an affect on teachers becoming teacher leaders and carrying out their role.

### **School Leadership**

The organizational context of the school is ultimately shaped by the school's leaders, which influences the selection of teacher leaders (Murphy et al., 2009). However, given the ambiguity of the teacher leader role and its roots in distributed leadership, its nature can be rather "fluid and emergent, rather than a fixed phenomenon" (Cheng & Szeto, 2016, p. 141). The ambiguity implies that there are "power relationships within the school where the distinctions between leaders and followers can be blurred" (Cheng & Szeto, 2016, p. 141). Berry et al. (2020) found that "only 42% of principals report that teachers have significant involvement in deciding school policies, curriculum, and instruction" (p. 14). School leaders are a critical component in the success of teacher leadership but "it cannot be assumed that principals—or other school leaders—are willing or able to support teacher leader development" (Smylie & Eckert, 2017, p. 570). Teacher leader selection and development might not be viewed as part of their role or even something that they are capable of handling (Smylie & Eckert, 2017). Therefore, in order for school leadership to be an effective contributing factor to teacher leader selection and development, they must be prepared in their own job to select, prepare, and develop teacher leaders (Murphy et al., 2009). According to the research, school leaders have a substantial impact on creating conditions within their school that will either support or hinder teacher leaders (Ado, 2016; Higgins & Bonne, 2011; Muijs & Harris, 2007; Silva et al., 2000).

Teacher leadership may bring "principals and teachers who assume leadership roles into "collaborative play" for the first time" with "no history or trust on which to build new working relationships (Smylie & Brownlee-Conyers, 1992, p. 153). There is ambiguity related to

accountability when it comes to teacher leadership as there is an entanglement of classroom and leadership performance (Floden et al., 1988; Popkewitz & Lind, 1989). Likewise, teacher leaders may “shape their leadership roles and their relationships with principals to minimize conflict with the social and normative systems that define their relationship with teaching colleagues” (Smylie & Brownlee-Conyers, 1992, p. 156). Ambiguity related to accountability may put pressure on administrators to successfully implement teacher leadership initiatives (Smylie & Brownlee-Conyers, 1992). Teachers becoming teacher leaders and successfully carrying out their role is heavily dependent on the administrator’s support. Teacher leadership can “neither be effective nor successful without principal support, but neither can the principal maximize his or her effectiveness without harnessing the talents and expertise of teachers in leadership roles” (Teacher Leadership Exploratory Consortium, 2011).

### ***Shared Leadership***

Shared leadership is a central component in the relationship between the principal and teacher leader (Barth, 2001). Principal support of teachers taking on leadership responsibilities is a critical component in undertaking a school improvement initiative (Barth, 2001). Barth (2001) suggests, “The principal, it seems, has a disproportionate influence upon teacher leadership — for better or for worse” (p. 447). Those principals who hold on tight to their power and their hierarchical status instead of embracing shared leadership, often become an obstacle in the leadership journey of a teacher. Barth (2001) also found that the tendency of a principal to share leadership seems to directly correlate to their personal security. Principals who are stronger and more secure in their role are more likely to share leadership compared to those principals who are weaker or not as secure. In the shared leadership model, teacher leaders are “encouraged, supported, and recognized” in a system of shared leadership as it values teachers’ insights (Berry

et al., 2020, p. 19). Numerous organizations outside of education operate within the realm of shared leadership. One such organization is the healthcare industry. This industry “has increasingly configured its services as team activities rather than individual ones” and has broken down “past territorialities, and instead, acting on shared values” (Berry et al., 2020, p. 21). This organization serves as a good example of shared leadership whereas the hierarchical nature of the school organization allows for territories and silos to be established.

This distributed perspective on leadership refers to the work completed by both formal and informal leaders within the organization (Harris & Spillane, 2008). Cheng and Szeto (2016) argue that “on the one hand, principals’ support and facilitation are critical in delegating leadership to teachers. On the other hand, teachers are the agency of teacher leadership and can initiate their performance of various leadership roles in the school context” (p. 140). Therefore, the development of teacher leadership “inevitably involves contributions from the mutual influences of the principal’s facilitation and the teacher’s self-initiation of the roles” (Cheng & Szeto, 2016, p. 140). There is a “more cooperative view of influence and authority” as both the principal and the teacher leaders are collaborating and sharing responsibilities to achieve a shared goal (Nappi, 2014, p. 29). When school leaders share leadership responsibilities, the “type of collaboration that follows results in productive social capital, which in turn increases the scope of effectiveness of the professional community” (Nappi, 2014, p. 33). Ultimately, resistance occurs in schools in which leadership is not shared or distributed (Harris, 2005). Resistance occurs between teacher leaders and administrators as well as between teacher leaders and colleagues (Klein et al., 2018).

## Colleagues

In the role transformation from teacher to teacher leader, teacher leaders often encounter “resistance and isolation from their peers” as they begin to embody the identity of a leader; begin to influence change; “question the status quo, challenge existing practices, and assume authority beyond their classroom responsibilities” (Carver, 2016, p. 160). Tension can arise when some teachers are given special roles, such as a teacher leader, due to the cultural perception that all teachers are on the same level of the organizational hierarchy (Cheung et al., 2018). Mangin and Stoelinga (2011) suggest that most teachers do not want to take on the role of teacher leader because they do not want to be placed in a hierarchical relationship with colleagues. Teachers seem to “cling to an ‘us against them’ mentality, so being seen as part of the administration can be risky” and they do not want to risk their relationship with colleagues (Fairman & Mackenzie, 2015, p. 78). These types of feelings might be less likely to exist in a school with a supportive culture of administrators who make teacher leadership and shared decision making the norm.

The role of teacher leader is also ambiguous and has not been clearly defined as previous research often has produced various and sometimes competing definitions. Teachers do not always have a clear understanding of the shift in identity and loyalty as well as the role of power when becoming a teacher leader. The teacher leader role often has a “vague power base and blurred boundaries of authority and responsibility” (Cooper, 2020, p. 5). This can lead to “resistance from colleagues when they did not understand the teacher-leader role and felt it was unnecessary or objected to working with the teacher-leader to carry out additional responsibilities imposed on them” (Cooper, 2020, p. 5). At the same time, teachers can also be hesitant to identify as teacher leaders due to the idea of having power over colleagues and wanting to be seen as equal to and not above their colleagues (Carver, 2016; Mevawalla &

Hadley, 2012). Fairman and Mackenzie (2015) interviewed teachers about the challenges of being a teacher leader. Teachers in the study shared that they ultimately had to establish trusting relationships with their colleagues in order to break down the barriers of “teacher autonomy and apathy, and prod their colleagues to take risks and change practices” (p. 69). In addition, to further prevent conflict with colleagues, teacher leaders may try to “define their new roles and relationships with their principals narrowly, avoiding or deferring responsibilities that would jeopardize their relationships with other teachers” (Smylie & Brownlee-Conyers, 1992, p. 156).

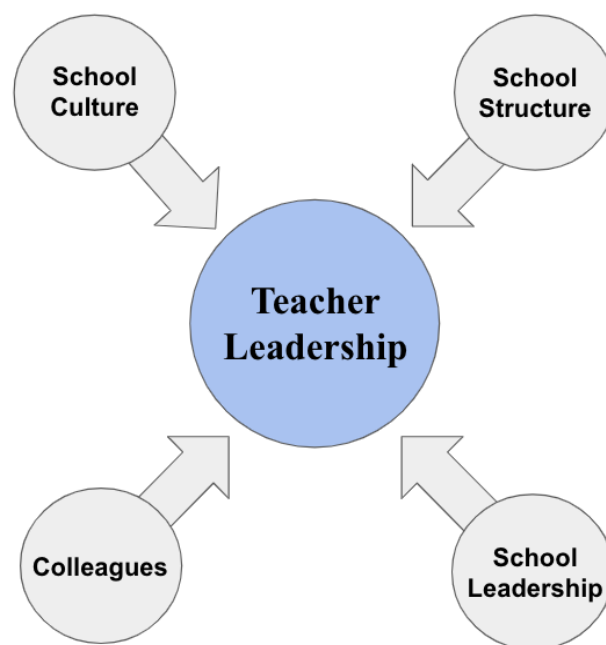
However, teacher leaders can have “natural credibility” with their colleagues due to their close connection to the classroom and understanding of the “rigors and demands of teaching as well as the press for continuous improvement” (Carver, 2016, p. 160). Colleagues can further help to solidify the teacher leader’s identity. Teacher leaders often find themselves “continuously juggling between two different agendas of professional interests: obtaining recognition as a teacher leader by their colleagues as well as maintaining their social-professional relationships with their colleagues” (Struyve et al., 2014, p. 203). In some cases, teacher leaders need to receive the social recognition from colleagues to fully embrace the teacher leader identity (Campbell et al, 2019).

Teacher leadership development can be “incubated and developed in the interplay of teachers’ awareness, willingness and self-initiation, as well as principals’ delegation, facilitation and identification of the potential leadership talents” (Cheng & Szeto, 2016, p. 147) . The teachers’ willingness to become a teacher leader and the school culture has a profound impact on teacher leader selection and enactment (Cheng & Szeto, 2016). Ultimately, school culture, structure, school leadership, and collegial relationships are critical components of “empowering or marginalizing teacher leaders” (Wenner & Campbell, 2017, p. 134). See Figure 4. It is

important to understand more about how teachers and administrators experience these micropolitical factors and why they may impact teacher leader selection and role enactment.

**Figure 4**

*Organizational Political Influences on Teacher Leadership*



### **Theoretical Framework**

#### **Micropolitical Theory**

Metaphorical lenses can be utilized to analyze organizations, such as schools, to gain a deeper understanding of the organization. One metaphorical lens that can be used to view and understand an organization is the lens of organizational politics. As Bacharach and Mundell

(1993) state, “Organizational politics can be seen as a struggle among various interests to establish unity around a particular logic of action, whether this unity is established through consensus or domination” (p. 429). The political metaphor, specifically the micro political frame, is “used to explain the tension between conflict and consensus building, the role of conflict in professional collaboration, struggles between external and internal education stakeholders, and the use of power by school leaders to influence change” (J. P. Scribner et al., 2002, p. 51). This metaphorical lens can be used to analyze school organizations, especially those that still cling to the hierarchical structure. The hierarchical structure often begins at the top with the district superintendent and trickles down to various levels of administrators, then to the principal, and finally to the teachers. Within this larger political context of a school district, there is a hierarchical structure present in the individual school as well. Each level is a part of the hierarchy in which each reports to the person above them and teachers often find themselves at the bottom (Howe & Stubbs, 2003). In these traditional types of schools, “lines of authority are usually clear, with the principal...as the decision-maker, policy-setter, and taskmaster” (Lambert, 1995, p. 5). The “emphasis on the managerial aspects of leadership is not found in all countries but is dominant in the United States” (Howe & Stubbs, 2003, p. 282). Therefore, it is nearly impossible within this hierarchical structure for teacher to “move into new roles when they are locked into a school structure that separates administrators from teachers and a schedule that allows no time for collegial interaction among teachers during the school day” (Howe & Stubbs, 2003, p. 296).

Micropolitics are inherent in the local school organization. It is important to have a clear understanding of micropolitics in order to analyze how the political dynamics of the school affect the selection and role enactment of teacher leaders. Micropolitics involves “the internal and



external organizational systems found within the school building” (Conway et al., 2015, p. 24).

Within those organizational systems, formal and informal power are used to achieve goals. The political actions that occur result “from perceived differences between individuals and groups, coupled with the motivation to use power to influence and/or protect” (Blasé, 1993, p.11).

Micropolitics has also been examined in relation to leadership at the individual school level (Conway et al., 2015, p. 24). In the hierarchical nature of an organization such as school, power normally resides at the top with the administrator. Therefore, “the power or powerlessness of the school organization that teachers confront is real” due to the micropolitics of the organization (Conway et al., 2015, p. 24).

Micropolitics can shape the organization and can be described as the daily interactions and negotiations made within the school or division over control, goals, policy, and decision-making (Bacharach & Mundell, 1993). What the struggle is over, who is involved (organization, group, or individual), the dimensions of power, and the relevant micro political actors all contribute to the micropolitics of an organization (Bacharach & Mundell, 1993). As Blasé (1993) stated, “Micro politics refers to the use of formal and informal power by individuals and groups to achieve their goals within an organization” (p. 11). There are two types of power within micro politics: authority and influence. The power of authority is formal power based on the individual’s position in the hierarchy and s/he has the “right to make the final decision” (Bacharach & Mundell, 1993, p. 434). Influential power is informal and based on expertise or the possession of valuable information or other resources. This type of power tries to persuade those who have authority to make the decision (Bacharach & Mundell, 1993).

In schools, “intraorganizational politics are a daily occurrence” (Brosky, 2011, p. 2). Brosky (2011) investigated the influences and interactions of teacher leaders within the school

organization and found that political forces within the school shaped the day-to-day operations of the organization and how things were done. Colleagues and administrators could influence teacher leadership both positively or negatively. Additionally, the “micropolitics of education—human behavior, power and how people use it to influence others and to protect themselves, and how people compete with each other to get what they want—shape the tone of the organization” (Brosky, 2011, p. 2). It is vital to understand the micropolitics within organizational structure to “successfully navigate school politics” (Conway et al., 2015, p. 24). The study of micropolitics allows educators and researchers to investigate the “theory of leadership based upon the realities of everyday school life and day-to-day decision-making” (Brosky, 2011, p. 2).

### **Summary**

There is a considerable amount of literature on teacher leadership but not as much on how teacher leaders are being selected and carry out their role. This research supports the importance of understanding how micropolitical influences at the school level impact teacher leader selection and role enactment. Research related to teacher leadership has examined the evolution of teacher leadership, pathways to becoming a teacher leader, and political influences at the school level. However, research on how the micropolitics of an organization affect teacher leadership selection and role enactment is sparse. As Blase (1989) suggests that the micropolitical perspective has not been used frequently when studying individual and group interaction within a school. Micropolitics has not been applied systematically to the study of how teacher leaders are selected within their organization and role enactment. Therefore, in this study, the micropolitical framework will be utilized to describe and explain the selection and role enactment of teacher leaders within one local school organization. The micropolitical framework is an important lens to view the teacher leader selection process through as it highlights how the

daily interactions at the individual school level can impact how teachers are being selected and how they are able to enact their role. This has implications for how the structure, culture, and leadership of the individual school impact the teacher leadership process and highlights the type of structure, culture, and leadership needed to successfully promote and enact teacher leadership.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

#### **Overview**

This chapter explains the research design and methodology for this study of how micropolitical influences at the school level influence the selection and role enactment of teacher leaders. This qualitative study was informed by the lived experiences of teacher leaders and administrators, specifically related to how they make sense of the teacher leader selection and role enactment process within the context of micropolitical influences. I interviewed teacher and administrator groups at local public elementary schools to gain a better understanding of this phenomenon. In this chapter, I provide an overview of the research questions and explain the research design and techniques that were used to gain insight into the micropolitical influences on teacher leader selection and role enactment. In addition, I discuss the participant selection process and criteria as well as data collection analysis processes.

#### **Research Questions**

The literature review presented in Chapter 2 provided the foundation that guides the study. It was critical to have an understanding of the evolution of teacher leadership, teacher leader identity, teacher leader pathways, and the political influences on teacher leadership. This phenomenologically-informed qualitative study examined the role of micropolitics in the selection and enactment process of teacher leaders. I sought to understand the social and psychological phenomena from the participants involved by targeting the effect of the micropolitics of an organization on the selection and role enactment of teacher leaders. The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the relationship between school level micropolitics and teacher leader selection and enactment?
  - a. How is the phenomenon of teacher leader selection perceived through the lens of a teacher?
  - b. How is the phenomenon of teacher leader selection perceived through the lens of an administrator?
2. What are the school-level micropolitical factors, such as school culture, school structure, school leadership, and collegial relationships, affecting teacher leader selection as well as role enactment and growth?
  - a. What role do micropolitics play in teachers becoming teacher leaders as well as enacting and growing in their role?

### **Research Design**

I used phenomenologically-informed qualitative methods to explore how the micropolitical influences of an organization can influence teacher leader selection and role enactment as understood from the lived experiences of the participants. The decision to use phenomenology, specifically hermeneutical, was influenced by the work of Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, and Max van Manen. Phenomenology is a type of qualitative research that refers to the “study of the primal, lived, prereflective, pre predicative meaning of an experience” (van Manen, 2017, p. 776). Qualitative researchers “study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 3). In this study, teacher leaders and administrators were interviewed in an attempt to make sense of how the micropolitics within their organizations impact teacher leader selection and role enactment. Phenomenological methods will help me

gain understanding of “the meaning of events and interactions to ordinary people in particular situations” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 25). Researchers in a phenomenological study try to “gain entry into the conceptual world of their informants in order to understand how and what meaning they construct around events in their daily lives” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 26). Phenomenological research is best suited for problems in which it is important to “understand several individuals’ common or shared experiences of a phenomenon” (Creswell, 2013, p. 81). Consequently, policies and practices may be developed as well as a deeper understanding of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). The aim in phenomenological research is to understand a social or psychological phenomenon from the perspective of those involved (Groenewald, 2004, p. 44).

Various other qualitative methods are used to study human experiences, such as ethnographic and narrative. However, phenomenology was chosen because it studies the “primal, lived, prereflective, prepredicative meaning of an experience” (Van Manen, 2017, p. 776). There are three main approaches to phenomenology: hermeneutic phenomenology, transcendental phenomenology, and existential phenomenology (Kafle, 2011). In this study, I relied on hermeneutic phenomenology, which is a “method of abstemious reflection on the basic structures of the lived experience of human existence” (van Manen, 2014, p. 26). In this approach, the researcher gives “considerable thought to their own experience” and explicitly claims “the ways in which their position or experience relates to the issues being researched” (Laverty, 2003, p. 28). The researcher keeps a reflective journal and may include personal assumptions in the final document (Laverty, 2003). The hermeneutical framework to phenomenology is a “dynamic interplay among six research activities” (Van Manen, 1990, p. 30). These six research activities consist of:

1. Turning to a phenomenon which seriously interests us and commits us to the world;

2. Investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it;
3. Reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon;
4. Describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting;
5. Maintaining a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon;
6. Balancing research context by considering parts and whole. (p. 30)

Ultimately, hermeneutic phenomenology is “concerned with the life world or human experience as it is lived” and focuses on “illuminating details and seemingly trivial aspects within experience that may be taken for granted in our lives, with a goal of creating meaning and achieving a sense of understanding” (Laverty, 2003, p. 24).

Data collection in a phenomenological study often consists of in-depth interviews in which data analysis builds on the data obtained from the research questions. The researcher reviews the data and highlights any “significant statements, sentences, or quotes that provide understanding of how the participants experienced the phenomenon” (Creswell, 2013, p. 82). Next, the researcher develops “clusters of meaning” from those statements to determine themes (Creswell, 2013, p. 82). After the themes have been determined, the researcher writes a textural description, a description of “what the participants experienced” (Creswell, 2013, p. 82). A structural description, a description of the “context or setting that influenced how the participants experienced the phenomenon”, is also written (Creswell, 2013, p. 82). After the researcher writes the textural and structural descriptions, a composite description is written to present the “essence of the phenomenon” by focusing on the “common experiences of the participants” (Creswell, 2013, p. 82). When analyzing and coding the interview transcripts for themes, it is important that the researcher focus on the thematic and the mantic aspect of the text. The thematic aspect of the text is “primarily concerned with *what* the text says, its semantic, linguistic meaning and

significance” whereas the mantic aspect of the text tries to “capture *how* the text speaks, how the text divines and inspirits our understanding” (van Manen, 1997a, p. 346). This study targeted the effect of the micropolitics of an organization on the organization’s selection of teacher leaders as experienced by administrators and teacher leaders using the framework of micropolitical theory.

### **Researcher Positionality**

Currently, I am a Digital Learning Specialist employed by a public school in the Mid-Atlantic region and a doctoral candidate in the Educational Leadership program at Old Dominion University. My professional experience includes 10 years as a classroom teacher all of which were in fifth grade. I have worked in two elementary schools, both of which qualified for Title I funding. During my classroom tenure, I held various teacher leadership positions, such as grade level lead, science instructional leader, and serving as a member of the school’s leadership team. In addition, I had numerous opportunities to present professional development to teachers. Also, I have written curriculum and common assessments for the district.

As a former classroom teacher and teacher leader, I came into this study with an understanding of the transition from teacher to a teacher leader that came entirely from my own experiences. In addition, when I was in the classroom, I noticed that teachers were taking on leadership roles and responsibilities in a variety of ways and often took different paths. I observed various obstacles that seemed to prevent teachers from taking the next steps to become a teacher leader. My experiences as a teacher leader with both formal and informal leadership roles in the school and the district have led me to develop a passion for understanding the teacher leader phenomenon. Likewise, this passion for wanting to gain a deeper understanding about the phenomenon has impacted the way I designed the study. I was interested in understanding the perceptions and lived experiences of both administrators and teacher leaders to see how the



micropolitics of the school influence the selection and enactment process of teacher leaders. My insider knowledge from being a classroom teacher allowed me to often share my own experiences with the teacher leader participants which helped to develop relationships and trust. In addition, in my current role I have now been able to broaden my lens and view things from an administrator perspective. I was able to relate to the administrator participants and have conversations through the interviews in regards to leadership journeys and teacher leadership that also built trust between us.

As a classroom teacher, I was able to observe how the culture, structure, collegial relationships, and leadership of a school can influence teachers. Therefore, I acknowledged that there may be some biases that I brought in terms of my former position as a classroom teacher. I was aware of those biases and strived to ensure that when I selected participants and analyzed data that I was not merely focusing on one viewpoint that matched my own perceptions but rather ensured that I selected participants from varied sites and demographical backgrounds as well as analyzed the data as objectively as possible. However, since this study was informed by hermeneutic phenomenology, I was able to give “considerable thought” to my own experiences in regards to the teacher leader phenomenon in relation to those interviewed (Laverty, 2003, p. 28). I kept a reflective journal and included personal assumptions throughout the study (Laverty, 2003).

### **Participant Selection**

The site for this study was Bayside School District. It is a large, urban school district in a Mid-Atlantic state. The district contains 19 elementary schools, 5 middle schools, 4 high schools, 2 Prek-8 schools, 1 gifted center, 1 early childhood center, and 1 alternative school. Collectively, the schools serve approximately 20,000 students and employ approximately 1,500 teachers. Each

school represented by a teacher leader/administrator group in the study will be further discussed in Chapter 4.

In order to garner interested participants to be a part of the study, a recruitment email was sent to provide basic information about the study, including the definition of teacher leader, teacher leadership, and micropolitics as well as the goals of the study (Appendix A). The message also included information on data collection and participant requirements. Interested participants completed an attached Google form indicating their interest in being a part of the study. I was given permission by Bayside and access to email groups to send emails to the following email groups: elementary principals, elementary assistant principals, and elementary teachers. A Google form was utilized as it collects and organizes data effectively and efficiently. In addition, the sample district is one in which users use Google applications and therefore participants were familiar with how to complete the form. Once a participant completed the interest form the researcher emailed the potential participant with more information about the study, the anticipated timeline, as well as the informed consent form (Appendix B). The recruitment email was sent to approximately 400 potential participants—both teachers and administrators—at the elementary school level, which includes 18 K-5 elementary schools, 2 prek-8 schools, and 1 gifted center.

### **Participant Criteria**

To explore the effects of micropolitics on teacher leadership selection and enactment, purposeful, criterion sampling was utilized to select the participants in this study. In a phenomenologically-informed study, such as this one, criterion sampling works well because participants are chosen carefully based on the fact that they have experienced the same phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). From the initial response to interest in the study, 23 teacher

leaders and 10 administrators completed the questionnaire that focused on participant demographics and criteria alignment. From this questionnaire, eight elementary teacher leader/administrator groups moved on to participate in the study including 11 teacher leaders and 9 administrators. When determining sample size in hermeneutic phenomenology, Cohen et al. (2000) stated, “the scientifically important criterion for determining sample size for the hermeneutic phenomenological researchers is the intensity of the contact need to gather sufficient data regarding a phenomenon or experience” (p. 56). In a phenomenological study in which each participant is interviewed several times in which a large amount of data can be collected, the researcher may need only 6 to 10 participants whereas other research suggests 5 to 25 or 2 to 10 (Boyd, 2001; Creswell, 1998; Morse, 2000). In this study, the initial target sample size was seven groups of at least fourteen total participants. However, in hermeneutic phenomenology, the same size can increase throughout the study. The final sample size was eight groups, which was approximately twenty participants that were chosen. The increase in sample size allowed for enough data to be obtained to reach a point where “nothing new”, or saturation, was encountered (Cohen et al., 2000, p. 55).

The decision to select both teacher leaders and administrators was to gain multiple perspectives into the phenomenon. As Creswell (2013) suggests, “A hallmark of all good qualitative research is the report of multiple perspectives” (p. 151). The teacher leader participants were selected based on their role, leadership experience, and whether they identified as a teacher leader in addition to their demographics to ensure a balanced participant demographic representation. The teacher leaders must be a full-time classroom teacher at a public elementary school and hold a professional license. Administrators were selected based on their willingness to participate in the study and whether they supervise a teacher leader(s) who is

also participating in the study. In order to create a representative sample, the participant demographics were reviewed from the first questionnaire (Saldaña, 2015). This includes having a balance of teacher leader and administrator demographics if possible, such as ethnicity, race, gender, years of experience, and student population served (Tables 1 & 2).

**Table 1**

*Study Participants: Teacher Leaders*

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Teaching Position</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Race</b>	<b>Years Teaching</b>
Layla	Resource	F	43	Caucasian	15
Ava	Resource	F	38	Caucasian	15
Sophia	5th grade	F	35	Caucasian	8
Amelia	3rd grade	F	35	Caucasian	7
Isabella	4th grade	F	30	Caucasian	8
Olivia	5th grade	F	32	Hispanic	9
Mia	5th grade	F	36	African American	13
Emma	5th grade	F	43	African American	15
Evelyn	5th grade	F	52	Caucasian	10
Charlotte	4th grade	F	34	African American	4
Abigail	3rd grade	F	34	Caucasian	4

**Table 2***Study Participants: Administrators*

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Race</b>	<b>Years as Administrator</b>
Hazel	Assistant Principal	F	35	Caucasian	1
Michael	Assistant Principal	M	56	African American	16
Zoey	Principal	F	39	Caucasian	9
Madison	Assistant Principal	F	37	Caucasian	7
Victoria	Assistant Principal	F	57	African American	14
Eleanor	Principal	F	51	African American	9
Lily	Principal	F	42	Caucasian	11
Violet	Principal	F	38	Caucasian	7
Stella	Assistant Principal	F	32	African American	2

Approximately 90% of the administrators in the study were female and 10% were male. This is representative of the district's percentage of female and male elementary administrators (82% female and 18% male). Likewise, approximately 45% of the administrators in the study were African American and 54% were Caucasian. This is fairly representative of the district's percentage of African American and Caucasian elementary administrators (59% African American and 40% Caucasian). Although the email was sent to all elementary school teachers, only female teachers responded with interest in the study. This is fairly representative of the elementary teacher population at the participating schools within Bayside school district. In the

eight schools represented in this study, 92% of the teacher population is female and 8% is male. In addition, approximately 27% of the teacher leaders in this study were African American, 64% were Caucasian, and 9% were Hispanic. The elementary schools represented in the study consisted of 4 Title I and 4 non-Title I, one of which was a gifted school.

Each participant had the option of participating in the study, completed a consent form to participate, and was assigned a pseudonym to protect his or her identity. Participants were interviewed via a virtual conferencing platform, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, to ensure safety for both the participants and the researcher. Participants received a copy of the interview transcript and were able to review for validity. Ultimately, participants benefited from participating in the research by gaining a greater understanding of self-awareness and of the micropolitics within their organization. This knowledge could potentially influence the culture and structure of the organization.

### **Data Collection**

Data collection consisted of one questionnaire, one semi-structured, formal interview, and a follow-up interview as needed. The main source of data collection came from the semi-structured, formal interviews. The interviews allowed for “the collection of data in a natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study, and [facilitate] data analysis that is both inductive and deductive and establishes patterns and themes” (Creswell, 2013, p. 44). In phenomenology, the researcher must “allow the data to emerge” by capturing “rich descriptions of phenomena and their settings” (Groenewald, 2004, p. 47; Bentz & Shapiro, 1998, p. 104). Data was collected from all of the participants, both teacher leaders and administrators. In a phenomenological investigation the “long interview is the method through which data is collected on the topic and question” and involves an “informal, interactive process and utilizes

open-ended comments and questions" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 114). Through the interviews, my goal was to understand the common or shared experiences of teacher leaders and administrators in the teacher leader selection and role enactment process. In the following sections, I will further explain my data collection method.

## **Interviews**

Phenomenology is "more a method of questioning than answering, realizing that insights come to us in that mode of musing, reflective questioning, and being obsessed with sources and meanings of lived meaning" (van Manen, 2014, p. 26). Therefore, data was primarily obtained from the semi-structured, formal interviews. The purpose of the interviews conducted was to study how teacher leader selection and enactment was influenced by the micropolitics of their organization. According to Bogdan and Biklen (1992), an interview is a discussion with a purpose. The purpose of these interviews was to gain insight into the shared experiences of the micropolitical influences on teacher leader selection and enactment. Therefore, interview questions were "directed to the participants' experiences, feelings, beliefs and convictions about the theme in question" (Welman & Kruger, 1999, p. 196). In hermeneutical phenomenology, the interview process works within an "environment of safety and trust" and is maintained throughout the project (Laverty, 2003, p. 29).

The questionnaire that the participants completed focused on participant demographics and alignment to teacher leader, teacher leadership, and micropolitics of those teacher leaders and administrators who expressed interest in participating in the study. The questionnaire took approximately 30 minutes. From the questionnaire, eight groups of administrators and teacher leaders—20 total participants—were selected to move to the interview round and to be a part of the study. The interview round consisted of 20 formal semi-structured interviews conducted, one

per participant. The interviews lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes. There was a total of 15 interview questions with additional probing questions as needed. The specific questions were very open in nature with “follow up discussion being led not so much by the researcher, but by the participant” (Laverty, 2003, p. 29). The interview questions were developed in advance, however, they can be “varied, altered, or not used at all when the co-researcher shares the full story of his or her experience of the bracketed question” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 114). A second round of interviews, if needed, served as a follow-up interview to the second round to ask any clarifying or follow-up questions and lasted approximately thirty minutes. As Jacob and Furgerson (2012) suggest, a follow-up shorter interview “lets you clear up anything that you do not understand” and “gives you the chance to ask early interviewees questions that may have arisen in later interviews” (p. 6). The first and optional second round of interviews remained very open in nature with few direct questions asked as “openness is critical” (Laverty, 2003, p. 29).

Semi-structured interviews allowed a balance between formal structure and freedom to deviate from the set questions to gain more information (Saldaña, 2015). Interviews were conducted with all of the participants individually and were audio recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using content analysis techniques (Creswell, 2003). An interview protocol was utilized to guide the interview process and to help organize thoughts (Creswell, 2013). See Appendix C and E. In addition, each participant signed a consent form prior to the first initial demographic and study alignment screening questionnaire so that they had time to read over the form and “ask any questions about the consent that she or he may need to ask” (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012, p. 7).

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis began after the first interview and followed the hermeneutic circle of reading, reflective writing, and interpreting (Kafle, 2011). Each interview was audio-recorded



and transcribed verbatim. At the conclusion of each interview, additional field notes were made as “field notes are a secondary data storage method in qualitative research. Because the human mind tends to forget quickly, field notes by the researchers are crucial in qualitative research to retain data gathered” (Groenwald, 2004, p. 48). Throughout the interviews, a notebook was kept to record reflections, memos, and observations throughout the interviews and data analysis. The notebook that was kept to record field notes helped to capture key observations and/or memos throughout the process to aid in coding and the establishment of themes. This notebook ultimately transitioned to a larger format and chart paper was used. Chart paper allowed for a larger space to begin connecting codes in order to establish themes. For instance, as transcripts were reviewed, notes and key phrases were written down in the notebook and eventually on the chart paper. I established emerging codes and themes by analyzing each interview transcript. This was done by searching for patterns among each interview in the form of keywords and phrases and then between the interviews using in vivo, descriptive, and causation coding. In vivo coding refers to a “word or phrase from the actual language” used by the participant (Saldaña, 2015, p. 91). In addition to in vivo coding, a combination of descriptive and causation coding will be used as well. Descriptive coding “summarizes in a word or short phrase—most often as the noun—the basic topic of a passage of qualitative data” (Saldaña, 2015, p. 88). Causation coding is a type of coding used to discern “motives, belief systems, worldviews, processes, recent histories, interrelationships, and the complexity of influences and affects on human actions and phenomena” (Saldaña, 2015, p. 165). From these codes, themes were established that will be described in Chapter 4. Phenomenological themes “may be understood as the structures” that make up the experience (van Manen, 1997b, p. 79). As I coded and established themes, I wrote thematic reflections to capture the essence. Through the teacher

leader and administrator interviews, I sought to understand how the micropolitics of the organization affected the selection and role enactment of teacher leaders.

Peer researchers, a colleague in the doctoral program and a recent graduate of a doctoral program, were invited to review the coding and to ensure validity and reliability with the coding and the development of themes. The peer researchers consisted of two individuals who are not associated with the research project. The research team reviewed my analysis and only codes and themes that were “consensually validated through intersubjective agreement” were kept (Laverty, 2003, p. 29). As each interview was coded and themes were noted, the transcript, void of an identifying information, was sent to the peer researchers for review. Once reviewed, the peer researchers would then send the transcript back noting any discrepancies. If discrepancies with the codes and/or themes arose a virtual meeting was held to discuss the discrepancies and to reach intersubjective agreement. In addition, I read all research participants’ transcriptions and returned them to each participant to review for accuracy. This also allowed for validation to occur as participants could add, elaborate, or clarify information. I also noted any discrepancies and include “new information throughout the process” (Laverty, 2003, p. 29). The majority of the participants returned the transcripts with no adjustments that needed to made. However, there were four participants, who after reading the transcript, wished to clarify a few statements that were made as well as add additional information. These notes were then added to the transcript. This process of working with the participants in the co-construction of the data allowed the participants “engage in a hermeneutic circle of understanding” (Laverty, 2003, p. 29). The hermeneutic circle “moves from the parts of experience, to the whole of experience and back and forth again and again to increase the depth of engagement with the understanding of texts” (Laverty, 2003, p. 24). This consists of an on-going cycle reading, reflective writing, and

interpretations (Laverty, 2003). In this type of data analysis and validation the researcher and participants “work together to bring life to the experience being explored” (Laverty, 2003, p. 30).

### **Confidentiality of Participants**

I ensured that participation is known to be voluntary and participants are able to stop participating at any time. In addition, I communicated to each participant that identifying information, such as their name and school, would be kept confidential. All participants’ names and work sites were coded so as to not identify the participants; any identifying information was changed. Each participant, name of schools, or other identifying information was not used in the reporting process and was replaced with pseudonyms. In addition, transcripts and audio-recordings were stored on a personal computer that requires a password to log in. It is important to establish trust with the participants. As Jacob and Furgerson (2012) state, “If they trust you, they will share their experiences with you” (p. 7). Participants were able to withdraw from the study at any time.

### **Strengths and Limitations**

A strength of the study was it adds to the literature about teacher leadership and micropolitics in education. It specifically targeted teachers that identify as teacher leaders and have some type of formal or informal role in their school as a leader. This study offered evidence on how the micropolitics at the school level can influence the selection and role enactment of teacher leaders. Therefore, by providing such evidence, administrators and teacher leaders can prepare for and navigate micropolitics in order to increase school improvement and teacher efficacy.

A limitation to the study is the sample population. The sample population will consist of only eleven teacher leaders and nine administrators from the same school district at the

elementary school level. Therefore, the data collected cannot be generalized. Micropolitics can be a difficult topic for the participants to discuss. Therefore, another limitation is the potential for response bias in the interviews as well as social desirability bias because participants might provide answers that they think they should provide (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015). It was necessary for me to establish a trusting relationship with the participants and ensure that their responses and their participation in the study would remain completely confidential and anonymous. In addition, there was a potential for researcher bias as I do have certain beliefs about micropolitical influences on teacher leader selection and enactment which could lead to a “*positivist* outlook” (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015, p. 185). This outlook can cause a researcher to look for cause and effect relationships that may not warrant such a connection (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015). No person can be completely objective but rather can try and recognize the potential for bias to aid in eliminating such biases (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015).

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **FINDINGS**

#### **Overview**

With this research, I explored micropolitical influences on the selection and role enactment of teacher leaders, as viewed through the lens of teacher leaders and administrators at the selected elementary schools. An overview of participants' demographic data as well as an analysis of the data collected from each interview is discussed in detail in this chapter. The following research questions were examined through the use of a structured questionnaire as well as a semi-structured interview with teacher leader and administrator who participated in this study:

1. What is the relationship between school level micropolitics and teacher leader selection and enactment?
  - a. How is the phenomenon of teacher leader selection perceived through the lens of a teacher?
  - b. How is the phenomenon of teacher leader selection perceived through the lens of an administrator?
2. What are the school-level micropolitical factors, such as school culture, school structure, school leadership, and collegial relationships, affecting teacher leader selection and enactment?
  - a. What role do micropolitics play in teachers becoming teacher leaders and enacting their role?

Interviews were transcribed and coded using in vivo, descriptive, and causation coding to establish patterns and themes. Data from the questionnaire was also analyzed and responses to

questions that targeted participants' understanding of teacher leadership and micropolitics was also coded using in vivo and descriptive coding.

### **Demographic Data**

In this study, both administrators and teacher leaders were selected to participate using purposeful, criterion sampling. Teacher leader participants had to meet the following criteria: currently employed by Bayside City Schools as a full-time classroom teacher; held a professional teaching license; and met the definition of a teacher leader: a teacher who maintains "K-12 classroom-based teaching responsibilities, while also taking on leadership responsibilities outside of the classroom" (Wenner & Campbell, 2017, p. 140). Administrator participants had to meet the following criteria: currently employed by Bayside City Schools as a principal or assistant principal and a teacher leader from their school was participating in the study.

Teacher leaders and administrators from eight elementary schools within the Bayside School district were selected. Five schools had a pair of participants each (one teacher leader, one administrator); two schools had two leaders and a single administrator participating; and one school had a pair of teacher leaders and a pair of administrators participating. Each of the teacher leaders in the study self-identified as teacher leaders in accordance to the teacher leader definition. They each assumed both formal and informal roles outside of their classroom. Participating teacher leaders' formal leadership roles are listed in Table 3 and their educational experience and licensure endorsements can be found in Table 4 and Table 5.

**Table 3***Teacher Leaders' Leadership Roles & Years of Leadership Experience*

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Formal Roles</b>	<b>Years</b>
Layla	Team Lead, School Leadership Team, Mentor, Instructional Leader	6
Ava	Team Lead, School Leadership Team, Climate and Culture Coach	10
Sophia	Team Lead, School Leadership Team, Instructional Leader	4
Amelia	Team Lead, School Leadership Team, Climate and Culture Coach, Mentor Lead	3
Isabella	Team Lead, School Leadership Team, Instructional Leader, Tutoring Coordinator	7
Olivia	Team lead, Instructional leader, Staff Participation Committee Chair	7
Mia	Instructional Leader, Student Council Association Representative, Team Lead, Mentor Lead, Tutoring Coordinator	4
Emma	Team Lead, School Leadership Team, Mentor	12
Evelyn	Team Lead, School Leadership Team, Mentor, Instructional Leader	8
Charlotte	Summer School Site Coordinator, School Leadership Team, Tutoring Coordinator	3
Abigail	School Leadership Team, Instructional Leader	2

**Table 4***Administrator Participants' Educational Experience & Licensure Endorsements*

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Endorsement</b>	<b>Highest Degree</b>
Hazel	English 6-12; Administration & Supervision PreK-12	Masters
Michael	Marketing Education, Gifted Education, Administration & Supervision PreK-12	Doctorate
Zoey	Middle Ed. 6-8: English, Middle Ed. 6-8: Mathematics; Administration & Supervision PreK-12	Masters
Madison	History and Social Sciences, Gifted Education, Administration & Supervision PreK-12	Educational Specialist
Victoria	English, Middle Education Grades 4-8, Early Education NK-4, Gifted Education, Administration & Supervision PreK-12	Doctorate
Eleanor	Early Education NK-4, Middle Education Grades 4-8, Administration & Supervision PreK-12	Masters
Lily	Psychology, Administration & Supervision PreK-12	Masters
Violet	Elementary Pk-6, Administration & Supervision PreK-12	Doctorate
Stella	Elementary Pk-6, Administration & Supervision PreK-12	Educational Specialist



**Table 5***Teacher Leader Participants' Educational Experience & Licensure Endorsements*

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Endorsement</b>	<b>Highest Degree</b>
Layla	Health and Physical Education K-12, Gifted	Bachelors
Ava	Music PK-12	Masters
Sophia	Elementary Pk-6, Administration & Supervision PreK-12	Masters
Amelia	Elementary Pk-6	Masters
Isabella	Elementary Pk-6	Masters
Olivia	Elementary Pk-6, Administration & Supervision PreK-12	Masters
Mia	Elementary Pk-6	Masters
Emma	Elementary Pk-6 , ESL endorsement K-12	Masters
Evelyn	Elementary Pk-6	Bachelors
Charlotte	Elementary Pk-6, Administration & Supervision PreK-12	Masters

### **Brief Biographical Summaries**

Participating teachers' paths toward leadership varied. A brief description of each teacher leader's path is described in the sections that follow; this context is important for understanding the research questions presented in this study. Likewise, a brief biographical description of each administrator interviewed is also included. The brief education and leadership experience is provided as it helps establish the participants within the context of the study.

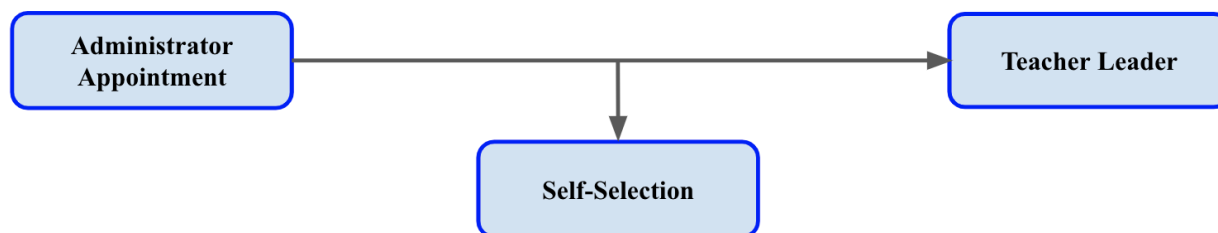
## School Group 1: Teacher Leader & Administrator Summary

### *Teacher Leader: Layla*

Layla did not initially want to be a teacher and had tried several other career paths prior to becoming a teacher. She realized that “a lot of the pieces of everything that I loved really fell into place with teaching.” She taught for 4 years and then took a break from teaching to stay home with her children. She indicated that staying home with her children really “changed [her] perspective on teaching and how to teach and the best way to handle different situations” when she returned to the profession 10 years ago. Throughout her teaching career she has gradually taken on various formal and informal leadership roles within her building. These leadership roles were mainly appointed by her administrators, but she has also begun to volunteer for opportunities. However, Layla felt that she was a natural leader with leadership skills that stem back to high school when she was playing sports and was often the captain of the teams. Layla also indicated that she did not want to become an administrator because she enjoys the time with her students.

**Figure 5**

*Layla’s Teacher Leader Pathway*

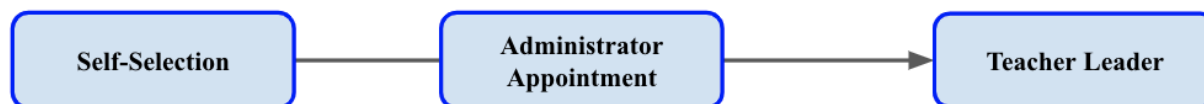


***Administrator: Dr. Michael***

At the time of this study, Dr. Michael was an assistant principal with 29 years in the education system, including a variety of experiences and challenges. As a classroom teacher, he also became a teacher leader at his school by volunteering for various formal and informal leadership roles as well as being approached to take on additional leadership responsibilities. Early in his teaching career he was mentored by a teacher leader in his building. He had been both a principal and an assistant principal throughout his career, all in the Bayside School District. Dr. Michael agreed to be a part of this study as a way to repay, in his own way, those who helped him in his pursuit; he felt compelled to do for others like was done for him.

**School Group 2: Teacher Leader & Administrator Summary*****Teacher Leader: Ava***

Ava went to college to become a teacher and entered the profession immediately upon graduation. She indicated people recognized her leadership potential at a very young age and she began to realize it as well. Ava stated, "I've always been frustrated in professional roles where I wasn't able to be a leader." In a previous school, she felt unsatisfied with the lack of leadership opportunities. However, in her current school she has been able to volunteer for both formal and informal leadership roles. In addition to volunteering for roles, her administrators have also approached her to take on responsibilities.

**Figure 6***Ava's Teacher Leader Pathway**Administrator: Zoey*

Zoey is currently a principal. She began her educational career in a neighboring district teaching middle school. She began her leadership journey out of frustration with how she was feeling as a teacher: disconnected, not supported, and confused about her role as a teacher leader. She then earned her master's in educational leadership and became an instructional coach. However, she did not feel that the district she was working in as a coach valued relationships or provided enough autonomy. Therefore, she began looking to neighboring districts and was hired as an assistant principal at an elementary school in the Bayside district. She suggested that Bayside was a better fit for her because they have a heavy focus on climate and building relationships. Given her prior experiences, she "is trying to grow in ways that [she] hadn't really had that example as much. So the teachers that [she] works with feel a little better and more supported."

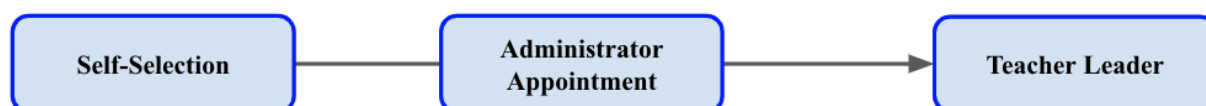
**School Group 3: Teacher Leader & Administrator Summary***Teacher Leaders: Sophia & Isabella*

Sophia began her career in the military. After her active-duty service was completed, she completed her elementary education degree while in the National Guard. She has since completed her master's in educational leadership. She took on a leadership role early on in her

military career and believes those same skills transferred into her teaching career. Initially, she sought out leadership roles at her school because she “wasn't comfortable with the way some things were being handled.” Therefore, she “let it be known that she wanted to take on additional roles” and “once the admin saw that [she] was comfortable training other teachers and that [she] liked seeking additional roles and they would seek [her] to take on more.” Sophia would like to become an administrator one day.

**Figure 7**

*Sophia's Teacher Leader Pathway*



Isabella went to college to be a teacher and upon graduation entered the teaching profession. She admitted her first year was a tough year and she really had to reflect and change the way she was leading in her classroom. Once this change occurred, she stated that administration began to notice her classroom management success and began to approach her to take on additional formal and informal leadership roles within the building. She expressed interest in expanding her leadership role to becoming a mathematics coach but has since realized her goal is to become an administrator because, “I want to be the voice to my building versus just the voice in my classroom.”

**Figure 8***Isabella's Teacher Leader Pathway**Administrators: Madison & Eleanor*

Madison, an assistant principal at the time of this study, began her educational journey as a middle school teacher and discussed how she was a teacher leader within her building as she took on leadership roles and responsibilities. She then became an educational specialist which was a “good next step.” When the educational specialist position was cut from the budget, Madison applied and became an assistant principal. Madison considers herself a leader because she takes care of people and stated that a big part of the job is “taking care of people and problem solving,” and that it is not all about instruction and behavior. She feels that her leadership style is collaborative.

Eleanor was a principal at the time of this study. She knew she always wanted to be a teacher from the time she was a child playing teacher. She began her teaching career in the Bayside School District. She also spent time as a teacher leader with various roles and responsibilities. She realized her calling was to work in Title I schools and was teaching in one when her principal at the time encouraged her to consider administration. She went back to school to earn her administration and supervision endorsement. She then became the assistant principal at her current school when it was going through the state turn-around process to

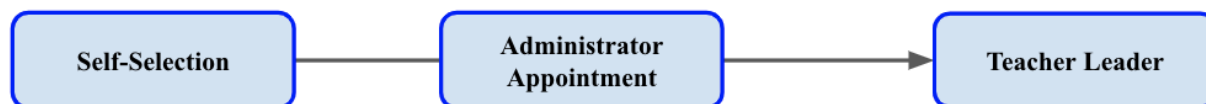
increase student achievement and become accredited. Then when her principal took a position at another district, she had the opportunity to apply to be the principal. Eleanor stated,

it was hard work in the beginning working with the state department...I could have bailed, instead of accepting, you know, this leadership role right here, but I had to finish what I started. And I think that says something to, you know, to be able to do all the work, work out all the kinks, you know, shape the folks to help you do the work.

#### **School Group 4: Teacher Leader & Administrator Summary**

##### ***Teacher Leader: Amelia***

Amelia always wanted to be a teacher but went to college for business and leadership. She went into the workforce and realized she was unhappy and decided to go back to school to earn her master's in elementary education. After graduation, she began her teaching career teaching first grade, but was teaching third grade at the time of this study. She has always been put into leadership roles since high school and was able to strengthen her leadership skills in college. She stated that she was influenced by her father, who was also a leader in his career. When she began her teaching career she did not "start off as a leader right away," but, "I kinda came in and I'm the type of person that I got to sit back and assess the situation before I'm able to like dive in and get into things." Her teacher leader journey began by volunteering for a formal leadership role within her building. She then expressed her leadership goals to her administrator and was provided additional leadership opportunities within the building. At the time of this study, she was working on a master's degree in educational leadership.

**Figure 9***Amelia's Teacher Leader Pathway**Administrator: Lily*

Lily, a principal, had always wanted to teach but initially earned a psychology degree. Eventually, she was able to explore being a teacher. She taught high school and was able to teach psychology courses as well. She discussed how, at that time, she thought she would stay in the classroom forever because she loved it so much. However, she stated that “people often see leadership in you when maybe you'd say I'd want to be a teacher forever.” Therefore, she was provided with teacher leadership opportunities that were both formal and informal that helped to broaden her lens. Those teacher leadership roles helped her on the path to becoming an administrator. She admitted that she still misses the classroom but is able to “have a bigger influence” as an administrator.

**School Group 5: Teacher Leader & Administrator Summary***Teacher Leaders: Olivia & Emma*

Olivia always wanted to be a teacher even as a child when she was “teaching [her] stuffed animals in [her] room.” Olivia did not see herself as a leader initially, but her administrator at the time recognized her leadership qualities. Olivia’s administrators consistently asked her to take on both formal and informal leadership roles within the building. She indicated that this helped her confidence grow, but she still did not feel like a teacher leader because “everybody had more



experience.” She stated, she just had to trust that “admin, whenever they do add that responsibility... they are seeing something.” At the time of the study, she said she has continued to grow in confidence and considered herself a teacher leader.

**Figure 10**

*Olivia’s Teacher Leader Pathway*



Emma knew she wanted to be a teacher from a young age. She said she “started teaching everyone in [her] house and wanted to be the teacher in the play” and she is “really living [her] dream of becoming a teacher.” Emma never really considered herself a leader, but others recognized her leadership qualities. She was often appointed to various formal and informal leadership positions in her building and that really helped her to consider herself a leader. She admitted she was not sure if some of those roles were appointed because of her qualities or because she had more years of experience. Emma discussed that the transition to becoming a teacher leader was not something that she initially wanted. She indicated that when an administrator comes to you to ask you to take on a leadership role “it’s not expected for you to say no, if you are asked to do something like this in our field, you know, it’s never good to say no.” Therefore, she said it was difficult at first because of the additional responsibilities, but then she realized it came with “its perks too.”

**Figure 11***Emma's Teacher Leader Pathway****Administrator: Dr. Victoria***

Victoria, an assistant principal, always wanted to be a lawyer but fell in love with teaching when completing a community service assignment for college. She then got her master's in education and became a middle school teacher. She realized she was a leader at a very young age when people followed her lead. As a teacher she became a teacher leader and was tasked with additional leadership roles and responsibilities. Victoria has served in various leadership roles, such as Department Chair Math; Trainer for Quality Education for Minorities in Washington, DC Gifted Chair; Assistant Principal, Grades 3-8; Coordinator of Instructional Technology Pk-12; and Summer School Principal (3 summers). Victoria believes that your experiences are valuable and can carry “a lot of weight” and they are “what you bring to the table.”

**School Group 6: Teacher Leader & Administrator Summary*****Teacher Leader: Mia***

Mia discussed how she came from a line of teachers, but initially it was not something she wanted to do; she wanted to be a pediatrician. However, she realized the science component was not something she enjoyed and it was suggested to her to consider teaching. She realized that teaching was something she really enjoyed. She graduated with a degree in education and

has been teaching ever since. When she first started teaching, another member of her grade level team as well as her administrator began to recognize her leadership qualities “before [she] actually saw it in [her]self.” Her administrators, past and current, have always brought formal and informal leadership opportunities to her, which continues to “open doors” for more. She indicated, “I’m so busy and being a teacher that I don’t even realize all the different things that are happening.” Mia is “intrinsically motivated” to continue to grow as a leader. She is currently working on her doctorate in educational leadership.

**Figure 12**

*Mia’s Teacher Leader Pathway*



***Administrator: Dr. Violet***

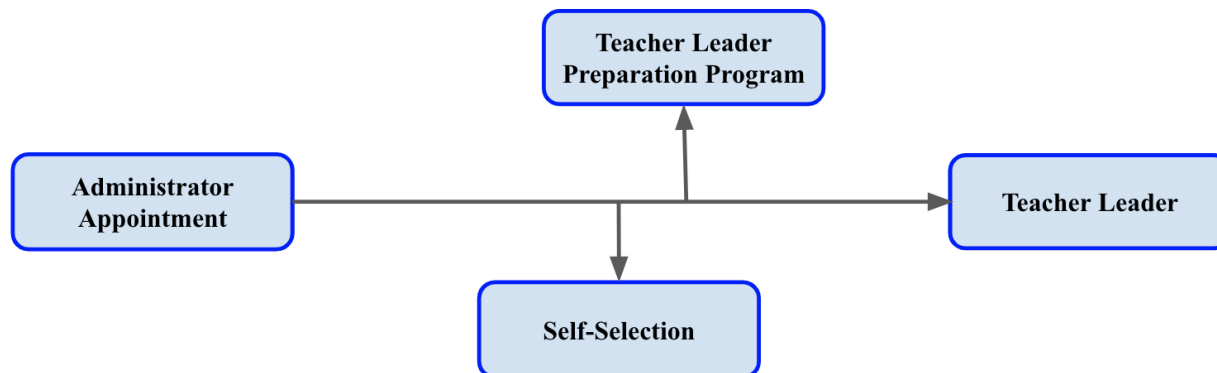
Violet is currently a principal. She did not always want to go into education; she initially wanted to be a clinical social worker, but while she was in college, she started substitute teaching and decided that teaching was what she wanted to do. She went back to get her teaching license and was hired as a fourth-grade teacher under a provisional license and then taught fifth grade the following year. She was encouraged by her assistant principal at the time to apply to be a math interventionist and was offered the job. Once in that position, she was encouraged to become a math coach and was offered the job. Then she was encouraged to apply to become an

assistant principal and was hired as an administrative assistant while she finished her administrative degree. She spent 3 years as an assistant principal and then became a principal. She indicated that people were “constantly reaching out” and encouraging her in her leadership journey.

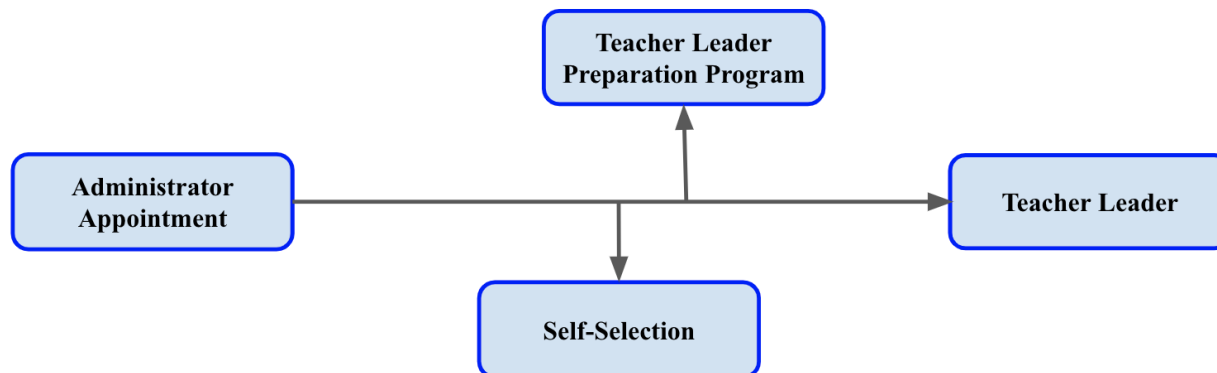
### **School Group 7: Teacher Leader & Administrator Summary**

#### ***Teacher Leaders: Evelyn & Abigail***

Evelyn did not begin her career in education. She was a paralegal and minored in law. After she graduated and started a family, she realized she wanted to be on the same schedule as her children and began to volunteer in the school system, which eventually led to her becoming a teacher. In the beginning of her teaching career, she did not consider herself a leader; however, she was labeled as a leader by others. She stated that she was approached by her administrator to take on additional formal and informal leadership responsibilities. She suggested that was “because [the administrator] saw qualities in [her] that she pushed to develop.” She admitted that now she feels comfortable within the district due to the relationships she has built to seek out opportunities that are of interest to her.

**Figure 13***Evelyn's Teacher Leader Pathway*

Teacher leader, Abigail, grew up wanting to be a lawyer, but midway through realized it was not what she wanted to do. After she began a family, she went back to school and finished her bachelor's and then her master's in education. She completed her student teaching and fell in love with the school and has been working there ever since. She did not realize she was a leader initially, but others told her she was a leader. She realized she was a leader once she went through teacher orientation and began the teacher leadership program that Bayside offers. She was approached by administration first to take on additional formal and informal leadership responsibilities, but later took it upon herself to become more educated about the position, leadership, and educational topics.

**Figure 14***Abigail's Teacher Leader Pathway****Administrator: Stella***

Stella, an assistant principal, went to college for psychology and ended up also completing the MAT (Master of Arts in Teaching) program. Initially, teaching was her backup plan but once she began teaching, she “just never left.” She began her teaching career as a classroom reduction teacher (a teacher hired to reduce the number of students per class as part of the state’s class size reduction program) in second grade and then went to third grade the following year. As a third-grade teacher, she completed her Educational Specialist degree in Educational Leadership. Stella discussed the formal and informal roles she took on as a classroom teacher that helped her to become a teacher leader. She then became a curriculum integration teacher, followed by an assistant principal. She is currently working on her doctoral degree in curriculum and instruction. She believes that a “leader should not lead people into doing things that they would not do themselves.”

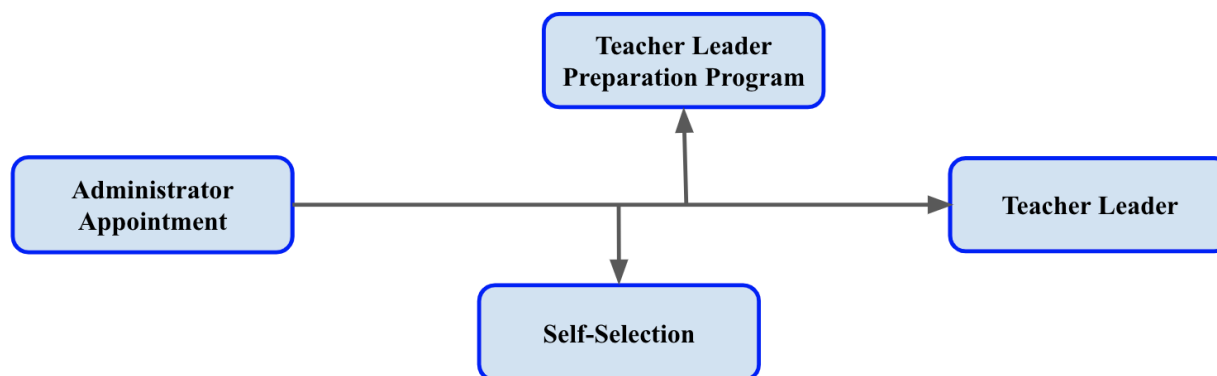
## School Group 8: Teacher Leader & Administrator Summary

### *Teacher Leader: Charlotte*

Charlotte always has worked with children in some capacity prior to becoming a classroom teacher: childcare, instructional assistant, Early Intervention Reading Assistant, a job coach for special education students, and a family engagement specialist. After she finished her degree in education, she began teaching and had recently completed her master's in administration and supervision in hopes of becoming an administrator. She initially realized she was a leader when her administrator recognized her leadership qualities and pushed her to take on additional responsibilities. Her current administrator also knows her goals of wanting to become an administrator and provides opportunities to take on both formal and informal leadership roles in the building. Likewise, Charlotte asks for opportunities when she sees them available. She is currently in the teacher leadership formal training program that Bayside offers.

**Figure 15**

*Charlotte's Teacher Leader Pathway*



***Administrator: Hazel***

Hazel, an assistant principal, is originally from an area in which teaching jobs are really hard to find and ended up moving to the area and accepting a high school teaching position at a neighboring district. While teaching, she decided to go back to college to earn a master's degree as well as her administration and supervision endorsement. She continued to work as a high school teacher and quickly became a teacher leader in her school before accepting a position as a literacy support specialist. This position allowed her more “direct leadership experience.” She took on additional formal and informal leadership responsibilities and began applying to become an assistant principal. When a position opened up in Bayside, she applied and was hired to her current position. Hazel discussed that the leadership journey to become an administrator is a “very humbling experience” and “makes you discover who you are and who you want to be as a leader.”

**Presentation and Analysis of Data**

The research explored the phenomenon of organizational micropolitics on teacher leader selection at the elementary school level. Teacher leaders were interviewed based on both their formal and informal roles as teacher leaders. Three themes emerged in the findings that centered around the two research questions: Who is a Teacher Leader? Teacher Leader and Administrative Perspectives; Teacher Leader Selection: The Two Initial Starting Points; and Influential Factors on Teacher Leader Role Enactment and Growth. The first theme, Who is a Teacher Leader? Teacher Leader and Administrative Perspectives, was driven by the teacher leaders’ and administrators’ understanding of the teacher leader role. Subthemes emerged under both the administrators’ and teacher leaders’ perspectives: whole school vision, credibility, servant leader, continuous growth, and collaboration and communication. The second theme,



Teacher Leader Selection: The Two Initial Starting Points, explored how teacher leaders are initially selected or begin their role as a teacher leader. The following sub themes emerged: self-selection and administrator appointed. The third theme, Influential Factors on Teacher Leader Role Enactment and Growth, delves into the factors that influence teacher leaders' role enactment and growth as a leader. Several sub themes emerged as being influential factors: administrators, collegial perception and response to teacher leaders, influential relationships, a culture of collaboration and trust, structural factors, and uncertainty (Table 6).

**Table 6***Themes and Subthemes*

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Subthemes</b>
Who is a teacher leader? Teacher Leader & Administrative Perspectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Whole School Vision</li> <li>● Credibility</li> <li>● Servant Leader</li> <li>● Continuous Growth</li> <li>● Collaboration &amp; Communication</li> </ul>
Teacher Leader Selection: The Two Initial Starting Points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Self-Selection <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Identity</li> <li>○ Motivation</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Administrator Appointed <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Identity</li> <li>○ Motivation</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Influential Factors on Teacher Leader Role Enactment & Growth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Administrators</li> <li>● Collegial Perception &amp; Response to Teacher Leaders <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Respect &amp; Role Model</li> <li>○ Competition &amp; Jealousy</li> <li>○ Authority &amp; Power</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Influential Relationships</li> <li>● A Culture of Collaboration &amp; Trust</li> <li>● Structural Factors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Opportunity Availability</li> <li>○ Decision-Making</li> <li>○ Stability</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Uncertainty <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Teacher Leader Path</li> <li>○ Teacher Leader Preparation</li> <li>○ Role Management</li> <li>○ Future</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

**Theme 1: Who is a Teacher Leader? Teacher Leader & Administrative Perspectives**

Participants' perceptions of who a teacher leader is and what their role consists of at the building level was a critical piece in understanding how teacher leaders are selected and enact

their role. Several characteristics were prominent in the interviews of both the administrators and teacher leaders: having a whole school vision, credibility, being a servant leader, continuing to grow as a professional, and collaborating and communicating effectively as depicted in Table 7. These characteristics are described in the sections that follow as viewed from the lens of the teacher leaders and administrators who participated in this study.

**Table 7**

*Theme 1 and Subthemes*

Theme	Subthemes
Who is a teacher leader? Teacher Leader & Administrative Perspectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Whole School Vision</li> <li>● Credibility</li> <li>● Servant Leader</li> <li>● Continuous Growth</li> <li>● Collaboration &amp; Communication</li> </ul>

**Whole School Vision**

*Teacher Leaders' Perspectives*

The teacher leaders interviewed discussed how teacher leaders take on additional responsibilities and are focused not only on their own classroom, but also the school as a whole. For instance, Ava stated that teacher leaders are “really focused on making the school a better place.” Likewise, Charlotte suggested that what makes a teacher leader “is kind of stepping outside of your own comfort zone, like the safety of your classroom and kind of doing things that benefits your entire team or even...doing things to step out, to help the entire school.” Olivia recognized a teacher leader as one whose vision is not only focused on their class, but also

stretches to the “grade level to building wide visions.” Olivia referred to this characteristic as being visionary and seeing the “bigger picture and making contributions that will help accomplish any short/long term goals.” Amelia discussed how teacher leaders are able to “put their own agenda aside in order to make the best decision for the school” and also mentioned that these decisions need to be equitable, meaningful, and have a positive effect on the school.

### *Administrators’ Perspective*

The administrator participants in the study also suggested that a commitment to the vision of the entire school was an important characteristic when identifying a teacher leader. They suggested that teacher leaders are able to view beyond their classroom and buy into the overall vision and mission of the school. As Zoey stated,

Teacher leaders must also be committed to the mission of the school and the [district] as well as committed to the success of all students. Teacher leaders see beyond the walls of their own classroom and are willing and eager to work to help their colleagues and the school as a whole for the success of all kids.

The administrators noted that teacher leaders take extra steps to go beyond their normal classroom responsibilities and take on additional responsibilities to have a greater influence on the school community and promote success throughout the school. Teacher leaders understand and have a commitment to the culture and vision of the school and, as stated by Michael, “understand that the operation of school is a compiled of various sub-systems such as attendance, assessment, discipline, grading, instruction, and scheduling...and the ability to effectively contribute to those systems for the benefit of a school.” The administrator participants indicated that teacher leaders are able to see the bigger picture and analyze a situation from multiple

perspectives. Lily stated that teacher leaders are “able to see the big picture; they have to be able to step outside their four walls to understand decisions made for teachers/students.”

## **Credibility**

### ***Teacher Leaders' Perspective***

The teacher leader participants discussed how important it was for a teacher leader to have success in the classroom in order to establish credibility with peers and administrators. Ava stated that teacher leaders:

have to be really good practitioners in their own classrooms. A teacher leader has to be that, to have the credibility of being an effective teacher first, or else there's really not any opportunity for leadership because nobody wants to be led by somebody who they feel like is a crappy teacher.

The characteristic of credibility was linked to the degree of trust as well. If a teacher leader had established credibility by having success in the classroom, then it was easier to trust them to make decisions. For instance, Olivia suggested that teacher leaders who are “really good at their craft are ones that I can trust because they also approach other people as if I can still learn from you.”

Participants defined success in the classroom not only as student achievement, but also as the ability to problem-solve and multitask. Isabella was very passionate in describing a teacher leader's ability to multitask:

The ability to multitask like a boss...all the teachers that I think of as teacher leaders, whether it be, they've got 15 things going on at one time, all day, every day from start to finish and you know, the 8 o'clock 9 o'clock rolls around and they're still willing to pick

up the phone. You know...it's exhausting, but it's, it takes that to be a leader...if you're not willing to go above and beyond, then leadership probably isn't the role for you.

Related to the ability to multitask was the ability to also problem-solve. Amelia stated that a teacher leader is a problem solver and they are the:

people who are level headed, they can put aside their emotions and really look at a problem from an objective standpoint and say, "Hey, this is the problem we need to fix it." And find ways to be a problem solver. They're not, there's a lot of people [who]...complain about a lot of things. But I think what distinguishes a leader from somebody who's not is because they're able to solve the problem and not just complain about the problem.

Ava agreed that teacher leaders are "proactive about helping solve problems." The ability to problem-solve was a factor in determining success as a teacher, which in turn added credibility to the teacher leader.

### ***Administrators' Perspectives***

The administrator participants expected that those teachers who are considered teacher leaders were proficient in their craft. As Zoey stated, "Teacher leaders are first and foremost a master of their craft." Administrators in this study often measured success in the classroom by student success on achievement tests. However, there were other indicators that came up as well, such as building relationships and classroom management. Victoria discussed how she could walk into a classroom and spot a teacher leader within the first couple of minutes by observing "the classroom ambience, the student responses, the patience provided for students who struggle, and the preparedness of the teacher" and also suggested that "A teacher that cares soars with data!" Likewise, Zoey stated, "if you aren't effective at building relationships with students,

managing your classroom culture, and helping students to reach their academic potential, then you shouldn't be a leader for other teachers in your building.” The administrator participants also noted problem-solving and the ability to multitask as key indicators of success, similar to what the teacher leader participants discussed. Lily noted that teacher leaders have to “manage the role of teacher, which is already so multifaceted, and other duties they are assigned or volunteer to do.” Therefore, not only are teacher leaders multitasking but they also have the ability to, as Eleanor discussed, be proficient in their content area and continue to problem-solve. The administrator participants explained that it is vital to know that a teacher leader can carry out the responsibilities of their teaching role effectively before they can be considered to take on any additional leadership roles and responsibilities.

## **Servant Leader**

### ***Teacher Leaders' Perspectives***

Another characteristic that the teacher leaders discussed was important to being a teacher leader is the willingness and ability to serve others in their role. The teacher leader participants agreed that teacher leaders are role models that build relationships and serve others. Isabella stated that “a good teacher leader and a role model, you know, accommodates other teachers trying to be their best selves.” Similarly, Ava and Evelyn discussed that a teacher leader helps everyone to grow, including students and colleagues. Olivia described this characteristic as having a “servant’s heart” because they continuously met the needs of others and helped others on their journey to grow. By serving others, teacher leaders build relationships with others. Amelia suggested that these relationships are built out of trust.

### ***Administrators' Perspectives***

Administrator participants discussed how teacher leaders build relationships and share their ideas and strategies with colleagues throughout the building. Eleanor mentioned that teacher leaders not only build relationships with staff and students, but are also respected by their colleagues. Eleanor went on to echo the sentiments of the other administrators by saying that teacher leaders “enjoy sharing and helping others, are innovative and respected by others, and know content.”

### **Continuous Learning & Growth**

#### ***Teacher Leaders' Perspectives***

Another characteristic that was heavily discussed by the teacher leader participants was that a teacher leader seeks out opportunities to continue to grow as a leader. Ava stated teacher leaders:

seek out professional development opportunities and then bring those ideas back to the building to share with others. So, they're kind of on the front edge of that adoption wave when something new is coming along and they're open-minded about adopting new things. They're change-oriented when change has been official, like not for its own sake. But you know, they're willing to explore changes and try things out.

Charlotte also discussed how teacher leaders are not afraid to try things that might be out of their comfort zone. She said teacher leaders:

aren't really afraid, especially now with the virtual setting, to kind of step out and say, “Hey, I tried this new thing. It really worked out for me.” And, um, just trying to help us all figure out how to do things more efficiently and to support all the learners in our building.



Abigail also spoke about continuous learning and growth and stated that it was vital for teacher leaders to continue to “look for ways to encourage and grow.” In most of the teacher leader participants’ stories of their own personal journey to becoming a teacher leader, seeking out opportunities and professional development was consistently mentioned.

### ***Administrators’ Perspectives***

The administrator participants spoke about teacher leaders’ desire to continue to grow and learn. Hazel suggested that while teacher leaders are often approached by administrators to take on additional roles and responsibilities, some actively seek them out and “are not afraid to take them on.” Stella concurred and stated that “teacher leaders must be willing to take risks.” She went on to say that she believes “the strength of a group rests in diverse thought and teacher leaders are taking risks when they share those thoughts despite [the possibility of] rejection.” Similarly, Zoey mentioned that when teacher leaders see problems, they have ideas and strategies and “see it as an opportunity to improve.” Several administrators mentioned that they have teacher leaders who actively seek professional development opportunities and have completed or are currently enrolled in Bayside’s teacher leadership program. As Hazel stated, teacher leaders have “aspirations to do more,” and they are not afraid “every once in a while, to go against the grain and try a new piece of technology or try a new strategy with the students.”

## **Communicate & Collaborate**

### ***Teacher Leaders’ Perspectives***

Teacher leaders in this study shared that the ability to communicate and collaborate was essential to their roles. Layla indicated that teacher leaders were good decision makers because they knew “how to involve people and when to involve people.” Likewise, Mia suggested that teacher leaders ask for input from other teachers. Emma stated that teacher leaders are “willing to

collaborate with colleagues and other stakeholders to ensure our children receive the best education to meet their individual needs” as well as being “willing to share ideas.” Teacher leaders are also able to communicate effectively. Olivia stated that communication is key and it is “stressful trying to follow a leader who does not communicate clearly.” Some of the other teacher leader participants discussed how a teacher leader is a great listener, is transparent, and can have hard conversations when needed.

### *Administrators’ Perspectives*

The ability to communicate effectively and collaborate were two characteristics administrator participants discussed as well. Teacher leaders, as noted by the administrators, have the ability to communicate to various stakeholders. For instance, Violet stated that “a teacher leader helps to make decisions and is able to communicate school-wide initiatives to other teachers and supports implementation.” Communication was coupled with collaboration. The administrator participants discussed how teacher leaders share their strategies and ideas with others. Stella said that teacher leaders have a “willingness to adapt and share with other teachers” and Hazel agreed, saying, “they go that extra mile instructionally and are innovative, and they are willing to share that with other members of their school/team.” The ability to collaborate and communicate effectively adds to the overall success of the teacher as a teacher leader. Hazel suggested that:

success can't be just in little compartments; you have to be willing to share what's working and help other people achieve that success. And so, I think that's one thing that makes a teacher leader really is that they're willing to put themselves out there and share what they've done and do what works and share that with people and, you know, coach other people through it.

Teacher leader and administrator participants identified teacher leaders, not by their informal or formal roles, but the characteristics that a teacher leader possesses. The ability to recognize a teacher leader led into the conversation of how they become teacher leaders or are selected to be a teacher leader with those informal and formal leadership responsibilities. Teacher leaders begin their journey either by self-selecting or being selected by an administrator as explained further in discussion of Theme 2.

### **Theme 2: Teacher Leader Selection: The Two Initial Starting Points**

After discussing teacher leader identification with participants, we talked about their journey to leadership. Two main sub themes emerged related to how teacher leaders are selected within their buildings: Self-Selection and Administrator Appointed (Table 8). Although these two starting points are aligned with previous research on teacher leadership, more details about why these are the two starting points was uncovered through the interviews with both the teacher leaders and administrators. The starting point of self-selection as well as the starting point of administrator appointed uncovered teacher leader identity and motivation to be the two main driving factors for those teachers who self-selected or for those that were appointed administrator.

**Table 8***Theme 2 and Subthemes*

Theme	Subthemes
Teacher Leader Selection: The Two Initial Starting Points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Self-Selection <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Identity</li> <li>○ Motivation</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Administrator Appointed <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Identity</li> <li>○ Motivation</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

**Self-Selection**

One pathway that teachers take to becoming teacher leaders is that of self-selection, also referred to as self-initiative in previous research (Smylie & Eckert, 2017). On this path, the teacher leaders assumed additional leadership responsibilities or roles outside of their normal classroom duties. The teacher leaders all engaged in some form of self-selection to strategically position themselves for leadership positions and responsibilities. Their strategies varied. They took on additional responsibilities at the school, attended professional development sessions, furthered their education, and/or established relationships. After discussing with the teacher leaders their path to teacher leadership, two sub themes emerged for those who self-selected: teacher leader's identity and motivation.

***Teacher Leader Identity***

Four of the teacher leaders (Layla, Ava, Sophia, and Amelia) discussed prior leadership experiences or their natural leadership tendencies, which helped them self-identify as teacher leaders early on in their teaching careers. For instance, Layla stated that her leadership experience stemmed from “playing sports in high school and in college, and being captains of

some of those teams.” Ava said she realized as a child that she was developing leadership traits because other people would tell her about her leadership potential. Sophia discussed she was in the military prior to becoming a teacher and that in the military “you’re forced into a leadership role as you progress in rank.” Amelia indicated that she had been put in leadership roles since she was in high school. She was involved with the Future Business Leaders of America in high school and completed a leadership program in college. For these teacher leaders leading was central to their identities, even prior to becoming teachers. Their teacher leader identity was that of a thick identity as their “passion for leading” was evident in their leadership journey stories (Wenner & Campbell, 2017, p. 15). They often sought opportunities to grow their leadership skills. In addition, administrators approached these teacher leaders to take on further responsibilities. Administrators tended to agree that there were some teacher leaders who were just natural leaders. For instance, Hazel stated that “leadership in some cases is ingrained in people because you have some people that are natural leaders and are going to take, take the reins and run with it.”

### ***Motivation***

Teacher leaders’ motivation to seek internal opportunities and gain power and influence ranged. Their motivations consisted of a desire to increase their experiences, increase their visibility within the school and district, the passion to help others, and the desire to enact change. For example, Amelia began to reach out and to help others, especially new teachers and was vocal with her administrators and let them know her “willingness” to take on additional leadership tasks. On the other hand, Sophia indicated that she took additional responsibilities in order to make herself well known in the district. Whereas, Ava was “frustrated in professional

roles where [she] wasn't able to be a leader.” Administrator Violet noted that for some teacher leaders, leadership was a matter of “intrinsic motivation to just keep being better.”

### **Administrator Appointed**

#### ***Teacher Leader Identity***

The identity of the teacher leader had an impact on whether they initially self-selected or were administrator appointed. Seven teacher leaders (Isabella, Olivia, Mia, Emma, Evelyn, Charlotte, and Abigail) stated that it was initially someone else who recognized their leadership potential and provided them with the push they needed to also see themselves as a leader. Once someone else saw the leadership potential in these teacher leaders, their thin identities as teacher leaders began to develop. They were just beginning to see themselves as leaders, but primarily when they were given an additional responsibility that came with a title or when an administrator approached them directly to carry out a leadership task. However, their identity did begin to transition from one of a “thin” identity to a “thick” identity as they gained more experience, both in terms of years and opportunities, as well as support from administrators and colleagues. In their transition from teacher to teacher leader, the identity transition from “thin” to “thick” also began as they embraced the role of leader and the responsibilities that come with the role (Carver, 2016). When asked if they saw themselves as leaders, initially they replied “no,” but after they were approached by administrators to continuously carry out tasks and take on more formal leadership roles, they began to see themselves as leaders within their building.

#### ***Motivation***

There were several motivating factors behind administrators’ selection of teacher leaders: influential prior experience, teacher leader experience and credibility, growth and

encouragement, and hierarchical power and relationships. Each of these motivations is further discussed in the sections that follow.

**Influence.** Administrators were influenced by their own experiences in their journey to leadership when grooming teachers to become teacher leaders and in selecting teacher leaders. Michael noted that he has “a lot of gratitude for what was done for [him]” and he feels “compelled to do for other people.” He shared that “having those administrators when I was a teacher, that has heavily influenced me...with my relationship[s]...with our teacher leaders.” On the other hand, Zoey described her experiences as a teacher leader and realizing that as an administrator she wanted to do things differently. She shared:

I always felt like my leaders, several of my leaders wanted me in whatever box fit them the best, you know, like you need a strong math teacher, so you want me to stay in this box, but that might not be what I want to do or what I'm capable of. I might be, you know, meant to do other things too, but this works well for you. And so you want me to stay there. And, um, so I never wanted to be that way.

The other administrators had several stories similar to Michael and Zoey and used those experiences to guide and influence how they select teacher leaders as well.

**Teacher Leader Experience & Credibility.** When discussing how teachers transition to teacher leaders, the teacher leaders indicated they believed teacher leaders were selected based upon years of experience as well as credibility stemming from the classroom. In contrast, most of the administrators agreed that years of experience did not necessarily mean a teacher was the best fit to be put into a leadership position. They also agreed that the participation and/or completion of the teacher leadership program does not determine if they will be selected but that it can help to develop and refine leadership skills.

When selecting teacher leaders or delegating responsibilities, the administrators suggested there are other teachers on staff who have the same or more experience than those selected as teacher leaders and yet do not have leadership responsibilities. For these administrators it came back to success in the classroom and the leadership qualities possessed by the teacher. Administrators suggested that there are natural born leaders who are ready to lead and there are others who possess the attributes of a leader but maybe do not see it yet. Eleanor suggested that,

it's the natural born ones that already come in and you just need a little mold and then there's the ones that I need to help them see it, whether they're lacking confidence or don't believe they can do it, or don't even know that it's available, that you can do it here.

**Growth & Encouragement.** The administrators in the study felt it was their responsibility to help mold and push teachers into becoming teacher leaders. For instance, Michael stated that teachers:

will either show the attributes and I would try to pull out the attributes of a teacher leader, or they would already exhibit those teacher leader attributes. And I would help them to better understand this world of being a leader in education.

Likewise, Zoey suggested that it is important to start to encourage people “even though they may not be the leadership person yet, but to grow them and they can take on other roles because they're still important.” Administrators also discussed how they notice when teachers are hesitant with the transition from teacher to teacher leader. They indicated that they have to encourage and push those teachers who display teacher leader attributes to begin to see themselves as leaders. For instance, Lily stated, “they know that they're really good at teaching and they don't always see themselves as teacher leaders. So, you have to show them how they are”.



**Power & Relationships.** Ultimately, the administrators exercised their power to delegate leadership responsibilities to whomever they decided. This concept directly correlates with the hierarchical structure of the organization in which the power resides at the top with the administrator (Lambert, 1995). The administrators all discussed how they presented formal opportunities to potential teacher leaders. Hazel stated, “if you have that aspiration, you're given an opportunity, it might not always be a giant opportunity, but I think that there's little nuggets of leadership that are given to you.” Violet also suggested that teacher leaders are identified by who would be best for the role and who they can build. Lily stated, “if I see a shining star, I'm going to...ask them because no one ever knows that until you...allow that teacher to either deliver PD or show a strategy in [Collaborative Learning Team meetings].” Administrators were asked to discuss whether a teacher had attended or was attending a teacher leader preparation program made a difference when selecting a teacher leader. The administrators unanimously indicated that this did not influence their selection. They agreed that it could help to build leadership skills, but that they look for success in the classroom, the ability to build relationships, and the capacity to manage multiple responsibilities when selecting a teacher leader. For instance, Madison suggested, “whether you're in a program or not, if you've shown that you have some leadership characteristics, consider yourself signed up.” Administrators said it was important to get to know their teachers and the goals they have. Eleanor stated that she gets to know her staff to find out what they are passionate about and what their future plans are. Likewise, Zoey indicated that she likes to get to know her teachers’ goals so she can “help them on that path.” It is, however, important to note that, at the time of this study, there were no official selection criteria in place at any of the elementary schools.

Discussions that occurred in the interviews with the teacher leader and administrator participants showed that teacher leaders begin their teacher leader journey as either self-selecting or being appointed by an administrator. After the discussion of how teacher leaders begin their journey, the factors that influence their ability to carry out their role and grow as a leader were discussed. These findings led to the third theme, Influential Factors on Teacher Leader Role Enactment and Growth, further discussed in the sections that follow.

### **Theme 3: Influential Factors on Teacher Leader Role Enactment & Growth**

In the interviews with the teacher leaders and administrators, a third theme emerged. This theme was the factors that influenced the ability for teacher leaders to enact their roles and grow as leaders. In Themes 1 and 2, the teacher leaders' and administrators' responses were fairly consistent on who they thought a teacher leader was as well as how teacher leaders are becoming teacher leaders. This trend continued into Theme 3; both teacher leaders and administrators were consistent on the factors that they believed influenced a teacher leader's ability to enact and carry out their role as well as continue to grow as a leader. Various sub themes also emerged that highlighted the differences among the schools as well as the micropolitical factors present. The administrators, colleagues, relationships, culture, structure, and uncertainty with the role all influenced a teacher's ability to be a teacher leader and grow in their leadership skills (Table 9).

**Table 9***Theme 3 and Subthemes*

Theme	Subthemes
Influential Factors on Teacher Leader Role Enactment & Growth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Administrator</li> <li>● Collegial Perception &amp; Response to Teacher Leaders <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Respect &amp; Role Model</li> <li>○ Competition &amp; Jealousy</li> <li>○ Authority &amp; Power</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Influential Relationships</li> <li>● A Culture of Collaboration &amp; Trust</li> <li>● Structural Factors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Opportunity Availability</li> <li>○ Decision-Making</li> <li>○ Stability</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Uncertainty <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Teacher Leader Path</li> <li>○ Teacher Leader Preparation</li> <li>○ Role Management</li> <li>○ Future</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

**Administrator**

Ultimately, the principal assigned the teacher the role of a teacher leader by giving the teacher additional teacher leader responsibilities regardless of their initial starting point of self-selecting or being initially selected by the administrator. When being appointed to these leadership positions, the level of collaboration varied among the schools. In two of the schools, little to no collaboration was involved, rather the teacher leaders were “volun-told” (asked to carry out a task or responsibility by the administrator with the understanding that it is required) for leadership roles by the principal. Sophia indicated that her role as a teacher leader is decided “more or less” by the administrator. Other participants also felt pressure from the hierarchy. Sophia said, “sometimes you feel like you still have to do it...that can be difficult, especially

with an administrator or those in a higher position.” In addition, one of the administrators made the statement, “if there's something that they need me to do, I'll do it. And if something I need them to do, they've never said no.” This statement mirrored the sentiment of one of the teacher leaders at that particular school. Emma stated, “I was in that situation of wanting to say no, but of course it's not expected for you to say no; if you are asked to do something like this in our field, you know, it's never good to say no.” The teacher leaders feel pressure to conform to the requests because they worried that they might not receive more opportunities if they said no. They ultimately saw that the authority belonged to the administrator, which recalls the hierarchical nature of the education system. Similarly, opportunities to develop and lead come from the administrator. The tasks that were given to the teacher leader were often tasks the administrator was delegating. Administrator Victoria noted that at her school, leadership was often “granted and not sought out.” Likewise, Sophia discussed how the leadership roles and responsibilities that administrators delegated went to only a select few teachers. This was frustrating for Sophia, who indicated that there were other teacher leaders at her school deserving of those responsibilities. Administrator Zoey recognized early on that when administrators consistently select the same group of teacher leaders to carry out tasks, the other teacher leaders and teachers get frustrated. She made it a point to consistently “look for ways to build leadership” in various areas so it was not always the same group.

In contrast, several of the schools showed evidence of high levels of collaboration between the administrator and teacher leaders. The administrators discussed with the teacher leaders their goals and helped guide them to opportunities. At these schools, teacher leaders seemed more comfortable seeking out opportunities and approaching the administrators. Administrator Hazel mentioned that teachers who want to be leaders “have to want more too for

themselves.” Victoria stated that a great leader “can lead a teacher into a leadership role without her ever knowing it.” Teacher leaders felt supported and encouraged in this type of environment and leadership. Charlotte stated, “When my administrator notices a strength in an area she encourages teachers to present ideas to staff. She has also encouraged teachers to take on additional leadership roles to help them to grow.” Amelia and Mia expressed similar sentiments about their administrators and how they encourage and help them to grow as leaders and push them out of their “comfort zone.” Leadership at these schools tended to be more shared; however, teacher leaders still felt that the administrator was the one who ultimately had the power to assign roles and responsibilities.

Teacher leaders clung to the idea that the power resides at the top of the hierarchy with the administrator. Administrators at the schools where a more shared leadership approach was happening were trying to change the mindset of authority and power residing at the top. Madison stated, “I’m not making them do stuff because I’m their boss, but because they’re needed and they’re trusted and they’re capable.” However, the organizational hierarchy was evident in the teacher leaders’ responses, such as saying the administrator is “still the boss” and feeling they had to “report to the right people.” Even for those teacher leaders who self-selected and strategically positioned themselves to gain political power as a leader within their organization, ultimately the decisions and responsibilities were delegated by the administrator.

### **Collegial Perception & Response to Teacher Leaders**

Administrators and teacher leader participants were asked how they thought colleagues perceived and responded to teacher leaders. There was a mixed review among the participants, which aligned to their school building. Administrator Michael discussed how at his school it can be a positive or negative response. He stated,

It can be positive as in, “Wow. I aspire to be like you one day” ...or negative. “Look at her, look at him. He's a brown noser. What ulterior motive do they have? Uh, they're trying to be the principal's pet.”

Three main groupings were discovered as to how teacher leaders were perceived: respected and as a role model, competition and jealousy, and authority and power.

### ***Respect & Role Model***

In most of the schools, administrators discussed how the teacher leaders were respected and looked up to as role models. Ultimately, administrators felt this was because of who was chosen for leadership roles. Hazel felt that it was important as an administrator to put someone in a leadership position that had credibility and a model to look up to to alleviate any pushback from colleagues. She stated,

If you have a teacher that's struggling and you try and put them in a leadership position...it kind of puts you in a tough position. Because if they're not really that strong of a teacher and people look at them, like, “I know that they're not very good.” They're not really a model that someone would look up to.

Madison also said her administrative team keeps in mind how their teacher leaders are perceived by their colleagues when assigning leadership responsibilities. She stated, “They have to be respected and be able to communicate reasonably ... those are important factors.” In those schools with a mostly positive perception and response to teacher leadership and the teacher leader role, the administrators discussed how teachers look to the teacher leaders for answers and said they are respected for their “competence and confidence.” The teacher leaders at these schools tended to share and focus on the school as a whole, which in turn (as Eleanor stated) earned the teacher leaders respect from other teachers because the other teachers then realized

that what was “being rolled out” was “not another thing” but “connected to the work” that was happening at the school level. In other words, colleagues respect the credibility of teachers who have proven themselves in the classroom.

Most of the teacher leader participants believed their colleagues respected them as a teacher leader. They attributed this respect to the relationships they had built and the culture their administrators had established. Ava discussed how her administrators have really empowered teacher leaders. She stated, “my principal has made it really clear what is our lane. Because she has empowered us as teacher leaders, there's less conflict when we're operating in our leadership role.” Amelia spoke to the relationships she has developed among her grade level team and throughout the building, which allows respect and trust to develop. Charlotte discussed how her colleagues have helped her become a teacher leader and carry out her role. When she suggests things, her colleagues listen and they will seek her out for advice. Sophia also mentioned how her colleagues helped her to become a teacher leader. She looked up to her teacher leader colleagues as role models. She stated,

working with colleagues that have taken the leadership route definitely helped. So I started, um, teaching for the district with two really strong individuals on my grade level...that helped me because they were good teacher leaders. So that had shown me that there was an opportunity to be a teacher leader within the building and within the district. Sophia said that since she has become a teacher leader and established relationships with her colleagues she feels like “they're comfortable coming and talking to [her] about problems.” Mia expressed similar sentiments and believes her colleagues appreciate her and come to talk to her often.

### ***Competition & Jealousy***

The schools that indicated a negative response to teacher leadership or the teacher leadership role attributed negative responses to jealousy and a sense of competition.

Administrator Victoria discussed how other teachers do not really like the teacher leaders and she believed it was due to jealousy. She mentioned that the teacher leaders “get a lot of pushback from teachers who want to be in the forefront and they want to lead.” She went on to say that “when you have a teacher leader, they think that that person's going to rise above them. And so the competition is real.” Administrator Violet has seen both positive and negative responses to teacher leaders and she believes that the negative responses and pushback come from “jealousy...because they would like to be the one with the information to be able to hear.” In addition, several of the administrators noted that asking the same people to carry out leadership tasks or asking someone newer to the building resulted in other teachers becoming frustrated because they feel like they should take on those roles or responsibilities because they have been there the longest.

Several of the teacher leader participants also discussed an occasional negative response to their role, which they attributed to jealousy or a sense of competition. Amelia said teacher leaders often take on more than one role or responsibility and this can cause colleagues to view them as “teacher’s pet,” but that this is mainly because they are not looking at it through the leadership lens. Emma also highlighted the competitive nature of colleagues as causing a negative reaction to the teacher leader role. She stated, “I have come to realize some teachers are very competitive throughout my experience.” Sophia and Olivia elaborated on how colleagues might be jealous of not being selected for the role and question why they were selected. Sophia discussed, “I’m sure that for some of my leadership roles, maybe they’re like, ‘Why am I not



getting that chance?’...There's always going to be a few teachers that don't see you as a teacher leader.” Likewise, Olivia stated, “And so it just seems like some people take things personally. And I don't know, like some of its probably jealousy—maybe they don't know why I have a leg to stand on. And so, there's no respect there.”

### ***Authority & Power***

Administrators suggested that teacher leaders were not always comfortable with some of the leadership responsibilities because, as Violet stated, “they're also times when they don't feel comfortable...primarily because they're an equal with their peers.” She said that the dynamic at each grade level can be different among teams and:

they don't want to buck the system...they don't want to upset their colleagues. And so they sometimes just go along with whatever's being said or done because they don't want to be the ones having to step into that role.

This dynamic that both groups of participants discussed recalls the hierarchical nature of the education system.

The interviews with teacher leaders revealed how much their role is influenced by the hierarchical nature of the school. In some cases where administrators had not empowered their teacher leaders, pushback and tension occurred because teachers and teacher leaders viewed themselves on the same level and teacher leaders did not have any formal authority or power. Olivia stated,

I think it is that lack of power because it's like, what makes anybody listen to me? And that was one of the things that bothered me those years, that I was team lead and I got all the pushback. So, I'm like, why would they listen to me? I am younger than them and I have less experience than three of them, you know? And so, it is what I can offer that

builds their trust? Um, cause this is really hard to do without that power.

Emma also experienced challenges with teachers resisting what she had to deliver as a teacher leader. She stated,

But I've had challenges where with teachers something that came down and I have to share it with the team that this is what we're going to do. And you do get resistance from the team. Usually for me, I just kind of let it go and share what I have to share, what we're going to do and kind of keep it positive instead of going back and forth. Because for me at the end of the day, we are all adults and professionals and I'm not making anyone do anything. This is what is expected of us to do.

The teacher leaders were also uncertain about where they fell on the hierarchy. Amelia stated, "I think a hindrance is the fear of having to address people who are on the same level ... as you in a different manner." She shared that teachers and teacher leaders are viewed as colleagues and it can be difficult to provide feedback to someone that may be older and more experienced in terms of years of service. She stated,

it's hard to walk in their room and be confident in saying, because you don't, I guess you don't hold the power that an administrator holds more like from colleague to colleague. People are afraid to give others on the same level as them feedback, because they're afraid that people are going to look at them and say, well, why do you get to tell me what to do? You're no different than I am.

Ultimately, the teacher leader participants did not view themselves as a "step higher" than their colleagues. As Abigail stated, "their input is just as important as mine."

## **Influential Relationships**

Administrators were asked to describe their relationship with their teacher leaders. The administrator participants all noted that there is a difference between the relationship with teacher leaders versus teachers. Hazel attributed this difference to the amount of interaction she had with the teacher leaders, stating that “there's a higher volume of interactions...with the people that are the leaders versus the others.” Michael indicated that these interactions often allowed for a chance to provide a deeper rationale and explanation to the teacher leaders. He discussed how he will “go a little bit deeper for those teacher leaders because [he] would discuss the different variables related to the decisions that are going to be made.”

Administrators discussed that they try to “consciously invest” in their teacher leaders and “push them to do things.” Eleanor noted that oftentimes with the other teachers:

it's a work in progress. I'm still getting to know you. And my conversation might be more of, “How can I align the support you need?” Whether it's learning the curriculum, you have someone come in to model the lesson or a behavior management strategy.

Similarly, Hazel discussed that it was important to get to know teachers on

an individual level and building a relationship with them will encourage that. When you get to know people, you discover more of what makes them tick and [that] can provide you with a greater insight into what their strengths are and what they are interested in doing.

The administrators also discussed how the relationship with the teacher leaders is different because the relationship is deeper as you have “confidential conversations,” different levels of information are shared, and there is a higher trust level.

Teacher leaders were also asked to describe their relationship with their administrators. In most cases, the relationships were described as positive and supportive. Most of the teacher leaders felt supported by their administrators and felt they could approach them with questions and concerns more easily than when they were a teacher. For instance, Layla stated,

I feel like I can go back and ask more questions than I could when I was not a teacher leader, or it was kind of like a cut and dry, like, you know, like a hierarchy. Um, and I wouldn't say, I feel like I'm equal with the administrators, but I feel like there's a lot more of conversation that could flow back and forth in that role.

Ava also described her relationship with her administrator as a positive one in which she felt treated like an equal and that her ideas really mattered. She stated, "I feel like it's a very healthy, productive relationship. It's friendly. It has healthy boundaries and is very equal even though I respect that she's the ultimate decision maker. The relationship feels very equal."

However, when successful relationships were not formed, the teacher leaders noted that the administrator was not as inclined to delegate responsibilities nor were colleagues as receptive to wanting assistance and guidance from someone on the "same level" as them. Likewise, administrator Stella discussed how when successful relationships were not developed with one administrator, teachers and teacher leaders will go to the other administrator to "get what they want." Sophia also described that personal feelings about a person can affect the relationship. She shared,

When you're in a leadership position within a building, you have your own personal feelings and, uh, as a leader, you have to put those aside sometimes and to be a good leader, you have to see the attributes of the people you're working with, whether or not you might like them on a personal level. And I think that some of the leaders really lack

that; they can't put aside their personal feelings and that's hindering them from giving others a chance.

### **A Culture of Collaboration & Trust**

Administrator participants discussed the building culture as having an impact on teacher leader role enactment and growth. In some cases, administrators had to come into a building and build the culture into one that supports teacher leadership. Zoey mentioned that culture was a big area her school had to work on when she became principal, but that now there is a lot of collaboration among teams and on the leadership team. Eleanor also discussed how culture was important to the growth of teacher leadership. She stated, “it goes back to the culture of our building...it has that family atmosphere, um, that spirit strong spirit of collaboration with high expectations.” Several administrators discussed climate and culture surveys that teachers completed about the school and the school leadership. Lily stated that she takes those surveys very seriously and that they are crucial to understanding the culture of the building and how to improve it. Lily stated that “people being happy with where they work and [feeling] fulfilled leads them to doing more outside of the classroom.” Likewise, Hazel realized that it was important to build a culture in which the administrator is there “to support, to guide and help create an environment for [teachers] to be successful.” She discussed, from her viewpoint as the assistant principal, how her “principal creates a culture that [she] believe[s] encourages leadership...[they] have a very open-door policy, which teachers use often.” Administrators noted the importance of creating a culture in which leaders can be built and flourish. Michael valued this importance and discussed that it is critical that the administrative team establishes “an atmosphere where potential teacher leaders would feel comfortable with assuming responsibilities that would allow them to flourish.”

All of the teacher leader participants also discussed how culture impacts their role and growth as teacher leaders. Two aspects that were discussed the most when it came to culture were collaboration and support of the teacher-leader role. Several of the teacher leader participants credited collaboration as an important aspect to positive school culture and the success of their role. Isabella stated, “We all work together with the mindset of doing whatever it takes to help our students succeed...it has always been a building where collaboration is strongly pushed.” Likewise, Sophia discussed that the teams at her school work collaboratively but she wished there was more vertical collaboration. Layla, Charlotte, and Mia mentioned “pockets of collaboration,” but they shared that there were also some teachers and teams working in isolation. They noted that the most successful and happiest teams were those working in collaboration. On the other hand, Olivia discussed how the culture of collaboration needed to improve at her school because the teams were “very cliquey.” She said there have not been many opportunities for teacher leaders and teachers to provide feedback to administrators this year.

It was important for the teacher leaders to feel supported in a culture that empowers the teacher leader role. Ava stated, “I think the climate my principal has created is very empowering for teacher leaders. She is the main factor in my opinion.” Layla agreed and discussed that the culture of a school can either make you want to be a leader or not. She discussed that the culture can go “either way because there are some times with the culture of the school that you don't want to be a leader.” Ava noted that the culture at her school is “very teacher-leader friendly” and she attributed this to the administrators who collaborate with teacher leaders and involve them in decision making. Isabella echoed the sentiments of Ava and discussed how the culture of the building and the administrative leadership are what made her want to become a teacher leader. Abigail described the culture at her school as open, easy to follow, and solution-oriented,

which helped her to become a teacher leader. Charlotte discussed the importance of the culture of the building to support teacher leaders and she also discussed that Bayside, as a school district, supports teacher leaders and their growth by providing a culture in which opportunities are provided. Sophia agreed that the district does provide opportunities for teachers to take on various leadership roles. Ava also spoke about the teacher leader program offered by the district and stated,

I think the leadership, the teacher leader Academy, I think is a big factor in building that culture too, because it says that as a school [district], we value teacher leadership. And that really sets a tone that building principals can either pick up and run with, or I guess, battle against.

### ***Trust***

Both administrators and teacher leader participants discussed the concept of trust as a necessary component in the school culture for teacher leader success. Administrator Stella stated, “trust allows people to feel the safety to take risks and to come with issues or come with solutions and not feel ridiculed for those solutions.” Administrator Hazel discussed that she gains her “own insight and information” about the teacher before determining whether they are a teacher leader rather than relying on what someone else has said previously. She stated “sometimes even though somebody has a title that doesn't necessarily mean you can trust them with all that you need too. And trust is, trust is a big thing.” Both the teacher leader and administrator participants noted that trust was an important part of their relationship. The teacher leader participants suggested trust was a critical factor in order to gain power, obtain buy-in, and be effective in the leadership role. Statements like “I believe they can lean on me and they trust my views and opinions” and “they trust what I’m going to do and what I am asking them to do”

indicated that the teacher leaders in the study had brokered relationships built on trust and were able to yield that power to influence their administrator's selection as well as influence their colleagues' responses to their leadership role.

The administrator participants shared that for the teacher leaders who are asked to carry out tasks or assume leadership roles, they have to trust them more. Zoey indicated that the way to trust teachers more is by providing them opportunities to lead and determine if you can in fact trust them and by "building that relationship." She went on to discuss that "it just takes really trusting them that they'll show you that that's safe to trust them." Madison also discussed the trust factor and mentioned that, as an administrator, she had to be able to recognize those who can handle the extra responsibility and those that she could trust to do extra. As a teacher leader, administrators noted, "there's a trust factor...because you're trusted with more responsibility." In one of the buildings where a culture of trust had not been established, Stella described that "Teachers feel that they will be targeted for opposing viewpoints. Building trust! As previously stated, leadership involves taking risks and teachers need to know that these risks will not be held against them."

The teacher leader participants felt trusted by their administrators in their role. Evelyn stated, "I've always had, or at least I felt like I have always had, trust. I never had to report back when I was given a task, they knew it was going to be done. They didn't micromanage me." Charlotte expressed similar sentiments and stated, "I think they both feel like they can count on me if they need something done or trust me to get things done, if you know, there's the deadline or anything like that." However, trust is a two-way street and there was mention of not always trusting the administrator. Sophia stated, "the administration above me, if something doesn't go



right, you know, you always have in the back of the mind, like, am I going to be blamed or was it us working collaboratively together?”

### **Structural Factors**

Study participants also discussed how the structure of the school affected teacher leadership. Administrator Victoria stated, “structure is extremely important. I think anything that you do should be structured when it comes to leadership. I think somebody who doesn't have a clear path just wanders or they are just on different roads.” Layla discussed how she had been at schools where there was a lack of structure and she did not feel supported, which was a hindrance in her teacher leader journey. Participants described structure as the opportunities that were available, the decision-making process, whether and how feedback was given, and stability with leadership and staff.

### ***Opportunity Availability***

Administrators discussed that it is important to provide opportunities for teacher leaders. Madison shared,

I think it's about opportunity. I mean, you know, like you can't grow, you can't grow without trying some things out or being given the opportunity to take the lead on things or to collaborate on things. So, I think that it's really about opportunity.

Likewise, Lily indicated,

You can't just call them teacher leaders or give them a title and then not have them actually doing anything. So, I mean, it's, you have to always be sure you're thinking about helping them grow and... continuing to make sure that they're tapped for [professional development] opportunities, uh, continue to make sure they have a voice in meetings.

Administrators noted it was important to promote a school structure that allowed for

opportunities for teacher leaders, such as delivering professional development and presenting at grade level and leadership meetings. Eleanor also discussed that it is important to connect teacher leaders to information and opportunities within the district for their continued growth. A few of the participants reported at their schools that oftentimes positions for teacher leaders do not change unless someone leaves the schools or decides they no longer want to hold the position. Administrator Zoey elaborated on this concept:

I have a few teachers that would make amazing leaders but aren't quite as comfortable in front of adults. They are more comfortable being behind the scenes. In the past, there have been some teachers that have historically always been the leader and there are other teachers that are more natural leaders. This has taken conscious work to restructure without offending or upsetting some long-standing staff members.

Teacher leader participants expressed how important it was for them in their leadership journey and growth for the building administrators to have a structure in place that allows for leadership opportunities. Isabella stated that being “given the opportunity to step up and take on those leadership roles is crucial.” Ava agreed and stated, “the principal and what opportunities you get to lead in a real way is a factor.” She went on to describe past experiences at previous schools under different administrators where she did not have leadership opportunities and she was very “frustrated and unsatisfied” because she did not have “leadership avenues.” Olivia and Charlotte also described why having opportunities to lead was so important to them. Olivia discussed how “having those opportunities to kind of practice what [she’s] learned to see if [certain roles] are a fit for [her]” was important and critical to growing as a leader. Charlotte also discussed that the opportunities that were presented helped push her out of her comfort zone and helped her grow.

The teacher leaders also discussed why they believe there are not always opportunities for teacher leaders. Ava stated,

People want to lead, but don't want to leave the classroom. But I think not all building administrators are open to it. And so not all schools have real teacher leader opportunities because some principals just don't give up that control.

Sophia expressed similar concerns and stated, “as far as leadership in the building, um, that's kind of a mixed, I think the opportunities there for some people to take on additional roles, but they don't afford that opportunity to all of the teachers.” She elaborated and stated,

You can plainly see in some situations where some of the staff has built up and put into a position of leadership and given extra opportunities that some of the staff are never afforded the opportunity to have, and that's not meaning they don't have the characteristics to be a good teacher leader. It's just that they aren't given the opportunities within the building, which I think is good that the district has outside things that they can take advantage of if they're able to.

Sophia and Abigail discussed how the school district provides opportunities for teachers to grow into leadership roles. Sophia stated, “the district as a whole produces a lot of opportunities with the leadership programs that they have to be able to take on that role, if you want to be a teacher leader.” Abigail stated, “the district does a really great job of providing information and knowledge and guidance that helps develop not just teacher leaders, but just a teacher in general.” The teacher leaders agreed that the Bayside school district provides opportunities for teacher leaders and the availability of a teacher leader preparation program shows that the district supports teacher leadership. However, it does fall to the school to provide opportunities at the school level and to support teacher leadership.

### ***Decision Making & Feedback***

Administrators and teacher leaders also said teacher leader success was dependent on how the decision-making process was structured as well as a system of feedback. The decision-making process varied between the schools based on the style of leadership. Those schools that operated primarily from a type of shared leadership collaborated more with teachers in the decision-making process. Administrators discussed that when they arrived at their school, they had to build up the culture and structure to one that allowed for collaboration and for decision making to be decentralized. Michael stated that when he arrived at his school the “decisions were more centralized. Uh, now the decisions are more teacher driven and they also are arrived at through the collaborative learning team meetings.” Zoey realized that she had to work on releasing some of her hierarchical control and begin to allow more collaboration in the decision-making process. When she did this, she found that:

You get so much more input and you make those decisions together, it takes away a ton of the worry and pressure and then you've got the champions and the cheerleaders for things already there because they were part of the process. So, it just works so much better, but it takes work and effort and thought and planning ahead and moving pieces.

And sometimes people don't do it quite the way you would have done it and you just have to trust anyways.

Lily agreed and noted that “really anything that can be benefited by input...then I always ask staff and not just the formal teacher leaders, they all get to weigh in.” Zoey described the typical process for decision making at her school, which mirrored the other schools in which collaboration was at the core of decision making. She stated,

Our grade level teams each have team leaders. These leaders also serve on the school

leadership team. Team leaders are responsible for leading their grade level in planning and [Collaborative Learning Team] meetings and monitoring and supporting implementation of the school learning plan goals. The leadership team works together to plan for and make decisions on issues that affect the entire school community. Decisions regarding issues that are a matter of policy are made by the administrative team. All other planning and improvement efforts that affect the entire school community are discussed with the leadership team or appropriate committee.

The schools where the hierarchy was intact and the decisions were made more authoritatively seemed to discourage teachers from taking on leadership roles. For instance, Stella discussed how the decisions in her building were typically made in isolation by the building principal, which she believed “hinders teachers from teacher leaders from understanding that they have the responsibility or even encouraging them to do, because why would you want to go down that path if you don't really have any true power in that.” She also indicated that formal roles for teacher leaders are selected by the administrator and there is not much discussion or collaboration on things like “who becomes the grade level chair at the school.” In addition, she noted that these formal teacher leadership positions only allow the teacher leader to “lead within this bubble, and outside of this bubble, that's not your realm and you don't get to make those decisions.” Victoria also described the decision-making process at her school as very centralized, with little to no collaboration. She stated:

All decisions are made by the current principal. You are not allowed to talk to anyone unless permission is granted, so it is led by one person. Teachers are supported by their departmental directors. Advice can be given to the teachers, but the final say comes from the principal.

The teacher leader participants also weighed in on the decision-making process at their respective schools and the effect it has on their teacher leadership role. At most of the schools, the decision-making process was described as collaborative. At three of the schools the decision-making process was described as more authoritative, in which the principal made the decisions. The schools that had a more collaborative decision-making process allowed teacher leaders to feel as if their voice was heard. Charlotte stated, “it seems like when I contribute or when I have something to say it is received or...things that I consider are put into place or taken into consideration when decisions are made.” Amelia agreed that the shared decision-making process made her feel supported and included. She stated, “The administrators are very supportive and they share the decision making. I don't think I've ever worked for someone who I have felt has had my back as much as my administrators do now.” Charlotte discussed how collaborative decision making has allowed her to feel in the loop which “releases anxiety” and lessens the “resistance” to want to participate. Ava provided an example of the collaborative decision-making process at her school:

Our school leadership team primarily makes decisions collaboratively. When this is not practical, my principal tends to delegate to the people most impacted. For example, if a decision needs to be made about the resource schedule, she empowers the resource team to make that decision. If there is an issue with kindergarten PALS testing it is handled in kindergarten [Collaborative Learning Team meetings] and they make a decision together. Mia admitted that there are some decisions that have to be made by the administrator, but when there is an opportunity to involve others in the process she does. Mia stated, “some things are kinda down the pipeline, but some of them, she actually gives us opportunities...she gives us quite a bit of freedom in deciding on what or how to do things for our grade levels.”

Schools in which decision making was not collaborative, teacher leaders recognized that the decisions were primarily made by the principal. Even if the decisions were brought to the leadership team, teacher leaders felt like the decision had already been made and that their voice was not valued. For instance, Sophia stated, “The teacher leadership team is made to think they help make choices, but ultimately the admin makes the decision often drastically different than what the leadership team had discussed.” She went on, stating, “ultimately all of that work was really done for nothing because they're going to make their own decision and what they want, or they'll reach out to just one specific person and say, ‘Okay, you make the decision.’” Olivia and Evelyn also expressed that they do not always feel heard. Olivia stated, “I would actually really like to be able to have more say” and when “it's your way or no way then that discourages people from trying to step up because they're already not going to feel heard.” Likewise, Evelyn stated, “sometimes I feel like I have good ideas or things that I don't feel are heard.” Those teacher leaders who were in a school that was less collaborative seemed frustrated with the decision-making process. Sophia stated, “Administrators seem to make all decisions with little input from the leadership team. They are slow to share information, or sometimes only share with a few staff members relying on them to share information.” Emma expressed that when decision making is not collaborative and the power resides strictly with the principal, she feels as if she has to go “through chains to get back an answer.”

**Feedback.** Despite the differences in leadership styles at the schools, administrators still provided feedback to teacher leaders on tasks and or responsibilities they were carrying out. The teacher leader participants expected it to be a part of the process. Violet noted that there is always accountability, but it is also important to “trust your people.” Several of the teacher leaders discussed how their administrators set timelines and provided feedback. In addition,

teacher leaders often approached the administrators asking for feedback on a specific task or responsibility. Ava shared that she liked to check in with her administrator regarding decisions and responsibilities. Amelia discussed how receiving feedback is “a huge factor that influences your development and performance, because I can't change, I can't make a difference or make a change if I don't know where I need to make that difference or make that change.” Amelia further explained that the administrators at her school are very supportive and “constantly checking in with teachers for additional supports.”

### ***Stability***

Finally, participants discussed the influence of stability and turn over in both administrators and teacher leaders. Administrator Lily stated, “longevity helps the principal, you know, motivate that leadership.” Similarly, Administrator Violet discussed how it was challenging to grow teacher leaders when there were so many new teachers, either new to the profession or to the building. Administrator Victoria noted that when administrators leave, the structure and trust has to be rebuilt:

So when they leave, you have to start building up all over again. And so, then when you start to do that, the trust factor comes in because do you trust the people that are under you now because of the loyalty factor.

The teacher leader participants also noted stability as an influential factor on their role and their ability to carry out their role. Ava stated,

Well, I mean, it does feel like if we got a new principal, it would all be up in the air again. Um, you know, um, you're kind of at the mercy of your administrator...It's really at the whim of the building principal.

Emma supported this idea by discussing how she feels comfortable sharing her ideas now but it



has not always been that way as her school has experienced “lots of changes over the years.” She stated,

Leadership also is key because depending on who is the leadership in your school makes a big difference, how much you would want to give as a person. I've seen the difference in who's in leadership, you tend to want to give more when you're treated with more of a respect ...[as] a partner in education.

Evelyn also discussed the various administrators she has had at her school and how difficult it is to transition from a leader “that is 100% collaboration to one that is kind of like 50/50, it's very hard to do.”

### **Uncertainty**

Study participants expressed some uncertainty about teacher leadership and/or the teacher leader role. These uncertainties revolved around the teacher leader path, teacher leader preparation, role management, and the future. These uncertainties affected teacher leaders' selection as well as the ability to carry out their role successfully.

### ***Teacher Leader Path***

One of the uncertainties participants shared centered around the path of a teacher leader. Abigail stated, “I think that teachers in general have an uncertainty about what it is to be a teacher leader and what it takes to be a teacher leader.” She went on:

I think that there's not a whole lot of great teacher leaders because a lot of teachers believe that when you have to be a leader, you have to take this giant, enormous amount of work on. And it's not always about that. Sometimes you can be a teacher leader without having any title, but you're just being an efficient teacher and helping out a colleague; that's a leader to me.

Administrators and teacher leaders both discussed the expectation of a teacher leader to continue on into administration. Some of the teacher leaders expressed that they did not want to become an administrator. As Layla stated, “I would never want to truly be a straight up administrator because I like the time with students too much.” Several of the administrators recognized this worry of being pushed out of the classroom among teacher leaders. Lily stated:

You have the ones who will take on the roles and have the title, but you'll have the ones who do a lot and won't necessarily take that title because almost sometimes it's fear of being pushed out of the classroom.

Stella expressed similar sentiments suggesting,

When we push teachers to become teacher leaders, oftentimes they feel they have to leave the classroom at a certain point...I don't want people to feel like in order to be a leader [you have to leave the classroom].

Abigail stated “Sometimes, um, teachers will assume that a teacher leader, you know, you have to be an administrator...you can be a teacher and you can be a teacher leader without being administrator.”

### ***Teacher Leader Preparation***

There was also uncertainty about how teacher leaders are prepared for the role. Bayside School District does have a formal teacher leader preparation program. The teacher leadership professional development series was offered beginning in 2017. In Bayside, new teachers participate in targeted professional development sessions, and when they reach their 4th year in the district, they begin teacher leader sessions. The program is also available for other teachers. The teacher leader participants who have experienced the program as well as the administrators

spoke very highly of the program but were uncertain of its impact. Administrator Madison stated:

I don't know how much of it makes a difference. You know, like, I don't know how much we're looking at, honestly, just kind of a natural kind of knack for it versus you have formal training and you know, now you can kind of be good at it.

Likewise, Administrator Madison shared that “in the field of education, we crank out leaders and whether it's teacher leaders or it's people who are certified and I don't know that that makes people leaders.” Administrator Stella expressed uncertainty and confusion for veteran teachers stating,

What's happening to our teachers who've been in the classroom 10, 12 years? What are they learning about teacher leadership when they're with a principal or assistant principal who doesn't foster leadership in them? I think that's a huge problem because they don't even know that there is an avenue there for them because they're not being inducted into that process.

Participants spoke highly of the program itself and the fact that it was being offered, but were uncertain how teachers were inducted into the program and the overall effectiveness of the program.

### ***Role Management***

Teacher leader participants also expressed uncertainty with how to manage their normal classroom responsibilities in addition to leadership responsibilities. Amelia, Isabella, and Mia all suggested that the workload of teacher leaders is substantial and it may hinder teachers from becoming teacher leaders because they might not have the time to take on the additional responsibilities. Evelyn echoed the same sentiment about time. She stated, “Time is the biggest

problem. When I take on leadership duties and roles, my classroom and/or my personal time suffers.” Layla also discussed the time and responsibility commitment:

Many teachers do not want to take on the leadership responsibilities due to the extra time commitment, especially without extra pay for that time. Maybe if they had an extra block to perform the leadership duties, therefore taking away the “That is too much time” excuse.

More recently, the COVID-19 pandemic brought a new way of delivering instruction. Virtual teaching has added another layer of complexity and responsibility to the plate of teacher leaders. Olivia discussed that there may be some hesitance in taking on additional roles and responsibilities due to the demands of virtual teaching. As Evelyn stated, “But what I'm also finding is when they use teacher leaders, they don't take anything off of their plate.”

Teacher leaders also expressed uncertainty with their role and where exactly they fall within the hierarchy of school leadership. Olivia stated, “I feel like there's like this line. I don't know where it is.” Sophia suggested that the roles and responsibilities that are given out to teacher leaders are not always clear and she feels “lost at times.” The role uncertainty extends to how their role may change or fluctuate depending on who the administrator is, leaving teacher leaders unsure of what is expected of their role and how much they can actually do. Finally, within their role there is uncertainty on how to interact with colleagues. Amelia stated, “I have uncertainty with the piece, just speaking to other colleagues on the same level as me from a different role, which was like, is hard to do, and it's hard to break that barrier.”

### ***Future***

The COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated uncertainties with teacher leadership and education in general. Participants realized that education is going to change and teacher

leadership might as well. Several administrators and teacher leader participants expressed uncertainty of the roles of teacher leaders during the pandemic when Bayside was delivering instruction 100% virtually. Some felt that teacher leadership took a “backseat” and needed to be back at the forefront. Ava discussed that it may have taken a back seat because there is not a “super obvious connection line” between developing teacher leaders and their impact on student achievement. However, she stated, “I’m sure we could make a really powerful argument.”

Charlotte shared:

Everything that's going on right now this year has definitely tested like cause there's so much uncertainty, maybe not necessarily about being a teacher leader, but just, just uncertainty in general. Like I just feel like there's so much that has happened that you just it's like, you want to be prepared, but sometimes it's hard to be prepared.

The data suggested several micropolitical factors were at play in teacher leader selection and role enactment. Although each interview with administrators and teacher leaders showcased different aspects of their leadership journey, commonalities that impacted their journey occurred. Chapter 5 presents a summary of these findings and explore how teacher leaders and administrators made sense of this phenomenon in the complex system of a school in which a hierarchy is still intact and how the commonalities—often micropolitical—that were uncovered among the participants impact teacher leader selection and role enactment.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS**

#### **Overview**

This study analyzed the teacher leader role at the elementary school level by examining the lives and leadership experiences of selected teacher leaders and administrators. Two main research questions with sub-questions guided the study:

1. What is the relationship between school level micropolitics and teacher leader selection and enactment?
  - a. How is the phenomenon of teacher leader selection perceived through the lens of a teacher?
  - b. How is the phenomenon of teacher leader selection perceived through the lens of an administrator?
2. What are the school-level micropolitical factors, such as school culture, school structure, school leadership, and collegial relationships, affecting teacher leader selection as well as role enactment and growth?
  - a. What role do micropolitics play in teachers becoming teacher leaders as well as enacting and growing in their role?

The literature review focused on the following components of teacher leadership as it related to teacher leader selection: the evolution of teacher leadership, teacher leader identity and development, political influences at the school level, and the theoretical framework of micropolitical theory that served as the foundation to understanding how teacher leaders are selected and how they enact their roles. This phenomenologically-informed qualitative study used a structured questionnaire to recruit participants and 20 semi-structured interviews to gather

data (9 administrator and 11 teacher leader interviews). This chapter briefly summarizes the methodology and findings, and provides implications and recommendations.

### **Summary of Methodology**

This phenomenologically-informed, qualitative study was conducted to investigate how teacher leader selection is influenced by the micropolitics of educational organizations. Participants were teacher leaders and administrators from the Bayside School District (a pseudonym), which is located in a Mid-Atlantic state. Purposeful, criterion sampling was used to select participants. Each participant completed a structured questionnaire that asked demographic questions as well as questions to gauge their understanding of teacher leadership. The participants who met the criteria were asked to continue on in the study and participated in semi-structured interviews. Each participant as well as their school was given a pseudonym and any identifying information was changed. Once each semi-structured interview was complete, the interview was transcribed and returned to the participant to review for accuracy in representation and validity. The interview transcripts were then coded using in vivo, descriptive, and causation coding. I then reviewed and analyzed the codes to arrive at the themes and subthemes of the data. Codes and themes were reviewed by peer researchers for validity and reliability purposes and to reduce any researcher bias.

### **Discussion of Findings**

Through data analysis three themes were identified: Who is a teacher leader? Teacher Leader and Administrator Perspectives; Teacher Leader Selection: The Two Initial Starting Points; and Influential Factors on Teacher Leader Role Enactment and Growth. Several findings emerged under each theme as presented in Table 10. In this section, each finding is presented.

**Table 10***Overview of Themes and Findings*

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Finding</b>
1: Who is a teacher leader? Teacher Leader & Administrative Perspectives	1: Characteristics over Titles in Identifying Teacher Leaders 2: Teacher Leader Role Confusion
2: Teacher Leader Selection: The Two Initial Starting Points	3: The Impact of Identity on Teacher Leader Selection 4: Motivational Influences & The Role of Power on Teacher Leader Selection
3: Influential Factors on Teacher Leader Role Enactment & Growth	5: Administrators: The Biggest Influential Factor on Teacher Leadership 6: A Culture & Structure to Empower Teacher Leadership 7: Relationships Matter

**Theme 1: Who is a teacher leader? Teacher Leader & Administrative Perspectives**

Teacher leader and administrator participants were asked to make sense of the teacher leader phenomenon by discussing their understanding of who a teacher leader is and what they viewed as the difference between a teacher and a teacher leader. Based on their responses and after data analysis, two findings emerged: Characteristics over Titles in Identifying Teacher Leaders and Role Confusion.

**Finding 1: Characteristics over Titles in Identifying Teacher Leaders**

The teacher leaders in the study held both informal and formal leadership roles in and outside of the classroom, which aligns with previous research (York-Barr & Duke, 2004) on the three waves of teacher leader development. However, after speaking with all of the teacher leaders and administrators about their perspectives of a teacher leader, none mentioned a formal



role title when they thought of a teacher leader; they provided a list of characteristics: a teacher leader has a whole school vision, credibility within the classroom, is a servant leader, continuously grows in their knowledge and role, and is able to collaborate and communicate effectively.

The characteristics described by both the teacher leaders and administrators relate to how they make sense of the teacher leader role through their own lens. Sensemaking was critical to the identity development of the teacher leaders as well as the identity recognition of teacher leaders by administrators (Weick et al., 2005). The participants constructed their own meaning of teacher leadership based on “their conceptions of the norms and routines of teacher leaders” (Weiner & Woulfin, 2018, p. 215). The participants' understanding of a teacher leader guided how teacher leaders were identified, selected, and how they carried out their role. Administrators looked for these characteristics when selecting teacher leaders and teacher leaders that self-selected felt that they possessed these characteristics. In carrying out their role, these characteristics were the driving force behind identifying and selecting teacher leaders as well as the how the teacher leaders enacted their role. Weiner and Woulfin’s (2018) research correlates with this understanding—they found that different understandings or meanings of teacher leadership “steers” the processes associated with teacher leadership, including selection and role enactment (p. 215).

### **Finding 2: Teacher Leader Role Confusion**

Administrator and teacher leader participants agreed on the same characteristics of a teacher leader. Despite this, there was still role confusion when it came to the power and authority wielded by a teacher leader. These characteristics can be hard to quantify, leaving room for ambiguity and role confusion. In this study, none of the participants presented a clear

definition of teacher leadership. This is consistent with previous research on teacher leadership, which indicated that there is no clear and consistent definition to frame the role of a teacher leader (Brosky, 2011). Role confusion can create tension and did for several teacher leader participants in this study. The teacher leaders in this study recognized that they did not have the formal power or authority like an administrator to carry out roles and responsibilities, but they were still asked to do so by their administrators. Therefore, the teacher leaders often had to navigate how to broker power, either positional or personal, depending on the role or responsibility they were being asked to carry out (S. M. P. Scribner & Bradley-Levine, 2010). Some of the teacher leaders experienced confusion with how to make sense of where they fell on the hierarchy and how to use power to lead. Therefore, they were occasionally met with resistance, especially in those schools that had not built a culture to support teacher leadership and empower teacher leaders.

In addition, there was confusion about the path of teachers, with half of the participants suggesting that teachers who become teacher leaders are on the path to become administrators. Stella recognized this confusion for many teachers and administrators and stated,

Often, [administrators] view teacher leaders as those preparing to leave the classroom, but this is a common misconception. Teacher leaders tackle leadership within a niche [or several] and use the attributes mentioned above to advocate for change, offer ideas, support the goals of the school, etc.

Participants suggested that teachers might not want to become teacher leaders because they do not want to leave the classroom. Statements that were made that echoed this sentiment highlighted the confusion over the teacher leader role. Some of the administrator and teacher leader participants thought that being a teacher leader eventually meant you transitioned out of

the classroom into an administrator role, which can occur, but is not required as part of the path of a teacher leader. Participants often labeled this misconception a hindrance for those taking on the teacher leader role.

Other participants discussed how teacher leaders were an integral part of the building and helped build the capacity and overall school improvement as they influenced colleagues and school culture as well as aided with leadership responsibilities. The apparent role confusion impacted how teacher leaders made sense of the role, which in turn affected how they were selected and carried out their role. The teacher leaders and administrators who viewed teacher leadership as a stepping stone to an administrative role often self-selected or were appointed to the teacher leader role because of their goal to become an administrator; the tasks and responsibilities they were given were to prepare them for that role. In contrast, the teacher leaders and administrator participants who viewed teacher leadership as a way to bolster school improvement and build capacity often self-selected or were appointed to the position as a way to build organizational capacity and create a positive change within the building. The social and organizational context influences the selection and role enactment and varies from school to school and teacher to teacher (Weiner & Woulfin, 2018). Therefore, role confusion not only affects how teacher leaders are selected and carry out their role, but also influences the overall success of teacher leadership within the building. This concept will be further discussed later in this chapter.

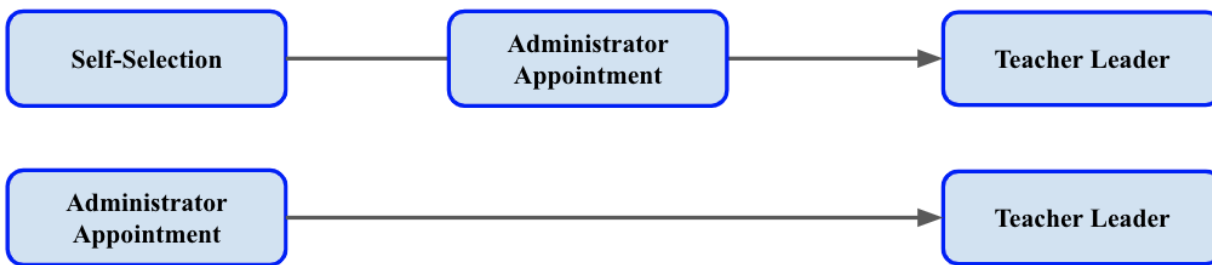
## **Theme 2: Teacher Leader Selection: The Two Initial Starting Points**

In this study, there were only two main ways that teacher leaders were selected: self-selection and administrator appointed, with an emphasis on administrator appointment on the self-selection path as well (Figure 16). Two initial starting points are concurrent with research

(Barth, 2001; Nolan & Palazzolo, 2011; Patterson & Patterson, 2004; Smylie & Brownlee-Conyers, 1992; Smylie & Denny, 1990; Smylie & Eckert, 2017). However, there is less emphasis in this study placed on the impact of a teacher leader preparation program on initial selection than previous research suggests.

**Figure 16**

*The Two Initial Starting Points of Teacher Leadership*



The path of self-selection is one of self-initiative, in which the teacher leader takes on informal responsibilities and seeks out collaboration and additional formal responsibilities (Harrison & Killion, 2007; Smylie & Eckert, 2017). This was evident in the journeys of teacher leaders who initially self-selected. However, the path of self-selection was influenced by the administrator as well. Administrators had the ultimate decision in delegating formal roles and responsibilities, even when a teacher self-selected to be a teacher leader. For those teacher leaders who were initially administrator appointed, their journey mirrors previous research on teacher leadership. The administrators had to identify which teachers engaged in leadership or had leadership qualities and then carefully select those to whom they delegated roles and

responsibilities (Smylie & Eckert, 2017). The appointment by an administrator to a formal role increased teachers' confidence among those who self-selected to be a teacher leader—exponentially so to those who did not self-select. For the teacher leaders who self-selected, it helped to solidify their identity as a teacher leader; for those who had not self-selected, it encouraged them to begin an identity shift where they began to think of themselves as teacher leaders and make sense of this role. This notion will be further expanded upon in Finding 3: The Impact of Identity on Teacher Leader Selection.

The difference between what was found in this study and the previous research on the pathways of teacher leadership lies not only with the degree of influence administrator appointment has on the self-selection path, but also with the effects of the teacher leader preparation program on that selection. Previous research on teacher leadership preparation suggests that a preparation program has an impact on the selection of a teacher leader; however, at Bayside this was not the case. I found that, although the formal teacher preparation program might be a part of the teacher leader's path, the teacher leader either self-selected to enroll in the program (indicating they already consider themselves a leader), or they were advised to enroll by an administrator (which is adjacent to administrator appointment). It is also interesting to note that no participants discussed the teacher leader model standards as a way to identify and select teacher leaders despite the use of a formal teacher leader preparation program at Bayside. The lack of conversation around the teacher leader model standards and selection criteria further illuminated the lack of impact of the teacher leadership preparation program on the initial selection process.

Based on discussions with the teacher leader participants about their teacher leader path and with the administrator participants of how teachers become teacher leaders within their

building, the second theme of the study emerged: Teacher Leader Selection: The Two Initial Starting Points. Two findings supported this theme: The Impact of Identity on Teacher Leader Selection and Motivational Influences & The Role of Power on Teacher Leader Selection. The teacher leaders' identity and the motivation of the teacher leaders and administrators influenced whether they began their journey as self-selecting or administrator appointment.

### **Finding 3: The Impact of Identity on Teacher Leader Selection**

The teacher leader's identity had an impact on their selection and role enactment. The teachers who were initially selected by their administrator were reluctant to identify as a leader because of how it expanded their role outside of the classroom and did not have a clear understanding of the teacher leader role. They had to be encouraged by the administrators to begin to see themselves as leaders. Not having a clear understanding of the teacher leader role impacted those teacher leaders who began with a thin teacher-leader identity. Wenner and Campbell (2017) suggested that a thin identity is based on the teacher self-identifying as a leader only when called to lead by the administrator. The teachers who began their teacher leadership journey with a thin identity often relied on administrators and colleagues to solidify their identity, either by approaching them to carry out leadership roles and tasks or by discussing their leadership qualities with them. They also had a difficult time identifying as a leader because it did not match their understanding of the hierarchical view of a leader, which is consistent with the research conducted by Heikka and Waniganayake (2011) and Muijs et al. (2004). These teacher leaders, out of the group, often had the hardest time navigating collegial relationships when it came to carrying out leadership responsibilities because they viewed themselves as "on the same level" in the organizational hierarchy.

The teachers who identified early on as leaders, even prior to becoming a teacher, had a thick identity. Wenner and Campbell (2017) indicated that a thick identity is one in which being a leader is rooted in who the individual is all of the time. Administrators often recognized these teachers as natural born leaders with an intrinsic motivation to lead and grow. These teacher leaders were able to bridge their teacher identity and leader identity more effectively to form their teacher leader identity. Their teacher leader identity, a social identity as suggested by Campbell et al. (2019), was constantly being shaped and reshaped throughout their story based on the relationships they formed. They often described themselves as a leader and were able to discuss their leadership in relation to others.

Cooper (2020) supports this finding as well, positing that the identity work of teacher leaders involves numerous facets. The teacher leaders in this study, whether they began with a thick or thin identity, all identified as teacher leaders. Both the teacher leaders and the administrators attributed this identity recognition or the ability to recognize other teacher leaders to various components that were in line with Cooper's (2020) facets and mirrored characteristics the participants described as how they identify a teacher leader. These facets highlighted the competency of both skills and knowledge, others recognizing the individual as a teacher leader, recognizing oneself as a teacher leader, displaying leadership skills outside of the classroom, understanding factors that influence the teacher leadership role, having the ability to collaborate and communicate effectively, and recognizing the structure needed to enable teacher leadership.

#### **Finding 4: Motivational Influences & The Role of Power on Teacher Leader Selection**

##### ***Teacher Leaders' Motivation(s)***

The teacher leader participants in this study all had taken on both informal and formal leadership roles within their building or the Bayside district. In addition, there were a variety of

other strategies the teacher leaders took to increase their knowledge and credibility within their role. Each tactic or combination of tactics was used to gain influential or personal power in a role that lacks formal power of a teacher leader, which directly correlates to the research centered around complexity theory (S. M. P. Scribner & Bradley-Levine, 2010). The teacher leaders in my study brokered their experience and education as a way to leverage power, sometimes successfully and other times unsuccessfully. For instance, four of the teacher leaders took the initiative to participate in a formal teacher leader preparation program Bayside offered in order to build expertise and credibility to add to their personal and positional power. This program is an intentional development and preparation of the teacher into a teacher leader. Layla stated that she was a teacher leader prior to enrolling in the program, but the program made her stronger and gave her “more direction in how to lead in a better way.” The motivations behind taking on additional responsibilities, participating in leadership programs, attending professional development, and/or furthering their education varied. For a few, the main motivation was wanting to move to the next level in the educational hierarchy; others wanted to continue to lead within their own building and be able to affect change. Several of the teacher leaders took on informal and formal leadership roles and responsibilities because they wanted to impact more than their classroom. They wanted to have a greater impact across the school— some were frustrated with the way things were going at their school. This aligns with the research conducted by York-Barr and Duke (2004) that suggested teacher leadership emerged due to teachers wanting change within their school building.

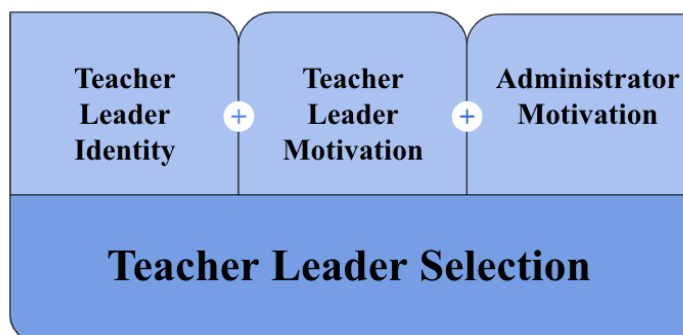
Motivational factors determined the political capital the teacher leaders were able to gain. The teacher leaders whose motivation was to increase their experiences and gain visibility to one day move up the organizational hierarchy often did not generate as much political capital



as the teacher leaders whose motivation was that of servant leadership. Motivation to help others enabled relationships among colleagues and the administrators to develop, allowing for the least amount of resistance when it came to enacting their role. These relationships added to the teacher leaders' influence and political capital within their building, because power is contingent upon the social context (Fowler, 2013).

### ***Administrators' Motivations***

The phenomenon of “appointed and anointed” was present at the elementary schools in some capacity. It was clear that the idea of an organizational hierarchy at the building level is still present in the mindset of stakeholders despite some schools operating from a shared leadership perspective. Although some administrators selected teacher leaders based on wanting to see growth in teachers who had potential to become teacher leaders, others selected teachers who already had credibility and experience. These motivations were influenced by the administrators' prior experiences, the teacher leader's own experience and credibility, the desire to build capacity by helping others grow, and the hierarchical nature of the education system as discussed in Chapter 4. Ultimately, whether a teacher self-selected or was initially appointed as a teacher leader by the administrator, the administrator was the one who determined how much responsibility and power were given to who. This notion aligns with the research completed by Smylie and Eckert (2017), who found that administrators ultimately determine and influence who “engages in teacher leadership development and practice” (p. 570).

**Figure 17***Facets of Teacher Leader Selection*

### **Theme 3: Influential Factors on Teacher Leader Role Enactment & Growth**

Teacher leader and administrator participants were asked to discuss what they thought aided or hindered teacher leadership at their school. The third theme: Influential Factors on Teacher Leader Role Enactment and Growth emerged. Several subthemes emerged from the discussion: administrators, collegial perceptions and response to teacher leaders, influential relationships, a culture of collaboration and trust, structural factors, and uncertainty. Based on the theme and its various subthemes, key findings emerged. These findings were:

Administrators: The Biggest Influential Factor; Culture and Structure; and Relationships Matter.

#### **Finding 5: Administrators: The Biggest Influential Factor on Teacher Leadership**

Administrators were found to be the biggest influential factor on teacher leader selection and enactment. Whether administrators operated from a shared leadership perspective or a more authoritative one, ultimately, they had the power to select teacher leaders, provide opportunities, and delegate roles and responsibilities. Sophia recognized this and stated, “Admin has a great influence on teacher leader development and opportunities.” This finding aligns with research

conducted by Barth (2001), who concluded that the administrator “has a disproportionate influence upon teacher leadership—for better or for worse” (p. 447).

In some cases, teacher leaders felt pressured to accept additional responsibilities bestowed upon them by their administrators due to the hierarchical nature of the organization and the fear of not being asked again. In the schools that operated from a more authoritarian style of leadership, where collaboration was not at the forefront, opportunities and roles were delegated by the administrator based on who they determined embodied the qualities of a teacher leader. The administrators in these schools rarely empowered the teacher leaders, so decisions were ultimately made by the administrator. These teacher leaders often were not independently leading, but were instead carrying out what the administrator asked of them. They were often met with resistance because they had not been empowered by the administrator. This aligns with research conducted by Klein et al. (2018), who found that resistance among teacher leaders and administrators as well as between teacher leaders and colleagues occurs in schools where leadership is not shared. In these instances, the administrator becomes more of an obstacle to the journey of the teacher leader.

On the other hand, in the schools that operated from a shared leadership perspective, where collaboration was at the forefront, administrators developed relationships with teacher leaders to determine their goals and to better provide opportunities, responsibilities, and roles that aligned with those goals. Administrators in these schools still had the ultimate power and authority to select teacher leaders and assign roles and responsibilities, but it was approached in a more collaborative manner. The collaborative relationships that were created between the administrators and the teacher leaders in these schools aided the teacher leader on their journey. Previous research on shared leadership supports this concept and recognizes the administrator’s

ability to share leadership as being critical to the success of the relationship between the administrator and teacher leader (Barth, 2001). The successful relationship established between the administrator and teacher leader participants allows them to work together toward the common goal or mission of the school, which increases the overall social capital and effectiveness of the school. The teacher leaders in those schools in which administrators shared leadership felt empowered and supported. This finding also aligns with the research on shared leadership that indicated a shared leadership model helps teacher leaders feel supported, encouraged, and valued by their administrator and school (Berry et al., 2020).

The differences in the level of administrator involvement between the more authoritarian administrators versus the more shared leadership schools aligns with current research that recognizes that “only 42% of principals report that teachers have significant involvement in deciding school policies, curriculum, and instruction” (Berry et al., 2020, p. 14). Teacher leaders in my study who felt supported also felt more confident and successful in their role as a teacher leader. This also helped build their teacher leader identity. The teacher leaders attributed the success of their role and the ability to carry it out to the support of their administrators. This finding aligns with the research conducted by the Teacher Leadership Exploratory Consortium (2011), which found that teacher leadership cannot be effective or successful without the support of the principal. Likewise, the power of administrator support on the teacher leader role that this study highlighted is also consistent with research conducted by Barth (2001), who found that administrators have a considerable amount of influence on teacher leadership, whether positive or negative.

In both situations, teacher leaders still felt the need to report back to the administrator, whether the administrator required it or not. Teacher leaders still viewed the administrator at the

top of the hierarchy and wanted to receive feedback on various decisions or projects. The research presented in Chapter 2 supports this idea, as there is ambiguity about accountability when it comes to teacher leadership—mainly because there is ambiguity with the teacher leader role itself, and the notion that the administrator holds the power and is at the top of the hierarchy is still prevalent. The data from this study suggest that administrators have an impact on creating conditions within their school to either foster or inhibit teacher leadership. This finding is supported by other researchers who suggest that administrators have a profound impact on the culture and structure of the building, which can either support or hinder teacher leadership (Ado, 2016; Higgins & Bonne, 2011; Muijs & Harris, 2007; Silva et al., 2000). Therefore, administrators ultimately control other factors that influence teacher leadership, such as the culture and structure of the building, which makes them the most influential factor on teacher leadership.

#### **Finding 6: A Culture and Structure to Empower Teacher Leadership**

Schools are complex organizations in which the culture is shaped by the administrators and the staff of the building. The teacher leader and administrator participants in this study discussed the importance of having a culture built on collaboration and trust. Ado (2016) also highlighted the importance of a culture where trust and collaboration were present to support teacher leadership. Both administrator and teacher leader participants in my study discussed how important it was to build a culture that encourages leadership, where leaders can grow and flourish. They also discussed how important it was for teacher leaders to feel comfortable taking on additional responsibilities and being able to trust one another in that process. Most of the administrator and teacher leader participants brokered relationships based on trust, which added to the power and influence of the teacher leaders. Participants noted how vital it was for the

administrators and teacher leaders to collaborate with one another and allow for collaboration throughout the entire school. Teacher leaders also needed to feel that the culture was one that empowered their role and allowed them to effectively carry it out. This finding is also consistent with Ado's (2016) research, in which he highlights how important it is to have an environment where trust and collaboration is present for teacher leadership to thrive. Ultimately, the teacher leader participants in my study suggested the culture created by the administrator was a factor in the success of their role and their ability to grow as teacher leaders.

The culture also has an impact on the structures in place at the building level to either support or hinder teacher leadership. These structures include available opportunities for leadership, a collaborative decision-making process, and stability among leadership and staff. The collaborative culture at most of the schools represented in this study empowered teacher leaders and provided opportunities for them to continue to grow as leaders. The decision-making process is decentralized and collaborative at these schools. The collaborative decision-making process evident at most of the schools represented in this study allowed for all stakeholders to be at that table for many of the decisions, encouraging buy-in and teacher leaders feeling as though their voice matters. For those few schools in this study that did not have a collaborative decision-making process, the teacher leaders knew that the administrator would make the final decision with or without input from them, which often left the teacher leaders not feeling their voices were valued. This hierarchical structure present at the building level for a few of the participating schools in which collaboration is not embedded will need to be restructured to help teacher leaders grow in their leadership and feel valued. The participating schools that had restructured to where collaboration and shared leadership, teacher leaders noted that they felt that they were able to grow in their leadership journey. This finding is consistent with Struyve et al.'s (2014)

findings that the reshaping of structure is necessary as teacher leadership challenges the traditional educational hierarchy. My analysis suggests collaboration is critical to teacher leaders' development.

The culture also influenced the stability or retention of administrators and staff. The administrator and teacher leader participants in my study noted that when there is significant turnover, it is like starting over with the teacher leader process. Teacher leader participants discussed stability within administration as an influential factor on their role and their ability to carry out their role because the administrator determined what teacher leadership would look like in the building. Both groups of participants also discussed that turnover comes with a rebuilding of relationships and potentially culture. This finding directly correlates with previous research that suggests school leaders have a substantial impact on creating conditions within their school that will either support or hinder teacher leaders (Ado, 2016; Higgins & Bonne, 2011; Muijs & Harris, 2007; Silva et al., 2000). Therefore, once the school leader leaves, it can potentially upend teacher leadership progress as well as the culture of building.

When the culture and structure are not in place for teacher leadership, issues such as a lack of respect for the teacher leader role and jealousy can arise. For the schools in which the administrators did not build a culture that empowered teacher leaders, teacher leaders were often met with resistance and a lack of respect for their leadership role. In addition, without a culture that promotes teacher leadership by offering opportunities to lead, competition and jealousy can arise. This was mainly found in those schools operating from an authoritarian leadership style. Cooper (2020) and Fairman and Mackenzie (2015) separately support this finding; they also found that resistance from colleagues can occur when the teacher leader role has not been made clear or supported by administration. Some of the same people were constantly asked to carry out

certain roles and responsibilities, which caused other teacher leaders to become frustrated. In my study, teacher leaders at schools in which the culture was not one of collaboration and did not directly promote teacher leadership found that their role was often viewed as “teacher’s pet,” which created a divisive line between the teacher leaders and teachers. This was exacerbated when other teachers began to question why the teacher leaders had the role they did and why they were selected over others who felt or seemed more qualified. My findings suggest that when administrators fail to establish a culture that supports and empowers teacher leadership, this creates pushback and tension among teacher leaders and teachers because the two groups are viewed as equals in the educational hierarchy. The culture and structure of the building influences whether and how relationships develop. The relationships that develop, whether among colleagues or administrators, impact the teacher leader role and their ability to enact their role and grow in their leadership.

### **Finding 7: Relationships Matter**

In this study, administrator participants were asked to describe their relationship with their teacher leaders. Likewise, teacher leader participants were asked to describe their relationship with their administrators and their colleagues. I found that these relationships are of significant value as it relates to teacher leaders carrying out their roles and growing as teacher leaders. This notion aligns with Brosky’s (2011) suggestion that the relationships teacher leaders formed increased their influence on school improvement and the educational practice of other teachers. Teachers tend to “value (and be influenced by) their colleagues’ expertise (human capital) and strength of their ties (social capital) while they rely on administrators for their economic capital” (S. M. P. Scribner & Bradley-Levine, 2010, p. 496). The extent of their



influence and how it can effect change is directly related to their ability to activate their cultural capital (S. M. P. Scribner & Bradley-Levine, 2010).

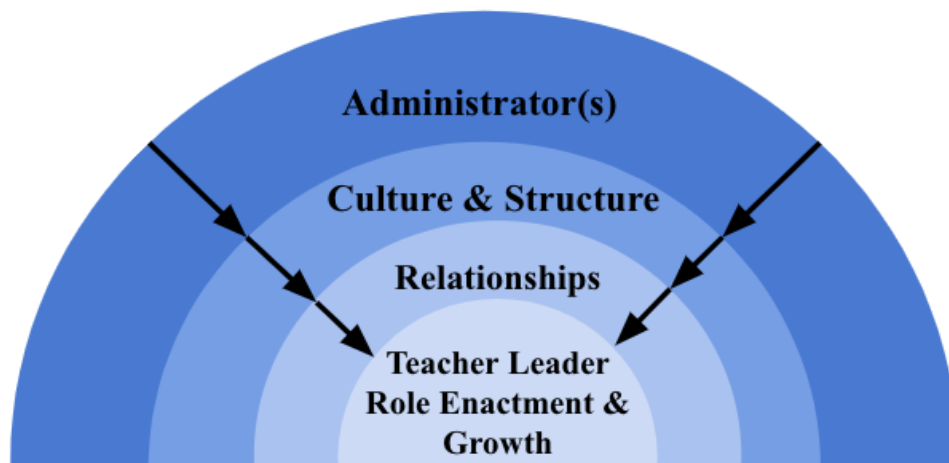
Administrators from schools in which the leaders operated from a shared leadership style developed closer relationships with their teacher leaders and experienced high levels of trust. Administrators from schools in which the leaders operated from a more authoritarian leadership style did not highlight the relationships with their teacher leaders as necessarily being different from relationships with other teachers. When the teacher leaders discussed their relationship with their administrators, specifically the ones using shared leadership, they felt as if they could approach them and felt like their administrators genuinely listened to what they had to say. Teacher leaders who were at schools with more authoritarian administrators were a little uncertain on where the line was for their role; they did not feel as comfortable approaching the administrators and often felt as if their voices were not heard.

Teacher leaders and administrators were also asked to describe the relationship between the teacher leaders and teachers in the building. In schools that were more collaborative and where leadership was shared, the collegial relationships were more positive than at the schools that were not as collaborative and where leadership was more authoritarian. The relationships between the teacher leaders and teachers at the more collaborative schools allowed for the teacher leaders to solidify their identity as a teacher leader and enact their role with little resistance. Teacher leaders at these schools felt respected and trusted by their colleagues. Teacher leaders at the schools in which collaboration was not the focus often found it difficult to form relationships outside of their grade level team. They also questioned their own teacher leader identity more often because they felt that they did not have the power and authority to enact their role. These teacher leaders often met with resistance from their colleagues. Most of

the teacher leader participants discussed that they believed their colleagues respected them as a teacher leader. They mainly attributed it to the relationships they had built and the culture the administrators had established. The culture and structure that has been established in the building and the relationships that have been built allowed for the teacher leaders to carry out their role. Ultimately, school leaders have the power to directly affect the school culture and structure, which in turn affects the relationships that are built, influences the effectiveness of teacher leadership, and has the ability to empower or marginalize teacher leaders (Wenner & Campbell, 2017).

**Figure 18**

*Micropolitical Influences on Teacher Leader Role Enactment & Growth.*



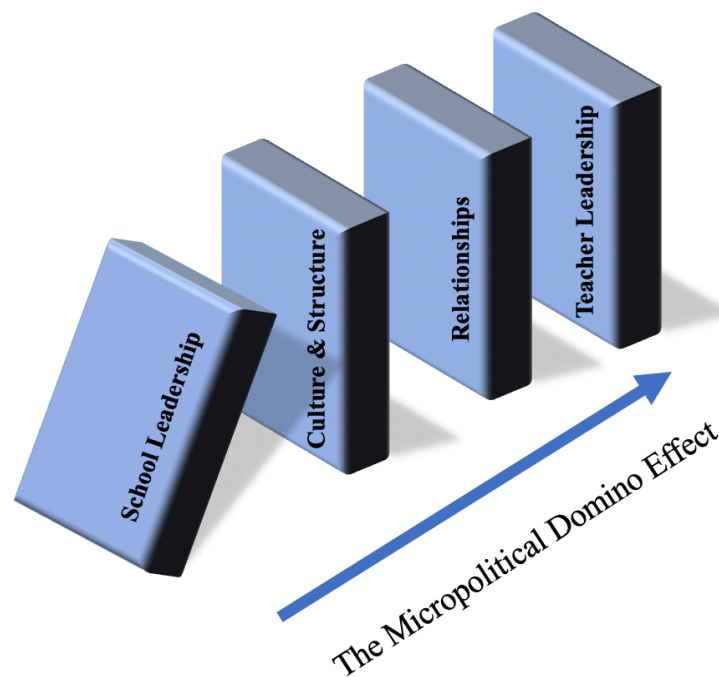
### **Summary of Findings**

Through data analysis three themes were identified: Who is a teacher leader? Teacher Leader and Administrator Perspectives; Teacher Leader Selection: The Two Initial Starting Points; and Influential Factors on Teacher Leader Role Enactment and Growth. Several findings were discovered under each theme. These findings were: Characteristics over Titles in Identifying Teacher Leaders, Teacher Leader Role Confusion, The Impact of Identity on Teacher Leader Selection, Motivational Influences and the Role of Power on Teacher Leader Selection, Administrator: The Biggest Influential Factor on Teacher Leadership, A Culture and Structure to Empower Teacher Leadership, and Relationships Matter. Micropolitical influences were evident in the selection and role enactment of the teacher leaders in this study. The organizational hierarchy present at the various elementary schools leaves the power at the top with the administrator. At all of the elementary schools in the study, the administrator was the one who appointed the teacher leaders to formal positions, such as members of the leadership team, grade level chairs, instructional leaders, and teacher mentors. Likewise, the administrator was the one who tasked the selected teacher leaders with additional responsibilities, such as leading school professional development sessions and updating the School Learning Plan. Therefore, the teacher leader participants had to broker their own political power and influence by vying to add to their experience and by establishing relationships in order to be selected. Ultimately, teacher leaders seemed to have more influence and power over the administrator's selection as well as with their colleagues when a relationship had been established built on trust. However, administrators had to share their leadership and build a culture and structure that supported collaborations and allowed relationships to form. In addition, the culture and structure that administrators established needed to be one that supported teacher leadership, provided opportunities, and

empowered teacher leaders. If the administrators held on tight to their power and were more authoritarian in the leadership, the culture and structure was not collaborative and did not foster relationships between teacher leaders and administrators or between teacher leaders and other teachers. This in turn caused tension and pushback, leaving teacher leaders to feel powerless and unheard. Therefore, administrators hold the power and have the ability to embrace teacher leadership or reject it, leading to a micropolitical domino effect as illustrated by Figure 19.

**Figure 19**

*The Micropolitical Domino Effect*



### **Implications for Practice**

Through the stories of the teacher leader and administrator participants, three themes emerged: Who is a Teacher Leader? Teacher Leader and Administrative Perspective; Teacher Leader Selection: The Two Initial Starting Points; and Influential Factors on Teacher Leader Role Enactment and Growth. Seven findings emerged through the data analysis process: Characteristics over Titles in Identifying Teacher Leaders; Teacher Leader Role Confusion; The Impact of Identity on Teacher Leader Selection; Motivational Influences and The Role of Power on Teacher Leader Selection; Administrators: The Biggest Influential Factor on Teacher Leadership; A Culture and Structure to Empower Teacher Leadership; and Relationships Matter. This section highlights implications for the local school, district, and collegiate level to consider when developing, preparing, and selecting teacher leaders.

#### **Building Level**

The teacher leaders in this study expressed uncertainty with how to manage their teacher leader responsibilities while also managing their normal day-to-day teaching responsibilities. Therefore, a structure needs to be developed at the building level that would allow for additional time and opportunity to alleviate some of this uncertainty. In turn, this will call for school structure and organization to be reviewed and revised as well. Administrators at the building level will also need to establish a culture that is collaborative, where leadership is shared, if one is not already in place. This will help empower teacher leadership and alleviate some of the micropolitical factors that can negatively affect teacher leadership. In addition, it will allow for more opportunities for teacher leaders to lead. Many of the teacher leaders and administrators in this study suggested they learned by doing.

## **District Level**

Although this study showed that the participation in a teacher leader preparation program did not influence the administrator selecting a teacher to be a teacher leader, this was partly due to the lack of knowledge of the teacher leadership program across the district. However, it is possible if the program was more systemic and given more of a focus by the district, the participation in a teacher leader program could help alleviate some of the ambiguity and uncertainty regarding the role. In order to facilitate a mutual and clear understanding of the role and responsibilities of a teacher leader, teacher leader preparation programs should be developed and required of those who are taking on teacher leader roles. This would include selection criteria to ensure that the teachers who are becoming teacher leaders will be successful in the program and in their role and that selection is not influenced by the micropolitics of the organization. Part of that criteria could be the completion of a teacher leadership preparation program. The district could also offer a professional development series for administrators to help relieve some of the ambiguity around teacher leadership and help administrators to better identify, select, develop, and prepare teacher leaders as well as highlight the type of leadership and school culture in which teacher leadership thrives.

## **Collegiate Level**

Administrative leadership will have to be reconfigured in order to best select, prepare, and develop teacher leaders. As Smylie and Eckert (2018) suggest, teacher leadership will “redefine administrative leadership and it will recalibrate working and authority relationships” (p. 15). The program that administrators complete should include a course on teacher leadership or have teacher leadership embedded within a course. It could highlight the definition of a teacher leader as well as the role and responsibilities. In addition, it should teach administrators

how to identify, select, prepare, and develop teacher leaders; currently, administrators have not been necessarily prepared to select, prepare, and develop leaders. A program or course for administrators should also highlight the type of leadership that helps teacher leaders thrive as well as how to build a successful school culture that is collaborative and empowers teacher leadership.

Teacher leader preparation for teachers could begin at the undergraduate collegiate level where teachers can begin to learn about this role and have a clear understanding of the role and the responsibilities of a teacher leader prior to entering the workforce. This would help teachers who already see themselves as leaders learn about potential paths they could take. In addition, this could help teachers learn how to respond to teacher leaders once in a school. A universal teacher leader program could alleviate some of the ambiguity around teacher leadership and the role of a teacher leader. In addition, colleges and universities could offer teacher leader preparation programs for those in-service teachers interested in becoming teacher leaders. This type of program should discuss the foundations of teacher leadership and clearly explain the role and the responsibilities of a teacher leader. In addition, the course would also need to prepare teachers on the other facets of becoming a teacher leader, such as navigating relationships and the micropolitics of the school.

Teacher leadership holds great potential as a part of school improvement and building school capacity. As Smylie and Eckert (2018) stated, teacher leadership “will be required as part of new systems of leadership for schools of the future...and the education field would do well to pay much more attention, and devote much more systematic effort, to development” (p. 17). All three of these levels must work together in order to create and carry out a successful teacher leadership program. Smylie and Eckert (2018) found that schools and districts have the most

responsibility when it comes to teacher leadership development but are unable to do it alone; this understanding “raises the important question about what state and education agencies, the higher education community, professional associations and teacher leader support enterprises might complement, but not supplant, the local focus of leadership development” (p. 16).

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

It is crucial to continue research on teacher leadership and its many facets in order to establish a clear definition of who a teacher leader is, how they are selected, and their responsibilities. The role of teacher leader is not yet clearly defined and “little attention has been paid to preparing the school as a setting for new forms of leadership” (Smylie & Denny, 1990, p. 237). In my study, there was quite a bit of uncertainty from both teacher leader and administrator participants. Part of the uncertainty centers around this lack of a common definition of a teacher leader and a lack of a clear understanding of their role. More research on teacher leadership, specifically around defining teacher leadership and clearly defining the role, is necessary to help alleviate this uncertainty and help guide administrators in establishing a culture and structure that best supports teacher leadership.

Despite the increase in micropolitical research in education, “analyses of principals’ everyday micropolitical orientations toward teachers are still relatively scarce” (Blase, 1993, p. 143). Therefore, further research is needed on how micropolitics influences the relationship between principals and teachers, specifically teacher leaders. In addition, future micropolitical research is needed on how teacher leaders achieve their goals within their building and what political means they use. This study began to explore the micropolitical influences that affect teacher leadership, but there is a need for a deeper analysis that specifically looks at how teacher leaders navigate the ambiguities between teacher and leader to broker relationships and achieve



goals, especially when the administrator has not built a culture that empowers teacher leadership. In addition, I only included elementary school teacher leaders' and administrators' personal stories and experiences; further research on the micropolitical influences of teacher leader selection and role enactments is needed at the middle and high school levels. Furthermore, various definitions of teacher leader also include those roles such as specialists and coaches, who no longer have their own classroom, but work with teachers throughout the school while still reporting to the building principal. There is little information on how these teacher leaders navigate the building micropolitics as well as the district level micropolitics to enact their role successfully.

Additional research on the relationship between teacher leadership and school improvement is needed, because “very little is known about the scope of efforts being used to develop teacher leadership and little is known about the respective outcomes”; it is important to examine the “outcomes of teacher leadership practice on teaching and student learning, school organization change and effectiveness, and teacher career attitudes and decision making (Smylie & Eckert, 2017, p. 571). Teacher leadership would become more at the forefront of education if there was a direct link between teacher leadership, school improvement, and student achievement. Finally, there is a need for additional research on what teacher leadership looks like in virtual instruction. Teacher leader and administrator participants in this study expressed uncertainty about the future due to the COVID-19 pandemic and what education and teacher leadership will look like in the future.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to identify and understand the organizational micropolitical influence on teacher leaders' selection and role enactment. The study was driven by the

conceptual framework of sensemaking theory and complexity theory and the theoretical framework of micropolitical theory. The study was guided by two main research questions with additional sub-questions that sought to understand from the lens of teacher leaders and administrators the relationship between school level micropolitics and teacher leader selection and enactment. The teacher leader participants in this study discussed their journey as a teacher leader and the factors that have both aided and hindered them. The administrator participants were asked to discuss their leadership journey as well as teacher leadership within their school building. The discussion with the participants along with the analysis of data suggested there were micropolitical factors that influenced the teacher leaders' selection and role enactment. These factors include the building administrators and the embedded hierarchy of authority, colleagues, the culture and structure of the building, and relationships. Administrators selected teachers for leadership positions and responsibilities. They were able to gain political power and influence with their colleagues and administrator by adding to their experience and credibility and, most importantly, by establishing relationships built on trust. Administrators delegated responsibilities to those with experience and credibility. Ultimately, the organizational hierarchy and the inherent micropolitics of the school impacted the selection of teacher leaders and their ability to carry out their role. As Brosky (2011) stated, "In political organizations such as schools, traditional hierarchical perspectives of leadership must give way to the concept of shared leadership between principals and teacher leaders" (p. 8). Teacher leadership has great potential to positively influence school improvement and capacity if supported at the school and district levels. However, if the building administrator is not operating from a shared leadership perspective and has not built a culture and structure that empowers teacher leaders, teacher

leaders will find it exponentially more difficult to rise above the micropolitics to enact their role and continue to grow as leaders within their schools.

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## APPENDIX A

### PROSPECTIVE PARTICIPANT EMAIL INVITATION

Good Afternoon,

My name is Jennifer Thomason and I am a PhD student at Old Dominion University. I am currently working on my dissertation and am recruiting teacher leaders and administrators to be a part of my study. If you are interested, please email me at [jarth005@odu.edu](mailto:jarth005@odu.edu). Once you have expressed interest in participating in the study, you will be sent a consent form to complete and will be asked to participate in an initial questionnaire to determine eligibility. Below you will find information about the study:

#### INTRODUCTION

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted at Old Dominion University (ODU) for the Educational Leadership Department. Jennifer Thomason is the investigator of the study. Approximately fourteen (14) participants will be enrolled in this study. Initial participation will only require about thirty minutes of your time.

#### ELIGIBILITY

To be included in the study, you must be currently employed by the district site as an elementary principal, assistant principal, or classroom teacher. Classroom teachers must meet the criteria based on the definition of a **Teacher Leader**: A teacher leader is a teacher who maintains “K-12 classroom-based teaching responsibilities, while also taking on leadership responsibilities outside of the classroom” (Wenner & Campbell, 2017, p. 140). In addition, the teacher leader must be a full-time classroom teacher at a public elementary school and hold a professional teaching license. Administrators must have a teacher leader participating in the study to be considered.

#### PURPOSE

The purpose of this study is to investigate how teachers become teacher leaders. Results of the study will be considered the data for Ms. Thomason’s dissertation requirement. Participation in the study, including responses, will be completely anonymous; your identity will not be revealed in the study at all.

#### PROCEDURES:

If you decide to participate in the study, you can expect the following: The selection round of a 30-minute questionnaire will capture teacher leaders’ and administrators’ basic demographics and understanding of teacher leadership. Following the questionnaire, a smaller group of participants will be selected to continue the study. These participants will participate in an interview and potential follow-up interview. All interviews will be conducted via Zoom and will

be scheduled to your availability. If you wish to participate, please email Jennifer Thomason at [jarth005@odu.edu](mailto:jarth005@odu.edu).

**QUESTIONS:**

You are encouraged to ask any questions, at any time, about the study and your involvement. You may contact the investigator, Jennifer Thomason at [jarth005@odu.edu](mailto:jarth005@odu.edu), or the investigator's faculty advisor, Dr. Karen Sanzo at [ksanzo@odu.edu](mailto:ksanzo@odu.edu). If you have any questions or concerns about this study or your rights as a participant, you may contact Dr. Laura Chezan, the chair of the DCEPS HSR Committee, or the Old Dominion University Office of Research, at 757-683-3460.

This is completely voluntary. You can choose to be in the study or not. If you wish to participate or have any questions, please email Jennifer Thomason at [jarth005@odu.edu](mailto:jarth005@odu.edu).

Thank you in advance for your willingness to participate,  
Jennifer Thomason

## **APPENDIX B**

### **INFORMED CONSENT**

**SUBJECT**

Research Study for Teacher Leaders and Administrators

**PROJECT TITLE**

The Micropolitical Influences on Teacher Leader Selection & Enactment:  
A Phenomenological, Qualitative Study

**INTRODUCTION**

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted at Old Dominion University (ODU) for the Educational Leadership Department. Jennifer Thomason is the investigator of the study. The purpose of this form is to provide you with information that may affect your decision to whether to say YES or NO to participation in this research, and to record the consent of those who say YES.

**PROCEDURE**

If you decide to participate in the study, you can expect the following: The selection round of a questionnaire will capture teacher leaders' and administrators' basic demographics and understanding of teacher leadership. Following this initial questionnaire, a smaller group of participants will be selected to continue the study. These participants will participate in an additional interview and a potential follow-up interview. If you wish to participate, please email Jennifer Thomason at [jarth005@odu.edu](mailto:jarth005@odu.edu).

**RESEARCHERS****Responsible Principal Investigator:**

Karen Sanzo, Ed.D.  
Professor  
Darden School of Education  
Department of Educational Foundations & Leadership  
Old Dominion University  
2323 Education Building Norfolk, VA 23529

**Co-Investigator(s):**

Jennifer Thomason  
Darden School of Education  
Department of Educational Foundations & Leadership  
Old Dominion University Norfolk, VA 23529

**DESCRIPTION OF STUDY**

Several studies have been conducted into the subject of teacher leadership. None of them have explained how the micropolitics of a school can influence how teacher leaders are selected and enact their roles.

If you decide to participate, then you will join a study involving research of how teacher leaders are selected and carry out their role. If you say YES, then your participation will consist of one questionnaire and one interview with a potential follow-up interview. The questionnaire should take approximately 30 minutes, the interview will last approximately one hour, and if a follow-up interview is needed it will take approximately 30 minutes. All interviews will be conducted via Zoom to ensure the safety of both you, as the participant, and the researcher. Approximately fourteen participants will be selected for the study; seven teacher leaders and seven administrators.

### **INCLUSIONARY CRITERIA**

To be included in the study, you must be currently employed by Hampton City Schools as a principal, assistant principal, or classroom teacher. Classroom teachers must meet the criteria based on the definition of a **Teacher Leader**: A teacher leader is a teacher who maintains “K-12 classroom-based teaching responsibilities, while also taking on leadership responsibilities outside of the classroom” (Wenner & Campbell, 2017, p. 140). In addition, the teacher leader must be a full-time classroom teacher at a public elementary school and hold a professional teaching license. Upon expressing interest in participating in the study, you will be asked to participate in an interview to determine alignment to criteria and demographics to ensure a representative participant selection.

### **RISKS AND BENEFITS**

**RISKS:** The main risk to you for participating in the study is it may be inconvenient to participate in the interviews. In addition, you may feel discomfort related to disclosing information about your work experiences and interactions. As with any research, there is some possibility that you may be subject to risks that have not yet been identified.

**BENEFITS:** The main benefit to you for participating in this study is an increased awareness of the political influences in a school as well as the role and responsibilities of a teacher leader. There is no financial compensation.

### **COSTS AND PAYMENTS**

The researchers are unable to give you any payment for participating in this study.

### **NEW INFORMATION**

If the researchers find new information during this study that would reasonably change your decision about participating, then they will give it to you.

### **CONFIDENTIALITY**

The researchers will take all reasonable measures to keep private information, such as recordings and interview transcripts, confidential. Only the researchers listed above will have access to your data. The researchers will remove any identifiers of the data, destroy all recordings, and store information in a locked file cabinet prior to its processing. The results of the study may be used in reports, presentations, and publications; but the researchers will not identify you. Of course, your records may be subpoenaed by court order or inspected by government bodies with oversight authority.

### **WITHDRAWAL PRIVILEGE**

It is OK for you to say NO. Even if you say YES now, you are free to say NO later, and walk away or withdraw from the study-at any time. The researchers reserve the right to withdraw your participation in this study, at any time if they observe potential problems with your continued participation.

### **COMPENSATION FOR ILLNESS AND INJURY**

If you say YES, then your consent in this document does not waive any of your legal rights. However, in the event of harm arising from this study, neither Old Dominion University nor the researchers are able to give you any money, insurance coverage, free medical care, or any other compensation for such injury. In the event that you suffer injury as a result of participation in any research project, you may contact Dr. Karen Sanzo, the responsible principal investigator at 757-683-6698, Dr. Laura Chezan, the chair of the DCEPS HSR Committee, or the Old Dominion University Office of Research at 757-683-3460 who will be glad to review the matter with you.

### **VOLUNTARY CONSENT**

By signing this form, you are saying several things. You are saying that you have read this form or have had it read to you, that you are satisfied that you understand this form, the research study, and its risks and benefits. The researchers should have answered any questions you may have had about the research. If you have any questions later on, then the researchers should be able to answer them or you can contact Dr. Karen Sanzo at 757-683-6698.

If at any time you feel pressured to participate, or if you have any questions about your rights or this form, then you should call Dr. Laura Chezan, the chair of the DCEPS HSR Committee, or the Old Dominion University Office of Research, at 757-683-3460.

And importantly, by signing below, you are telling the researcher YES, that you agree to participate in this study. The researcher should give you a copy of this form for your records.

---

Subject's Printed Name & Signature

---

Date

### **INVESTIGATOR'S STATEMENT**

I certify that I have explained to this subject the nature and purpose of this research, including benefits, risks, costs, and experimental procedures. I have described the rights and protections afforded to human subjects and have done nothing to pressure, coerce, or falsely entice this subject into participating. I am aware of my obligations under state and federal laws, and promise compliance. I have answered the subject's questions and have encouraged him/her to ask additional questions at any time during the course of this study. I have witnessed the above signature(s) on this consent form.

---

Investigator's Printed Name & Signature

---

Date

## APPENDIX C

### STRUCTURED QUESTIONNAIRE PROTOCOL

Participant:

---

Date:

---

#### **Pre-Questionnaire:**

Good morning/afternoon,

My name is Jennifer Thomason and I am a current doctoral candidate in the Educational Leadership program at Old Dominion University. I appreciate your willingness to participate in my study regarding teacher leader selection and role enactment. The purpose of this study is to examine, through the shared experiences of teacher leaders and administrators, how the micropolitics of the local school setting influence how teacher leaders are selected and enact their role. Results will contribute to the overall growing body of knowledge on teacher leadership and micropolitics in education. It is my belief that data drawn from this study will aid in an increased understanding of how teacher leaders are selected and able to carry out their role within their school.

My goal today is to explore your work as a teacher (or administrator) and your leader responsibilities. I will also ask questions that target demographic information that will aid in creating a representative sample for this study. Your name and any identifying information will not be used in the study. You can be assured of complete confidentiality and anonymity. This questionnaire will take approximately thirty minutes to complete.

#### **Post-Questionnaire:**

Thank you for taking the time to complete the questionnaire. Your input is invaluable to this study. I will review your responses questionnaire. Please feel free to contact with me any additional information you feel is important to the study. Once all participant questionnaires have been submitted and reviewed, you will be notified about your selection to further participate in the study.

## APPENDIX D

### STRUCTURED QUESTIONNAIRE QUESTIONS

#### Demographic Information:

1. (Both) What is your current role and responsibilities?
2. (Both) How many years of teaching have you completed?
3. (Administrators) How many years of experience do you have as an administrator?
4. (Teacher Leader) How long have you been a teacher leader?
5. (Teacher Leader) What grade level/content area do you teach?
6. (Both) What is your age?
7. (Both) What is your ethnicity?
8. (Both) What population of students do you serve?
9. (Both) What is your highest degree earned? What is your degree in?
10. (Both) What area(s) is your VDOE license in?
11. (Both) Describe your leadership experiences.
12. (Administrators) How would you describe your leadership style?

#### Teacher Leader Understanding

13. (Both) Can you describe the type of training you've had to prepare you as a leader?
14. (Both) I'm curious to know what you view as the attributes of a teacher leader. Why do you see those as attributes of a teacher leader?
15. (Both) What do you feel is the separation-or are the differences - between a teacher and teacher leader?
16. (Teacher) I'd like to understand how you work with both your teacher colleagues and the school administrator to achieve goals. Can you provide an example of a goal you had to

work with your colleagues around in order to achieve success? For example, perhaps you were asked to implement a reading initiative or to improve student engagement. Could you describe the initiative and then talk to me about the processes you used to meet that goal?

#### Micropolitical Understanding

17. (Both) How would you describe the structure of your school? For instance, who primarily makes the decisions, is it one person or collaborative? Who has authority? What supports are in place to assist teachers?
  18. (Both) How would you describe the culture of your school? For instance, do teachers primarily work collaboratively or in isolation? How are people recognized for their efforts and/or successes?
  19. (Teacher Leader) How would you describe the leadership at your school? For instance, are the administrators supportive? Do the administrators share in decision making?
  20. (Both) Are there factors you believe may hinder teachers in taking on leadership responsibilities in your school?
- (Both) Are there factors you believe may support teachers in taking on leadership responsibilities in your school?



## APPENDIX E

### SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Participant: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Start Time: \_\_\_\_\_

End Time: \_\_\_\_\_

#### **Pre-Interview:**

Once again, thank you for your willingness to participate in this study. I would like to record this interview as it will help to ensure that I have not missed anything you have said. Do I have your consent to record our interview? Your name and any identifying information will not be used in the study. You can be assured of complete confidentiality and anonymity. This interview will take approximately sixty minutes to complete. My goal today is to explore your experiences as a teacher leader, specifically your journey to becoming a teacher leader/your experiences as an administrator in selecting teacher leaders in your school.

#### **Post-Interview:**

Thank you for taking the time to speak with me today. Your input is invaluable to this study. I will transcribe this interview and will send you a copy of the transcription to review. Upon receipt, please review the transcription to ensure I have captured your responses accurately. Please feel free to contact with me any additional information you feel is important to the study.

## APPENDIX F

### SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. (Both) Tell me your story.
2. (Both) Do you have any good role models as teacher leaders in your school building/district?
  - a. Can you describe what makes you think they are good teacher leaders?
3. (Both) Do you consider yourself a leader? How do you know? How did it happen?
  - a. When did you realize you were a leader?
  - b. What characteristics do you have that you consider make you a leader?
4. (Teacher Leader) How did you transition from becoming a teacher to a teacher leader?  
 (Administrator) How do teachers become teacher leaders in your building?
5. (Teacher Leader) Please describe the leadership roles and responsibilities that you have outside of the classroom.
  - a. How did you become responsible for that work?
  - b. How do you determine if you are successful with those responsibilities outside of the classroom?
  - c. As a teacher leader, what work do you wish you could do within your school?
6. (Teacher Leader) What factors have aided in you becoming a teacher leader? (structure, culture, leadership, and/or colleagues)  
 (Administrator) What factors at your school enable teacher leadership? (structure, culture, leadership, and/or colleagues)
7. (Teacher Leader) What factors have hindered you in becoming a teacher leader? (structure, culture, leadership, and/or colleagues)

(Administrator) What factors at your school hinder teacher leadership? (structure, culture, leadership, and/or colleagues)

8. (Teacher Leader) Describe your relationship as a teacher leader with your administrator?

(Administrator) Describe your relationship as an administrator with your teacher leader(s)?

9. (Both) How are decisions made in regards to your leadership role and responsibilities? Please describe one example of a typical decision-making process in your current leadership role and responsibilities.

10. (Teacher Leader) Describe your relationship as a teacher leader with your colleagues?

(Administrator) Describe your relationship with a teacher leader in comparison to other teachers?

11. (Teacher Leader) How do you think other teachers perceive and respond to your leadership role(s)?

(Administrator) How do you think other teachers perceive and respond to your teacher leader(s)?

12. (Both) What factors do you think influences the development and performance of your role?

13. (Teacher Leader) What are the uncertainties, if any, you have as a teacher leader?

(Administrator) What are the uncertainties, if any, you have about teacher leadership?

14. (Teacher Leader) Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your role as a teacher leader?

(Administrator) Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your role and teacher leadership?

15. (Both) What would your colleagues say about your leadership?

## VITA

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Jennifer Thomason is a Digital Learning Specialist in Hampton, Virginia. Her research interests include teacher leadership, micropolitical influences in education, and educational reform.

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Educational Specialist: Educational Leadership & Policy Studies, May 2018.  
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