Teacher Leadership in Urban Elementary Schools

Michele Hancock
St. John Fisher College

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Abstract
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Document Type
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Degree Name
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Department
Executive Leadership

First Supervisor
Jason Berman

Second Supervisor
Ray Giamartino

Subject Categories
Education

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Teacher Leadership in Urban Elementary Schools

Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. School of Education
St. John Fisher College

By
Michele Hancock

Submitted in partial fulfillment
for the requirements for the degree
Ed. D. in Executive Leadership

Supervised by
Dr. Jason Berman, Dissertation Chair

Dr. Ray Giamartino, Dissertation Committee Member

November 2008
We recommend that the dissertation by

Michele Hancock

Entitled: Teacher Leadership in Urban Elementary Schools

Be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Education Doctorate degree.

Dr. Jason Berman, Ph.D., Chair

Dr. Ray Giamartino, Ed.D., Committee Member

10/07/08
Date
Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my husband, children, a beloved pet, family, friends, and colleagues who have been instrumental and inspirational in helping me reach my educational aspirations.

To my husband, Charles Hancock: I express my gratitude for the tremendous patience, support, and encouragement you have provided in my pursuit of a doctoral degree. You are my strength and my cheerleader. I love you so much!

To my sons, Brandon and Julian Hancock: Your understanding of the time commitment and words of encouragement nourished my soul. Your simple words and humor lighten my spirit to provide a level of balance to my work. Love, Kisses & Hugs!

To my Mom, grandchildren, and siblings: I found comfort in knowing how interested, proud and supportive all of you were in seeing me work towards a committed goal that I established for myself. Love & Affection!

To a beloved pet, Shadoe, who provided the family with unconditional love and affection, and companionship, especially for my husband during the time I spent working on my research study earned a special place in doggie heaven!

To my longtime special friends, Melva Brown, Cynthia Davis-Jones, Alpha Daly-Majors, Gloria Trott, Rebecca Bethleny: Your words of encouragement, assistance, and guidance reinforced for me how much I value our sisterhood and friendship. Ladies, you are the extra wind beneath my wings that allows me to soar! Thank you for always being there!
To my professional friends and colleagues, Marilynn Patterson-Grant, Cheryl McGruder-Holloway, Connie Leech, Tyra Webb-Lewis, Sonia James-Wilson, Pattie Dietz: The time and energy all of you spent on providing feedback, support, and counsel that enabled me to stay committed to completing the doctoral program contributed to my success. In appreciation of your professional support and friendship!

To professional colleagues who are dedicated urban educators: Without a doubt, your persistence, encouraging and caring attitude, continuous desire to learn, respect for students and their families influence positive outcomes for all the lives you touch. In your honor!

To my technical support, Betsy Christiansen: Thank you for your time and patience in assisting me with the formatting features of my dissertation.

Finally yet importantly, I express my sincere thanks to Dr. Arthur Walton, Dr. Steve Million, Dr. Jason Berman, Dr. Ray Giamartino, and all the other instructors in the program for their expertise, knowledge, and guidance. With sincere gratitude!
Biographical Sketch

Michele Hancock is currently the Chief of Human Capital Initiatives in a large urban district. Mrs. Hancock attended the University of Illinois from 1972 to 1976 and graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree in Early Childhood Education in 1976. She attended National Louis University from 1980-1982 and graduated with a Master of Science degree in General Education. Mrs. Hancock attended Oswego State University from 1995-1997 and graduated with an Advanced Certificate of Study in Educational Administration. She came to St. John Fisher College in the summer of 2006 and began doctoral studies in the Ed.D. Program in Executive Leadership. Mrs. Hancock pursued her research in teacher leadership in urban elementary schools under the direction of Dr. Jason Berman and received her Ed.D. degree in 2008.
Abstract

The purpose of this study was to describe how teacher leaders collaborate to recognize and challenge deficit thinking, as perceived by teachers in two urban elementary schools. The study also explored the influence of teacher leaders’ work on their colleagues’ thinking. This examination of teacher leadership utilized a symbolic interactionist framework to guide a descriptive multi-site case study. The primary research methods used for gathering data included interviews, survey and document review and analysis to gain insight and interpretation.

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Professional training that incorporates diversity, equity and social justice issues coupled with inclusive leadership practices could foster deliberative, collaborative
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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The concept of teacher leadership to support the improvement of educational practices has been extensively studied in the educational research. Individual and collective empowerment of teachers is viewed as the foundation for effecting change and improving schools (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001; Crowther, Ferguson & Hann, 2002; Beachum & Dentith, 2004; York-Barr & Duke, 2004; Murphy, 2005). Teacher leadership in urban schools requires teachers to ask tough questions and tackle tough problems in supportive school environments (Lyman & Villani, 2004). According to Crowther, Kaagan, Ferguson and Hann (2002), teacher leadership is powerful in its variety, its sensitivity to situation and context, and its capacity to improve and augment shared meaning and quality of life.

This first chapter introduces the problem statement, significance of the study, statement of purpose, research questions, definition of terms and a summary of remaining of the chapters.

Statement of the Problem

There is a need to identify specific methods for advancing teacher leadership to promote and sustain school improvement that counteract deficit thinking in urban schools (Lyman & Villani, 2004). The continuous academic failure of large numbers of urban students may be linked to teacher beliefs, attitudes, preconceived ideas, and expectations. Deficit thinking, in this context, is the process of 'blaming the victim' to explain school

in former times we used terms such as culturally deprived, socially deprived, culturally disadvantaged, academically disadvantaged, underdeveloped, disaffected, difficult to serve, hard to teach, alienated, and a host of others. All of these terms, including the present "at-risk," are labels used for the same purpose: to attribute the causes of low achievement and school failure to the child and family, but to do so in a manner that implies the labeler is not prejudiced and is sincerely trying to help (p. 51).

The process of "blaming the victim" has resulted in continual low student achievement levels as reported by the state department in the urban district where the researcher is employed. Despite implementation of comprehensive reform models, this district has one of the lowest graduate rates in the state. Over the years, various educational change efforts have been instituted including: 1) school restructuring; 2) increasing the number of instructional coaches in all schools; 3) the adoption of new and updated subject content curricula; and 4) the increase of funds for professional development. However, the district has yet to yield successful student achievement results across all demographic groups. As Berman and Chambliss (2000) note, educational change efforts appear to stall because of educators' unwillingness to assume responsibility for students' low achievement and failure. This would appear to have legitimacy based on the researcher's experiences as an urban educator who was informed by colleagues that reasons for student failure included: 1) lack of parental interest and
care; 2) poverty; and 3) low intellectual ability. Rarely, did these educators view themselves as the possible barrier to student success.

Another explanation for low performing districts offered by Moore, Johnson & Donaldson (2007) is that the “norms of school culture – autonomy, egalitarianism, and deference to seniority that long characterized the work of teaching” (p.10). Although traditional norms of school cultures and the phenomenon of deficit thinking have been extensively documented (Hargreaves & Fullan. 1996; York-Barr & Duke, 2004; Leonard & Leonard, 2003; Lyman & Villani, 2004; Delpit, 1995; Valencia, 1997; Heifetz, 1994), there is insufficient exploration of the role teacher leaders can play to address deficit thinking. Deficit thinking is being defined as a way of thinking (beliefs and attitudes) to explain the school failures of economically challenged and ethnically diverse children.

The district within which this researcher is employed is committed to the critical goal of significantly improving graduation rates. Achieving this goal requires eliminating those structural systems and practices that impede student development at all grade levels. Data collected by the district’s research department suggested students leave school before graduation because of:

- struggles with reading and experiences of “failure” at an early age;
- inability to maintain grade levels of peers;
- lack of motivation or inspiration to learn;
- poor attendance and chronic lateness to classes; and,
- curriculum that is not connected to real world experiences.

In an effect to improve the graduation rate of students in the district, the educational consultant firm, Education Resource Strategies (ERS) was hired to examine
the district's use of educational resources and to identify opportunities for improving student achievement in the fall of 2004. ERS is a Boston-based non-profit organization that works closely with leaders of urban public school systems to help them reevaluate their use of district and school-level resources. Based on their findings, ERS recommended that the district: 1) dedicate more time for collaborative work among teachers, emphasizing teacher leadership; 2) increase differentiated professional development opportunities; and, 3) align professional development with school improvement plans.

ERS noted that the district invested significant funding in individual teacher professional development without a clearly defined link to school improvement goals from the school years 2002-2005. They also reported that 20% of the district's professional development investment focused on career ladder options for teachers as mentors, instructional specialists, and lead teachers for the explicit purpose of creating individual teacher leadership roles to support school improvement. As a result, they suggested the investment of funds to support collaborative teacher leadership teams to address issues that were clearly linked to school improvement goals.

In the decades before the ERS report, the district did provide opportunities for structured teacher collaboration through study groups, collegial circles, and the mentor program. However, there was little focus on the development of informal teacher leaders who worked collaboratively to address challenges within their school communities.

Research conducted by Education Resource Strategies (2005) further highlighted common forms of professional teacher collaboration by teachers within the district. These included faculty, grade level, committee, beginning-of-year, and informal meetings, and
workshops. In the research, teachers identified "paper work," "lack of common planning time," and "lack of resources" as detrimental to teacher collaboration.

In response to the findings, the Superintendent of the district created the Department of Diversity and Leadership Development and appointed this researcher to a leadership role to create, develop, support, and implement leadership programs in partnership with local colleges and universities that fostered collaborative teamwork in support of improving urban schools. The district and a local university formed a partnership to establish the Collaborative Teacher Leadership Program (CTLP), (a fictitious name to maintain anonymity). The purpose of the program was to provide direction for collaborative engagement amongst teachers to address equity issues as defined within their schools' improvement plans. The shift toward investment in collaborative teacher leadership teams addressed the continuous need for the district to support knowledgeable, skilled educators to improve educational outcomes for students.

Participants were defined as teacher leaders who collaborated and led beyond the classroom, which included, but was not limited to, adaptive work to reduce persistent perceptions of deficits among urban students. Also, these teacher leaders were viewed as contributors within the larger school community through their work to advance effective educational practices.

The CTLP existed to build the capacity of teacher leadership teams to serve as catalysts for the promotion of equity and social justice throughout the district. Cohort teams of teachers from eleven schools participated in monthly sessions taught by this researcher and a professor from the partner university where participants learned to:

* use inclusive leadership practices;
- provide professional development opportunities for colleagues;
- manage limited resources in ways that supported equity and social justice;
- understand their role as "cultural workers;" and,
- influence school practices and policies.

During the 2006-2007 and 2007-2008 school years, teacher leadership teams collaborated with key stakeholders (school administration, other colleagues, students, parents, and community members) to develop and implement the equity projects based on an identified area of need derived from the School Improvement Plan (SIP).

Principals were a critical component of the CTLP program. Demonstration of their support consisted of: 1) engagement in discussions about how they supported the work of the teacher leadership teams; 2) the arrangement of time and resources for professional development; 3) input and feedback for the equity projects; and, 4) attendance and participation at school-based meetings with the CTLP teacher leadership teams throughout the year to support the progress of their equity projects.

This study describes how teacher leaders collaborated to recognize and challenge deficit thinking and the influence their work had on their colleagues’ thinking as a result of their development and implementation of the equity projects. Deficit thinking by adults continues to be an overwhelming challenge that needs to be addressed if urban schools are to improve (Lyman & Villani, 2004). Deficit thinking coupled with traditionally held norms of teaching make the problem of urban schools appear insurmountable. This study was able to: a) fill a void in existing research; b) contribute to existing research; and, c) inform practice.

Significance of the Study
As an urban educator with over thirty years in the field as a teacher, assistant principal, principal, and a Chief of Diversity and Leadership Development who worked directly with the Superintendent of Schools, this researcher's professional experience suggests urban schools have a unique set of problems including: blaming the victim, teacher isolation, fragmented staff development, and principal leadership.

**Blaming the Victim**

Board members, superintendents, administrators, teachers and parents of the district where this researcher is employed have struggled with the fact that lower socioeconomic status students (SES) consistently score lower on standardized tests, have higher dropout rates, and have lower college graduation rates. These students were typically African-American, Hispanic, and English Language Learners (ELL). To explain their lack of academic achievement, teachers frequently blamed students’ family backgrounds and the problems they face outside of school as noted in the research of Ryan, (1971). Heifetz, (1994). Valencia, (1997). Lyman & Villani, (2004). Garcia & Guerra, (2004). Haberman (1995) states, “Blaming the victim is an active past time of schools and educators...it is an occupational disease” (p. 51). This type of thinking makes it extremely difficult to provide an equal education to students who were perceived as inadequate.

**Teacher Isolation**

Lieberman and Miller (1999) assert: 1) teacher isolation as the norm; 2) the reward system for teachers encourage isolation; and, 3) competing and conflicting policy directives reinforced these norms, so teachers created a personal rather than a shared sense of goals and expectations. These norms continued to influence teacher willingness
to become leaders. This is especially true in urban school settings where teachers are so encapsulated and overwhelmed by the demands of their teaching environments (Montcro-Seiburth, 1989), that taking on leadership roles can appear to be a burdensome task.

Finding ways to encourage teacher leadership can foster ownership in solving problems that directly affect urban schools.

*Fragmented Staff Development*

Fragmented staff development that was episodic in nature tended to characterize the district’s overall framework for human resource improvement. Yet the research suggests staff development must be comprehensive, ongoing, and long term for it to have the required impact on principals and teachers (Sleeter, 1990). Human resource development assumes that people are the most important resource for improving schools specifically; staff development needs to address teacher empowerment (Bartz & Evans, 1989).

*Principal Leadership*

Principals need to place emphasis on teacher leadership. Principals holding onto traditional views about leadership and their failure to examine and practice new ways of leading are another challenge within schools. The literature suggested that some principals’ hierarchical views about leadership are a barrier to promoting teacher leadership. Principals willing to promote teacher leadership are more likely make gains in school improvement efforts. School leaders of exemplary schools make teacher leadership a priority and take risks to provide teacher leaders what they need to succeed (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001). Therefore, principals need to be willing to change hierarchical views of leadership and develop teacher leaders.
Finding ways to address the problems of blaming the victim, teacher isolation, fragmented staff development, and principal leadership in urban schools can help practitioners succeed in educating students within urban settings. This claim has been substantiated in the literature and in this researcher's professional experiences in urban schools.

This study is significant in that it outlines a course of action for the expansion of the role of teacher leaders in school improvement. It will offer a framework to guide urban school districts in their support of teacher empowerment. Because the data was collected in the actual settings where informal and formal teacher leaders collaborated to recognize and challenge deficit thinking, it provided insights from actual teacher perspectives about their work environments and has significant relevance for the district where the researcher is employed. This study paid sufficient attention to the followers' (classroom teachers') perceptions and motivations as they engaged with teacher leaders in a school-wide initiative. Using a qualitative case study method helped to capture the range of criteria that followers take into account when accepting and attributing leadership status to their colleagues (Kanungo & Mendonca, 1996). The approach in this study can likely enhance our understandings of the situations and the processes by which leadership is cited as an explanation in the follower's minds, which to date, is very limited (Kanungo & Mendonca, 1996).

Furthermore, staff development programs for teachers focused on addressing issues of diversity, equity and social justice, like the one studied in this research, may also be used to restructure teacher education programs and staff development programs at
the university level to include teacher leadership, equity-based pedagogy, and collaboration as an integral part of teacher training.

The significance of the study is not limited to the problems faced in urban schools as the findings are relevant to a wide variety of educational settings. Additionally, the research might inform teacher education programs and recommend ways to redefine teacher leaders' roles and teachers as followers. Most importantly for the district where the researcher is employed, this study offers a new conceptual framework for professional development programs.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study was to describe how teacher leaders collaborated to recognize and challenge deficit thinking, as perceived by teachers in two urban elementary schools. The study also explored the influence of teacher leaders' work had on their colleagues' thinking. The case study design was to reveal teacher leader behavioral roles and transformative processes used by teacher leaders to recognize and challenge deficit thinking. Furthermore, the study made known factors classroom teachers considered when engaged in learning that was led by teacher leaders.

The study was analyzed through a symbolic interactionist theoretical framework and support the premises that individuals: 1) act with plans and purposes because of the meanings objects hold for them; 2) develop meaning for objects (people, ourselves, animals, physical, ideas, perspectives, symbols, emotions) through their interactions; and 3) use an interpretative process to make sense of the meanings of social objects (Blumer, 1969; Charon, 1995). Examining processes of how teacher leaders recognized and challenged deficit thinking in urban schools, and determining how and if leadership
practices influenced colleagues formulate processes and practices for redefining the role of teacher leaders.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this qualitative study:

1) How do teacher leaders in two urban elementary schools collaborate to recognize and challenge deficit thinking?

2) What influence did the teacher leaders’ work have on their colleagues’ thinking?

Definition of Terms

Key Terms

Adaptive work | Learning required to address conflicts in the values people hold that leads to changes in values, beliefs or behaviors, and mobilizes people to learn new ways.

Autonomy | Teachers viewed as independent of each other.

Collaboration | To work together in a joint intellectual effort.

Deficit thinking | A way of thinking (beliefs & attitudes) to explain the school failures of economically challenged and ethnically diverse children as a result of preconceived biases.

Egalitarianism | The belief that all teachers are equal or the same.

Equity | A principle or value and way of being that supports meeting the needs all children to ensure quality schooling.

Formal leadership | Hierarchical roles as designated by a specific selection process, viewed as one person leading usually having a specified title within the ranks of the teaching profession.
Informal leadership  A form of leadership where colleagues view the teacher as a leader without having a specified title designation as leader.

Teacher leadership  A form of leadership where teachers collaborate and lead within and beyond the classroom. This may include, but is not limited to, adaptive work to reduce teachers' persistent perceptions of deficits among urban students. It may also take the form of contributions to the larger school community toward improved educational practices.

Urban schools  Though most cities have a range of schools that serve students from a variety of economic groups, in this study, "urban schools" refers to those with high levels of students living in poverty and those who are ethically and racially diverse, bilingual, immigrant, refugee and special needs students.

Summary of Remaining Chapters

A summary of the remaining chapters includes a brief description that outlines the contexts of each chapter. Chapter II reviews the existing knowledge and current research pertaining to teacher leadership incorporating the historical perspective, progression, obstacles, description, professional development and the conditions that fostered teachers as collaborative leaders. Chapter III explains the general perspective as it relates to the research questions, context and participants, data collection and analysis procedures, and a summary of the methodology used in this study. In Chapter IV, each research question is presented with an explanation of how the findings addressed the research questions.
utilizing respondents' quotes as the primary data source that includes unplanned benefits and a summary of the findings.

Chapter V discusses and interprets the results to delineate the implications of findings, study limitations, recommendations for future research or actions based on findings, and summary of this dissertation in its entirety.
CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

Studies on leadership in education provide clear evidence that teacher leaders are needed to effect change and improve schools (Lieberman & Miller, 1999; Barth, 2001; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001; Crowther, Kaagan, Ferguson & Hann, 2002; Beachum & Dentith, 2004; Murphy, 2005). Consistent with this body of research, urban schools require teacher leaders who can work collaboratively with diverse student populations to improve schools (Beachum & Dentith, 2004). According to Crowther, Kaagan, Ferguson and Hann (2002), teacher leadership appears to be inseparable from successful school reform. Teacher leadership in urban schools is the focus of this study.

The concept of teacher leadership has gained increasing acknowledgement and support over the past several years. This chapter will explore the history of school leadership; the progression of teacher leadership roles; various descriptions of teacher leadership; and define school-level collaboration as it relates to developing teacher leaders. This review of the literature also examines the conditions that cultivate teachers as collaborative leaders. Finally, this review will highlight professional development models to identify ways of fostering teacher leadership development.
Topic Analysis

*History of School Leadership*

Historically, school-level leadership has focused on the role of the principal as the impetus for improving schooling. During the first half of the 20th century, the prevailing school leadership model subscribed to the tenets of:

1) specific formal authority roles to ensure effective and efficient school operations;

2) uniformed approach to institutional processes for the core work of the school and meet to state standards;

3) knowledgeable leaders in control of employees with contact to governing and funding bodies, and

4) leaders having the ability to structure the school and meet emerging needs of students and the environment (Donaldson, 2001).

Buckner and McDowelle (2000) state, “the traditional school leadership hierarchical model served schools reasonably well when school performance met public expectations and few changes were occurring” (p. 35). Therefore, school leadership and its importance was basically ignored. Remarkably, the application of the word, “leadership” did not become widely relevant to schools until the 1970s and 1980s (Cunningham, 1990). Since the publication of *A Nation at Risk* report in 1983, reorganizing schools to meet the needs of a postindustrial society has been on federal, state, and local agendas (Lieberman, 1995). The dissatisfaction with public education resulted in national pressure for school reform. In a rush to respond, the models of leadership from the business literature and the effective schools literature encouraged principals to become “ instructional leaders”
Principals viewed as single leaders of instruction struggled to broaden their personal and professional competencies to meet new challenges (Murphy, 1992). This effort to reconceptualize school leadership communicated heroic images of leadership reinforcing the notion of a one-way process: “leaders lead and followers follow” (Bolman & Deal, 2003: 338). Donaldson (2001) noted: “Principals could not single-handedly initiate a reform in their schools any more than they could single-handedly make themselves over in a new leadership image” (p.5). Failure of these efforts raised deep concerns about our best educators evading leadership roles because of association with high stress and other difficulties (Evans, 1995). However, opportunities can exist to reduce educators’ anxieties of moving into school leadership roles. Donaldson (2001) suggests, “Times are ripe for widening the lens in search of a model of school leadership that is both more productive for schools and more sustainable for those who aspire to lead” (p.5).

Review of School Leadership Research

Over the past decade, the emergence of school leadership as a collective and collaborative affair has gained increasing attention. There is a growing belief that, “rethinking leadership in schools is a crucial first step in moving toward shared, ongoing, and sustainable school improvement” (Copeland, 2003: 4). Most recently, leadership as an organizational quality appears consistent with the idea of teachers as leaders (Crowther, Kaagan, Ferguson & Hann, 2002). Rethinking leadership for sustained school improvement and as an organizational quality was exemplified in a study of high leadership capacity in predominantly urban and high poverty schools guided Lambert (2005) to explore the research question: “Once you create a great school, how do you
maintain a close approximation of that high quality for the long term?” Lambert and colleagues (2005) questioned teachers and principals from 15 different schools in California, Kansas, Missouri, North Carolina, Ohio, Texas, Washington, and Alberta, Canada. The study included 11 elementary schools, 1 junior high school, and 3 high schools which were: 1) consistently high-performing; 2) continued to demonstrate school improvement; 3) moved from low to high performing schools over several years; and, 4) distinctive in developing high leadership capacity, defined as “broad-based skillful participation in the work of leadership” (p.63). Data collection consisted of school visitations and interviews using open-ended questions over a two-day period. Participants explained the leadership capacity of their schools, including barriers and reasons affecting sustainability (Lambert, 2005). Interchangeably, three phases (instructive, transitional, and high capacity) materialized for progressing leadership capability. Findings suggest that principals took on facilitative and co-participation roles, teachers valued leadership in one another, and expansive involvement in the work of leadership contributed to lasting school improvement (Lambert, 2005). Therefore, the focus on school leadership is on “interactions – the interact, not the act, becomes the basic building block of organizational leadership” (Ogawa & Bossert, 1995: 236).

Leithwood and Jantzi (1999) conducted a study that explored school leadership interactions by posing the question: “What are the relative effects of principal and teacher leadership on students’ engagement with school?” The results indicated that with student engagement as the dependent variable, teacher leadership effects were statistically insignificant while principal leadership reached statistical significance. This study’s demographics included one large urban district in eastern Canada with a community
population of approximately 343,000 serving urban, rural, and suburban students in
elementary and secondary schools. The school district's student population was 58,000
students. The 1995 census carried out by Statistics Canada reported annual family income
at $54,241. Canada's national average family income of $55,247 meant that the school
district served the country's economically average students. Population for the study
consisted of 2,465 teachers and 44,920 students in the district's 123 K-9 schools (78
schools Grades K-6 and 28 schools Grade 7-9). Remaining schools included a mixture of
Grades K-5, K-9 and 6-9 configurations. Data collection on all variables in this study
came from 110 of the 123 schools.

The framework for this quantitative study was adapted from prior research on
distributive leadership and replicated the results of that research (Leithwood & Jantzi,
1998). Data about leadership, school and classroom conditions, student engagement, and
family educational culture were collected through the dissemination of two surveys. The
Organizational Conditions and School Leadership Survey given to teachers included
items measuring five sets of school conditions (142 items in total) and the perceptible
influence of teacher and principal leadership in schools. Items measuring school
conditions were stated in the form of a 5-point Likert scale (strongly agree to strongly
disagree with the option of not applicable). Respondents also rated the degree of teacher
leadership influence on activities in the school on a 4-point scale.

Teachers answered three similar items about teacher leadership, one for each of
three diverse sources of teacher leadership: formal teacher leadership roles, informal
leadership roles, and committees or groups of teachers. All K-9 teachers in the school
district (n=2,465) were asked to respond to the Organizational Conditions and School

Leadership Survey. The extensive number of items on the survey required the researchers to develop two forms of the survey. Each form of the survey collected data on at least three sets of organizational conditions. Schools with less than 10 teachers completed both survey forms, at various times to prevent exhaustion. All other schools' teachers were arbitrarily assigned Form A or B. A total of 888 teachers completed Form A, and 874 completed Form B, with an overall response rate of 71%. The Student Engagement and Family Culture Survey contained 52 items measuring student participation in school activities (25 items), student identification with school (17 items), and students’ perceptions of their family (10 items).

The survey was administered to all students in the highest grades of each school. Grade selection was determined by the nature of the measured effect (student engagement with school), predicated on the idea that the longer the tenure of students, the greater chance of examination on student engagement. Principals supervised the administration and collection of the surveys. Students answered each item on the 5-point scale used by teachers. The total number of student responses was 9,941. 100% of students in attendance in classes of the 110 schools on the day of survey administration. The student response rate encompassed 22% of the district's total elementary, junior high, and senior high school student population.

A wide-range research review was undertaken to identify those school conditions that contribute to the impact of school on students to establish content validity in the Leithwood and Jantzi (1999) study. Researchers in collaboration with a group of 12 teachers and administrators developed detailed indicators for each element. Six to 10 survey items were generated to assess each indicator. Preparatory training on meanings of
indicators provided 37 teacher and administrator volunteers from one school district with the ability to assess survey items. This resulted in an edited version from the process to develop two surveys used in this study. The original surveys tested were piloted in one school district, scale reliabilities were determined and surveys were published in Leithwood and Aitken (1995). An additional group of six teachers, consultants, and administrators further reviewed and revised items for subsequent use in the Leithwood and Jantzi (1998) study. The internal reliabilities (Cronbach’s alpha) of all scales in both surveys were calculated after their initial pilot testing, and again after their administration. Scale reliabilities ranged from .79 to .97 in the first case and .70 and .97 in the second case.

Statistical analyses of individual teacher and student responses were aggregated to the school level. Statistical Packages for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to aggregate individual responses by schools, then calculated means, standard deviations, and reliability coefficient (Cronbach’s alpha) for all the scales measuring the variables. A Varimax Rotation for principal elements extractions was used to evaluate the five classroom conditions and to assess conceptual distinctions among the five organizational conditions for empirical verification. Data were analyzed using the LISREL 8 analysis of covariance structure approach to path analysis and maximum likelihood estimates (Jorkeskog & Sorbon, 1993). Five ordered categories for responses to individual survey items provided options for considerable variation. PRELIS (Jorkeskog & Sorbon, 1993) was used to test for univariate normality. Variables met the criteria for multivariate normality, but numerous variables departed significantly from normality (skewness>2). Recoding outliers yielded variables more closely aligned with approximate normality.
Final tests of multivariate normality were acceptable (skewness = 0.59, kurtosis = 0.79, chi-square = 0.98, p = 0.61). A series of regression analyses estimated the amount of explained disparity in student engagement that was accounted for in each of the conditions.

Internal reliabilities of all scales consisted of an acceptable range of .92 to .95 measures of the five school conditions, and .66 to .81 for the two student engagement scales. Family educational culture scale internal reliability was .81, and correspondingly, the principal and teacher leadership scales were .92 and .82. With student engagement in school as the dependent variable, results specified that teacher leadership effects are statistically insignificant, whereas principal leadership effects, while weak, did reach statistical significance. There has mainly been qualitative research to provide in-depth information about the teacher leadership phenomena. These findings may be viewed as disheartening to supporters of teacher leadership. However, research that aims at better understanding the phenomena using both quantitative and qualitative inquiry approaches can likely add to the body of literature.

**Progression of Teacher Leadership**

*Careers in Leadership*

Findings from the literature identify paradigms of teacher leadership over time through career ladder programs, mentor programs, and shared governance. Silva, Gimbert and Nolan (2000) explain the progression in three waves:

1) teachers as formal leaders whose main intention was to serve as department heads,

union representatives, and quasi-managers to support school operations;
2) teachers as instructional leaders whose main purpose was to serve as staff developers, curriculum leaders, and mentors to provide instructional expertise; and,

3) teachers as cultural workers, an emerging vision, recognizing teachers as critical to changing school cultures in order to capitalize on instructional expertise.

Initial efforts focused on “assigning teachers to formal leadership roles within schools” (Odell, 1997:120). Role-based strategies for teacher leadership established formalized roles that mirrored traditional, top-down norms of leadership (Murphy, 2005). Wasley (1991) explained the use of teachers as “quasi-administrative” to ensure a well-organized and effective operation of the existing system. As career ladder programs, in many different forms, appeared for the purpose of distinguishing, supporting, and rewarding teacher expertise (York-Barr & Duke, 2004), the establishment of a tiered-approach grew within the profession. An example of this is a “four-tier profession of intern teacher, resident teacher, professional teacher, and career teacher” (Urbanski & Nickolaou, 1997: 250) employed in an upstate, Western New York urban district.

The second wave focused on teachers as instructional leaders. Mentor programs and other instructional leaders roles centered on the “expertise of master teachers to support the development and growth of early career teachers while simultaneously providing an incentive for the master teachers to influence not only professionals but also school and district policies and practices” assert (York-Barr & Duke, 2004: 264).

The third wave, a most recent view, reflects a conception of leadership that is closely aligned with Childs-Bowen, Moller and Scrivner’s (2000) statement: “We believe
teachers are leaders when they function in professional learning communities to affect student learning; contribute to school improvement; inspire excellence in practice; and empower stakeholders to participate in educational improvement” (p.28). This explanation moves beyond shared governance to “recognizing teachers as central to the process of ‘reculturing’ schools such that the intentions of the second wave (i.e. maximizing teachers’ instructional expertise) can be realized” (York-Barr & Duke, 2004: 260).

Practices in Teacher Leadership

According to Crowther, Kaagan, Ferguson and Hann (2002), “Teacher leadership is real, it is grounded in authoritative theory, it is distinctive, it is diverse, and it can be nurtured” (p. 35). In a five-year study conducted by Crowther and colleagues in disadvantaged schools in Australia, then later in the United States, “The Teachers as Leaders Framework” captured the essence of teacher leadership. By observing teacher leaders in action regardless of title or position, the authors were able to present an idealized image of how teacher leaders exercise influence in their school communities. Scenarios in which teachers led in many complementary ways highlighted the diversity and complexity of teacher leadership. The framework reflects the fundamental nature of teacher leaders’ work and further defines the conception of leadership as, “action that transforms teaching and learning in a school, that ties school and community together on behalf of learning, and that advances social sustainability and quality of life for a community” (Crowther, et.al: xvii). The framework in action emphasizes that teacher leaders:

- convey convictions about a better world:
strive for authenticity in their teaching, learning, and assessment practices;
facilitate communities of learning through organization-wide processes;
confront barriers in the school's culture and structures;
translate ideas into sustainable systems of actions; and,
nurture a culture of success. (p. 4-5)

Kaztenmeyer and Moller (2001) identify the uniqueness of teachers' "self-work".
Teachers "self-work" is the examination of their own views, philosophies, and
experiences about education and its comparison with their actual work. Hargreaves and
Fullan (1996) say that "teaching is bound up in teachers' lives, biographies, with the
kinds of people they have become" (p.25). Personal assessment is an important
component of teacher practice for success in leadership roles (Kaztenmeyer & Moller,
2001).

Relationship building and collaboration are other aspects of teacher leadership
practices that surface in the literature (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Interviews with five
teacher leaders, as deemed by their principals and their peers, on how teacher leaders
influence, named collaboration as the crucial way in which the teachers make a difference
assert (LeBlanc & Shelton, 1997).

Despite literature recognizing the importance of personal assessment, relationship
building, and collaboration among the profession, Archer (2001) maintains that the
prevailing traditional roles for teacher leaders are formal and independent in the literature
and in practice. These practices, as identified in a large body of literature, include: school
and curriculum work, participation in professional organizations, quasi-administrative
tasks, professional development of colleagues, and participation on school-based teams are the areas of teacher practice.

Professional Opportunities

Teachers have the capacity to promote growth in each other. Barth (2001) concluded, "fellow teachers also hold the power to unlock one another's leadership potential and to foster its growth" (p.446). According to Fullan (1993), "the teacher of the future must be equally at home in the classroom and in working with others to bring about continuous improvement" (p. 17). Barth (2001) identifies several paths available to teachers that include:

- following the lead of others to influence the life of one's school beyond the classroom,
- joining the team because more perspectives are considered in a group and better decisions are often made,
- leading alone to influence their schools, or
- leading by example to have a positive influence upon the larger community (p. 447).

Teacher leaders have a wide range of professional opportunities available to them, whether these opportunities are formal or informal. Harrison and Killion (2007) state, "these multiple ways ensure that teachers can find ways to lead that fit their talents and interests" (p.77).

Obstacles to Teacher Leadership

The view of teacher leadership is a fairly recent trend (Yaeger & Lee, 1994). "Even now, we are a long way from a common understanding of teacher leadership.
Confusion about definitions ... abound” (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001: 5).

Consequently, “teacher leadership remains conceptually underdeveloped” (Crowther, 1996: 305). Coupled with a conceptually underdeveloped view of teacher leadership is the persistent paradigm that shapes American educators’ rationalization for school failure of students from low-income homes and children of color. This rationalization is described as deficit thinking.

Deficit Thinking Model

The deficit thinking model is not a modern concept. In 1971, William Ryan’s *Blaming the Victim*- a now classic offered a theory of school failure focused on “deficit thinking.” The deficit thinking model describes the behavior of low socioeconomic status (SES) students of color “as deficits, deficiencies, limitations or shortcomings in individuals, families and cultures” (Valencia, 1997:7). He further explains deficit thinking as:

a paradigm, one that suggests students who fail in school do so because of alleged internal deficiencies (such as cognitive and/or motivational limitations) or shortcomings socially linked to the youngster-such as familial deficits and dysfunctions...The popular “at-risk” construct, now entrenched in educational circles, views poor and working class children (typically of color) as predominantly responsible for school failure (cited in Valencia, 1997, p. xi).

An explanation of these behaviors suggests that limited intelligence and linguistic deficiencies are the bases for the behavioral deficits. Unfortunately, these beliefs of inferiority and attitudes about the inability of SES students and students of color have contributed to students’ underachievement (Kopetz, Lease & Warren-Kring, 2006). As a
consequence, school transformation efforts are weakened by educators’ deficit views, and by their beliefs about students of low socioeconomic status (Valencia, Valenzuela, Sloan & Foley, 2001).

Drawing on the research and professional development experiences of Garcia and Guerra (2004), themes emerged that exemplify deficit thinking include:

1. overgeneralization about family background;
2. writing students off before they come to school;
3. caring at the expense of academics;
4. absence of a cultural lens;
5. a monocultural view of child-rearing practices and success; and,
6. students and parents need to change: the system works (p. 159-164).

Such assumptions can often reflect the despairing attitudes among educators who believe that they have done all they can do to educate students effectively. Furthermore, educators possibly do not see themselves as part of the problem; therefore, the willingness to find solutions may get curtailed.

Egalitarianism Norms

Another obstacle that presents a special challenge is the long history in the profession of viewing teaching as a private affair. Katzenmeyer & Moller (1996) identified that teachers most often do not see themselves as leaders and fear the reactions of their colleagues because educational environments often value everyone being treated the same. This established norm of egalitarianism fosters the perception of formal teacher leaders as, “stepping out of line” (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Formal teacher leader roles create hierarchies within the teaching ranks that can have an effect on relationships
causing conflict and increasing privacy (Darling-Hammond, et al., 1995). Furthermore, "the element of competition contained in career-ladder plans may be one of several reasons for their lukewarm reception from teachers" to serve as leaders (Little, 2000: 392).

**Principals' Roles**

Literature indicates the relationships between principals and teachers as a significant factor for influencing teacher leadership (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). In addition to principals placing emphasis on teacher leadership, the literature suggests the need for principals to examine their own leadership beliefs. Principals' roles are often "dominated by a sense of accountability and control, encouraging principals to protect their authority and status" (Blase & Blase, 2006: 10). Emergent teacher leadership will require principals to change hierarchical views in support of developing teacher leaders. According to Barth (2001), "Good principals are more hero-makers than heroes" (p. 448). Lambert (2005) asserts, principals share characteristics that contributed to their schools' evolving culture of leadership, including:

- an understanding of self and clarity of values;
- a strong belief in equity and the democratic process;
- strategic thought about the evolution of school improvement;
- a vulnerable persona;
- a knowledge of the work of teaching and learning; and,
- the ability to develop capacity in colleagues and in the organization.” (p. 63)
As a result, "the ability of a principal to encourage and motivate leadership capacities in the building is critical for educational reform and collaboration" (Birky, Shelton & Headley, 2006: 87).

The literature remains unclear regarding specific ways of changing teacher dependency roles in advancing teacher leadership to support improving schools. Beachum and Dentith (2004) suggest:

In the quest for new paradigms of educational leadership, an urban research study recommended that teacher leadership surface as a way for teachers and administrators to be renewed and to transform their practices in this all too prescribed era of accountability. It can guide innovation and ingenuity, create novel ways to navigate the multiple roles and tasks of adults in school, and pose fundamental questions related to beliefs and values of schooling. Teacher leadership, it seems, is a judicious, as well as timely, endeavor (p. 284).

This is especially important in urban school districts given the complexity of challenges faced and the need for cohesive approaches embedded in collaborative practices. Noguera (2003) further explains the importance to urban districts "given the hardships present in so many inner-city communities, and given the difficult circumstances that so many young people in these areas are forced to endure" (p. 41).

Description of Teacher Leadership

Teacher leadership is positioned within four other conceptions of leadership, - participative, distributed, parallel leadership, and as an organizational quality (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Ogawa and Bossert (1995) argue that, "Leadership is not confined to certain roles in organizations and it flows through the networks of roles that comprise
organizations” (p. 238). Their work illustrates the importance of human capital within organizations and processes for examining relationships throughout organizations that are indicative of various leadership conceptions. The concept of distributed leadership offered by Spillane, Halverson and Diamond (2001) is closely linked to Ogawa and Bossert’s theory (1995) in that they both agree school leadership is best understood as a distributed practice, broaden over the school’s social and situational contexts. Spillane and colleagues further explain, “The interdependence of the individual and the environment shows how human activity as distributed in the interactive web of actors, artifacts, and the situation is the appropriate unit of analysis for studying practice” (p.23).

Crowther et al. (2002) introduced the concept of parallel leadership asserting that leadership:

- encourages a relatedness between teacher leaders and administrator leaders that activates and sustains the knowledge generating capacity of schools. Parallel leadership is a process whereby teacher leaders and their principals engage in collective action to build school capacity. It embodies mutual respect, shared purpose, and allowance for individual expression (p. 38).

The final phase of Crowther’s research (2002) demonstrated how parallel leadership connects processes of professional learning, culture building, and school wide pedagogy to improve a school’s overall ability to generate encouraging student outcomes.

Heitertz (1994) suggests another type of leadership theory to support the challenging work that is relevant to improving schools. He states:

- adaptive work consists of the learning required to address conflicts in the values people hold, or to diminish the gap between the values people stand
for and the reality they face. Adaptive work requires a change in values, beliefs, or behavior. The exposure and orchestration of conflict-internal contradictions—within individuals and constituencies provide the leverage for mobilizing people to learn new ways (p. 22).

Lynam & Villani (2004) explain that adaptive work may be seen as a means to change deficit thinking, and is as useful "a theory to explain the failure of economically disadvantaged minority students to succeed in school." through productive conflict to promote new ways of learning and doing (p.117). This work is likely a factor in promoting effective leadership practices among teachers and administrators in high poverty schools. Specifically, leadership is the ability to tackle tough problems.

Congruent with Heifetz’s theory (1994) is the description of teacher leadership and the connection to equity. Kovertz & Arriaza (2006) assert, “Equity is a principle and a way of being that has to do with how we as educators make the institution of schooling fulfill the commitment to educate every single child regardless of race, class, gender, physical challenges, sexual orientation, language and other circumstances” (p.103). Proficient teacher leaders see their responsibility as helping themselves and others to lead with their minds and their hearts. As Kovertz and Arriaza (2006) suggest, “The point of departure for this understanding is a simple one: the unequivocal rejection of deficit models and respect for the assets all students bring to school (p. 103).

**Definitions of Teacher Leadership**

The complexity of teacher leadership is evident in the broad array of “definitions of teacher leaders that abound in the literature” (LeBlanc & Shelton, 1997:32).

Illustrations of a few definitions purport the following:
• Someone who works with colleagues for the purpose of improving teaching and learning, whether in a formal or informal capacity (Paterson & Paterson, 2004, p. 74).

• Teacher leadership facilitates principled action to achieve whole-school success. It applies the distinctive power of teaching to shape meaning for children, youth, and adults. And it contributes to long-term, enhanced quality of community life (Crowther, Kaagan, Ferguson & Hann, 2002, p. 10).

• Teachers who are leaders leading within and beyond the classroom, identify with and contribute to a community of teacher learners and leaders, and influence others toward improved educational practice (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001, p. 5).

• Teacher leadership may be broadly defined as a professional commitment and a process which influences people to take joint actions toward changes and improved practices that enable achievement of shared educational goals and benefit the common good (Forster, 1997: 88).

• Teacher leadership is the capacity and commitment to contribute beyond one's classroom (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996:13)

Teacher leadership definitions share commonalities by emphasizing a sense of vision and capturing the relational work required in the organization (Murphy, 2005).

Review of Teacher Leadership Research

To date, a limited number of studies exist on emergent teacher leadership (Blase & Blase, 2006). Current research on teacher leadership focuses on formal leadership roles
However, teachers can serve as informal leaders (Smylie, 1995). Darling-Hammond, Bullmaster and Cobb (1995) studied teacher leadership in professional development schools (PDS) – collaborations between schools and universities established to support pre-service and experienced teachers while at the same time restructuring schools and schools of education. Specifically, the researchers posed the question: “What are the possibilities for new forms of teacher leadership that pervade teaching and are accessible to all teachers who engage in broader professional roles that are available in professional development schools?” Participating professional development schools included: 1) University of Louisville, Kentucky and Fairdale High School; 2) Teachers College, Columbia University, New York City PS 87; 3) Learning and Teaching Collaborative (six schools in Boston and Brookline, and Wheelock and Simmons Colleges); 4) University of Washington and Puget Professional Development Center and Lark Creek Middle School; 5) University of South Carolina and Pontiac Elementary School; 6) University of Southern California School of Education and Norwood Elementary School; and, 7) Gheens Academy, Louisville, Kentucky and Byck Elementary School. These professional development schools held longstanding relationships with universities’ beginning and veteran teachers, teacher educators, and administrators in which varied leadership roles emerged for teachers.

Researchers examined data from in-depth case studies of seven professional development schools. Supplemental research conducted in other professional development schools where similar teacher leadership patterns emerged led to three claims: 1) teacher leadership and teacher learning are interrelated and linked; 2) teacher leadership is embedded in roles and tasks that are non-hierarchical; and, 3) approaches
like those used in the professional development schools enhance the expansion capacity of teacher leadership, and that teachers as leaders is a common role for teachers. Findings from the study highlighted the emergence of teacher leadership as a normal role for teachers that is non-imposing, inclusive, and made available to all teachers. Teachers are powerful leaders and learners, particularly when their expertise is recognized, their roles expanded, and responsibilities increased.

Corallo’s (1995) study of informal teacher leaders who had the ability to influence others supported the findings of Darling-Hammond and colleagues (1995) in that teacher leadership was not imposed. The purpose of Corallo’s study was to explore the question: “How is the development of informal teacher leaders influenced by life experiences, teacher pre-service preparation, in-service and professional growth activities, association with others in the teaching profession, and contextual conditions in their work place?”

Three teachers identified by their peers as informal leaders participated in completing demographic surveys and extensive interviews. The information gathered provided data on teachers’ personal and professional experiences. Case studies were developed from the surveys and interviews. A multicase, cross-case method was used to analyze qualitative data. Each case, read by two informed readers, verified the themes and their meanings. The summary of cases shared with each teacher provided further verification. Study findings concluded that certain factors influence informal teacher leadership, which incorporated family background, professional growth activities, mentor teachers, administrative support, and success in early leadership experiences. The implication of these findings suggests that teachers will be predisposed to leadership roles if all of these factors are in place. When hiring teachers, delving into their background experiences may
help improve the selection process of new teachers. Another implication of the findings concluded administrators should facilitate collaboration among new teachers and informal teacher leaders to provide opportunities where veterans model new skills for new teachers. Lastly, Corallo’s study maintained that principals have a major role in establishing the conditions required for teacher leadership to thrive.

In another study conducted by Fennell (1999) in Northwestern Ontario, Canada, a large urban area, examined six female principals who encouraged the development of teacher leadership in their schools. Each principal served at least one year as a principal and served in significant leadership positions within the large urban school board. The six principals represented a wide range of experiences as leaders in the beginning, middle, and later parts of their careers. Data collected from the study which used a phenomenological conceptual framework consisted of six in-depth interviews at three-month intervals over a period of two school years. Thirty-six interviews with the teachers in these principals’ schools were conducted, each interview lasting between 1-2 hours for each participant. Ongoing data analysis, multiple readings and checks of interview transcripts helped isolate themes and concepts. Results from the study demonstrated that teachers were involved in leadership outside their classrooms. They participated in shared decision-making and consensus-building activities for curriculum understanding and application based on the areas emphasized by their principals. Additionally, Fennell (1999) noted “the layers of leadership are comprised, at various times, of all members of the organization from all parts of the organization – teachers, students, and staff, and appear to be virtual and changing in nature” (p. 27).
Sabatini's (2002) study researched teachers' perspectives of emergent teacher leadership. This study used a symbolic interactionist framework and grounded theory research design to concentrate on two questions: 1) What are teachers' experiences with emergent teacher leaders? and, 2) What do these experiences mean to teachers? The study took place in an urban elementary school in Northeast Georgia. The school district served 12,217 students in the 2001-2002 school year. Ethnically, the student body included approximately 57% African-American, 31% Caucasian, and 7% Hispanic. There existed a high rate of poverty, and many residents were undereducated.

Northville Elementary School was 1 of 13 elementary schools in the district. The school opened in 1990 in a predominantly African-American neighborhood and served 483 students in grades Pre-K through grade five. Student population was 70% African-American, 25% Hispanic, 5% Caucasian, and students from other diverse ethnic backgrounds. Twenty-one percent of the students had limited English proficiency. The poverty index for all students was 94% based on qualifications of free or reduced lunch. Test data from the grade 4 statewide criterion-referenced test indicated that over half of the school's fourth graders did not meet state performance standards in reading and math. Northville Elementary School housed 85 staff members of which 45 were certified teachers. Sixty-five percent of the teachers held advanced degrees, with an average of 15 years in teaching. Another 20% of the certified teachers were African-American, while the remaining 80% were Caucasian.

Three different principals had led the school over a 12-year period. Each principal held similar ideas of shared governance and teacher empowerment. Northville was the first school in Georgia to adopt the Accelerated Schools Project (ASP) model in 1993.
The ASP is a model of shared governance, inquiry, and school improvement. The school’s emphasis was on providing positive learning experiences and activities that enriched and stimulated student learning.

The sample size in the study included eight female teachers and one male teacher. All were Caucasian and their total years of teaching experience ranged from 2 to 16 years. Seven teachers taught in primary classes and one was an ESOL teacher. Data was collected through interviews, document reviews, and a researcher’s notebook was maintained for organizational purposes. Initially, interviews were conducted in the summer of 2002, with follow-up interviews held a few months later. The researcher employed face-to-face interviews as the main method of collecting data. Beginning interviews were unstructured in which participants shared their experiences with emergent teacher leaders. Later, the researcher narrowed the questioning to focus on detailed topics that emerged from the initial interviews.

During the final stage of data collection, structured interviews were used for identifying categories and member checking. Each interview lasted 20 to 40 minutes. Participants provided feedback on emerging categories throughout the various stages of data analysis. The researcher gained in-depth information through additional follow-up interviews. Data were audio-taped and transcribed for constant comparative analysis to create a theory. The theory entrenched in the data explains teachers’ views of emergent teacher leadership. Documents collected included the school’s report card, school test scores, a Reading First proposal, and pages from the school’s website. On-going data analysis surfaced relationships, interactions and outcomes as the three main categories. The seventeen common themes consisted of: 1) shared experience; 2) expertise; 3)
availability; 4) taking initiative; 5) curriculum support; 6) instructional support; 7) collaboration; 8) observation; 9) inquiry & problem-solving; 10) shared decision-making; 11) teacher improvement; 12) student benefits; 13) collective ownership; 14) increased leadership capacity; 15) stability; 16) improved morale, and 17) challenges.

Teacher empowerment surfaced as the fundamental theme from the study as determined by teachers building relationships to direct their own learning through shared experiences, knowledge, skills, and accessibility. Teacher-to-teacher leader interactions occurred at the classroom and school level promoting curriculum and instructional support, collaboration, inquiry, and shared decision-making. Teachers specified that the relationships and interactions resulted in: collective responsibility, student gains, enhanced leadership capacity, stability, and ultimately, teacher improvements.

Theoretical ideas emerged based on the findings to suggest teacher leaders felt trusted and valued, interacted in meaningful ways, and improved morale as some of the benefits with emergent teacher leaders. Implications for future research reinforced the importance of the principals ability to cultivate emergent teacher leadership, teachers taking responsibility for developing themselves as leaders, and the offering of coursework in higher education institutions to develop teachers as leaders.

These research studies indicate the use of selected strategies that can advance improvements in teaching and learning, and contribute to the examination of the ways in which teachers develop as leaders who work collaboratively in improving educational practices.
School Level Collaboration

The education reform literature offers several examples of the value of collaboration for school improvement. Fullan (2001) stated that collaborative efforts were more successful for those involved when work is done jointly. Uhl and Perez-Selles (1995) assert, “schools’ capacity for change is related to their efforts to make collaboration their prime vehicle of learning, instruction, and change” (p. 258).

Establishing a process for collaboration inclusive of commonly held goals, values, and beliefs that are demonstrated in actions, develops new understandings to dramatically change the ways humans interact (Hancock & Lamendola, 2005). In near consensus, educational researchers promote efforts and processes to incorporate the idea that teachers need to work together to improve schooling (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001). Teachers need time to study, plan, and assess together. The message of What Matters Most: Teaching for America’s Future, by the National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future (1996) is that teacher quality, teacher professionalism, and the conditions in which teachers teach are what matters most to students’ learning.

Literature further suggests collaboration should occur outside of school by creating teacher networks, visiting other schools, and attending professional conferences (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001). Newman and Whelage (1995) in a large scale study of school restructuring revealed that student achievement increases in schools where collaborative work cultures foster a professional learning community among teachers and others.

Collaborative work cultures require relational trust, a shared sense of purpose, and allowance for individual expression (Crowther, Kaagan, Ferguson & Hann, 2002). The
establishment of trust is central to restructuring school systems (Hargreaves, 1994).

Hargreaves (1994) has noted different forms of collaborative cultures including:

1. “fragmented individualism” where teacher isolationism is the norm;
2. “balkanization” where loyalties and identities are tied to particular groups;
3. “collaborative culture” where sharing, trust and support are central to daily work;
4. “contrived collegiality” where strategies for controlling are evident; and,
5. the “moving mosaic” where blurred boundaries and overlapping categories and membership are flexible, dynamic, and responsive (p. 238).

Hargreaves (1994) reports how truly collaborative cultures can contrast with other forms of school culture. Attention to how teachers learn to work collaboratively is a good investment of time if we are serious about improving schools.

Definition of Collaboration

Collaboration is an effort to unite people and organizations to produce something no one person or organization could achieve alone (Freeman, 1993). Rubin (2002) provides another working definition of collaboration as “a purposeful relationship in which all parties strategically choose to cooperate in order to accomplish a shared outcome” (p.17).

Review of Teacher Collaboration Research

Collaboration is fundamental to school transformation because it builds capacity for change in individuals and organizations (Fullan, 1993). “Building organization capacity through collegial interactions in schools has become prominent in much of the literature on education reform and school improvement” (Leonard & Leonard, 2003: 2).
A few research studies specifically cite teachers' views on collaboration and its relationship to teacher leadership (LeBlanc & Shelton, 1997; Stone, Horejst & Lomas, 1997; Beachum & Dentith, 2004). LeBlanc and Shelton’s (1997) research question focused on how teachers perceive themselves and others in their teacher leadership roles. This qualitative study used a purposeful sampling technique to recruit participants. Five teacher leaders were selected based on some form of leadership training, peer and principal recommendations, accessibility and diversity to insure representation of the local area. Using a semi-structured interview protocol, the researchers established validity through a three-step process. First, plausible questions developed from synthesizing the teacher leadership literature to comprehend teachers’ viewpoints. Secondly, they ascertained credibility through consultation with the coordinator of Leadership Development for Teachers mini-course at the South Florida Center for Educational Leaders. Finally, they used the revised interview protocol in a field test to gather evidence to support plausibility and credibility.

Interview reliability was accomplished through triangulation at data collection and using the referential technique of literature review for verification of themes. Data analysis produced several themes related to teacher leaders': (a) perceptions, (b) feelings, (c) methods, and (d) environment. Researchers used the constant comparative research method to connect research findings to theory and previous findings in the literature. LeBlanc and Shelton’s (1997) findings revealed: 1) conflict between two needs that motivate teacher leaders: achievement and affiliation; 2) participants experienced job satisfaction; 3) collaboration was the main vehicle for the study participants to make an
impact as a teacher leader; and, 4) the most important barrier to address in teacher leadership is the resource of time (pp. 9-10).

Stone, Horejs and Lomas (1997) explored the commonalities and differences in teacher leadership at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. To study this topic, a set of sub-questions included: 1) Who are teacher leaders? 2) How do teachers define or perceive teacher leadership? 3) In what leadership activities do teacher leaders engage? 4) How are teacher leadership positions designed, and who selects the leaders? 5) Why do teachers engage? 6) What are the desired outcomes of teacher leadership? 7) What factors and structures support or constrain teacher leadership? 8) In what ways does teacher leadership improve professional practice? and, 9) In what ways does teacher leadership assist in school improvement? Researchers used a mixed method, multi-site case study approach involving eighteen teachers, six from a suburban elementary school, six from an urban middle school, and six from a suburban high school in Northern California. Their peers nominated these teachers as leaders. The most frequently identified teachers became the subjects of these case studies. Triangulation occurred within each study through combining methodologies to assist in establishing validity of the conclusions.

Content validity was established through the use of multiple sources of evidence; instituting a chain of evidence; and, research colleagues assisting in interviewing, interpreting data, and verifying findings. Pattern-matching, explanation-building, and time-series analysis were used to establish internal validity (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Building reliability required researchers to develop a case study protocol and database. The study was initiated with no predetermined ideas about the findings. Observations of
subjects were documented over time in varied settings and subjects validated responses for accuracy. Various observers and interviewers were used to remove potential bias.

Data were substantiated by obtaining viewpoints from administrators, teacher leaders and colleagues who engaged in validating each other's perceptions. Multiple data sources included: formal and informal interviews with principals, teacher leaders, colleagues, focus groups, direct and participation observations, journals, and responses to staff surveys (76%-100%). Surveys contained open-ended and multiple choice questions to obtain personal, professional information, and views on teacher leadership.

The three integrated case studies (Horejs, 1996; Lomas, 1997; Stone; 1996) were designed to compare and contrast teacher leadership in the areas of characteristics, supports, constraints, motivations, and effects on professional practices and school improvement. Each of the three qualitative research designs focused on framing questions designed to provide everyday, but intricate, events in real-life settings over a prolonged period of time. One key finding from the study demonstrated that teacher leaders can improve professional practice by encouraging collaboration and decision-making.

Another key finding contends hearing teachers' voices and views can assist in school improvement efforts. Teacher leaders experienced challenges related to hierarchical structures, time constraints, power, and politics. Nevertheless, these findings emphasized the need for teacher leaders to collaborate in improving schools.

Beachum and Dentith (2004) investigated the definition of teacher leadership from the perspective of the teachers. Specifically, the research questions were: 1) How do teachers see their roles as teacher leaders? 2) Could such arrangements successfully dismantle the traditional mindset of school management and transform schools into
learning communities? 3) How is teacher leadership reshaping the nature of teachers’ work? and 4) Can such practices bring more participatory democratic practices to schools? The examiners’ goals were to identify how teachers adopt leadership roles in their schools and the ways school administrators organized to promote new structures of leadership. The qualitative study of 25 teacher leaders conducted in five schools within a large Midwestern city school district asserts teacher leadership as a model and theory of leadership for school renewal. The schools chosen were reputed to acknowledge the value of teachers as leaders in decision-making processes and the overall organization of the school. Two elementary schools (Pre-k through grade 5), one middle school (grades 5-8), one K-8 school (Pre-k through grade 8), and one high school were involved in this study. Researchers used an ethnographic approach (Hammersely & Atkinson, 1995) and strategies from the field of educational anthropology (Wolcott, 1994).

Data collection was comprised of unstructured interviews and observations of teachers during eight months of fieldwork in the five schools. The length of time for each interview ranged from 30 minutes to 2 hours. Each school was visited at least three times for the interviews. A list of questions served as a guide and interviews were with individual teachers and focus group meetings with groups of five teachers. Written transcripts, approximately 20, were distributed to participants during subsequent visits for clarification and validation purposes. Final versions served as data analysis. Investigators followed up with observations of teachers in committee work, team meetings, and large faculty meetings. Research field notes were taken at each site. Data were collected during eight months of continuous fieldwork.
Three central themes materialized to explain and support teacher leaders that incorporate: 1) organizational patterns and school structures; 2) processes and practices that exist among faculty; and, 3) use of external resources coupled with strong community ties to build relationships. Implications from the study suggested, “teachers who take leadership roles in their schools are successful agents and conduits in promoting cultural change. Their work as leaders—in and out of their classrooms—seems to push the school culture toward a more inclusive and collaborative one” (Beachum & Dentith, 2004: 283).

Two studies, Birky (2002) and Birky, Shelton & Headley (2004), explored ways to encourage and support teacher leadership in schools from the perspectives of the teacher leaders. In the Birky (2002) study, data were collected from four teacher leaders and forty teachers as identified by eleven principals representing five Oregon school districts. Teacher leaders were defined as informal leaders, who often initiated their involvement, volunteered their time and efforts, and had no leadership titles. Participants completed a survey and engaged in multiple interviews using Seidman’s (1991) model of hermeneutic phenomenology. Data were derived from open-ended questions, interviews, and conversations. In a follow-up study, Birky, Shelton and Headley (2004) investigated teacher leaders’ perceptions of site-based decision-making and collaboration while serving as council chairs. This part of the study targeted 228 high schools in Oregon’s 198 school districts through questionnaires. Researchers noted “the response rate of 21% percent, representing 49 high schools, reflected the typical response rate of below 30% for research surveys conducted through questionnaires” (Fowler, 2002). The study’s focus was to verify the results in Birky’s (2002) which also examined the views of
teacher leaders. In both studies, analysis of the data identified emergent themes from the research. For the intention of this study, one of the most relevant themes pertained to the skills administrators exhibited in encouraging teacher leadership activities that "promoted and facilitated collaboration while allowing independence when participation wasn’t necessary and empowering teachers in their leader tasks" (p. 96).

Leonard and Leonard (2003) examined collaborative working environments and its significance to the creation and maintenance of schools as professional learning communities. The study involved teachers from 45 north Louisiana schools. A questionnaire, designed with modifications from an earlier survey instrument based upon Schein's (1985) underlying dimensions of organizational culture, was distributed to 56 teachers from 45 schools in eight districts. Respondents taught at the elementary, middle, and high school levels with a range of teacher experience from 3 years to 34 years. The questionnaire asked teachers to reflect upon exact aspects of collaborative practices at their schools, at the district level, and beyond. In addition, teachers evaluated administrator and organizational expectations, and support for professional collaboration along with identifying barriers to such practices. The data analysis of the written responses to the open-ended questionnaires involved a basic qualitative inquiry technique by structuring the data along question topics and then allowing additional themes and sub-themes to emerge. Two principal themes from the study consisted of the nature and extent of professional collaboration in schools and the nature and extent of professional collaboration at the district level and beyond. The sub-themes to emerge were forms, variations, and support of collaborative practices at the school level, district level and beyond. Researchers coded data independently, and later, categories and themes were re-
examined by researchers collectively to establish agreement. The results demonstrated that the realization and maintenance of schools as "professional learning communities" seems an elusive ambition. Data presented indicated that various forms of teacher collaborative practices occurred in schools; however, there remain traditional norms of teacher individuality and organizational isolationism.

These studies exemplify how collaboration or lack thereof is intrinsically linked to teacher leadership as a fundamental ingredient to successful school improvement and the need for continual examination of ways to support collaboration among teachers.

**Conditions That Foster Collaborative Teacher Leadership**

**Organizational Structure**

Long-standing hierarchical and school governance structures prevent the support of newer conceptions that emphasize shared leadership and collaboration among teachers (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Yarger and Lee (1994) assert that replacing existing hierarchical norms to support teacher leadership development by rearranging school workplaces to influence team collaboration and decision-making is necessary. Coyle (1997) further explains, "unless we flatten the present hierarchies... and create structures that empower teachers to collaborate with one another and lead from within the heart of the school, the classroom, we will ... discourage true educational leadership" (p. 239). Flattening the present hierarchies requires the school, teachers, and administrators to change the way they think about certain aspects of school leadership, particularly teachers’ thinking about the concept of power (Buckner & McDowelle, 2000).

Power becomes realigned when the structures of professional development, school times, space, and access for collaboration are improved to support teachers as
collaborative leaders (Darling-Hammond, Bullmaster & Cobb, 1995). These observations emphasize the influence of structure on teacher leadership.

School Cultures

School culture is a dominant factor in influencing the success of teacher leadership and school improvement (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). The ways in which a school operates and the extent to which it will have a positive influence on student achievement is predicated on the functionality of the school culture. Two types of cultures have great influence on teachers' abilities to lead collaboratively. Peterson (2002) identifies these as "positive or toxic." Positive cultures reflect common purpose, constant inquiry, and shared practice to move from "isolation to collaboration in supportive environments in which all members of the school community can strive for continual improvement" (Hancock & Lamendola, 2005: 78). Conversely, toxic cultures discourage and often undermine collaboration, often lack purposeful direction, and promote antagonistic relations among staff (Peterson, 2002). In many urban school cultures, the tendency to "blame the community, parents, and students" prevails as a way to explain systemic failures and disheartens schools' morale; thereby, fostering toxic school cultures. Heifetz (1994) explains, "People fail to adapt because of the distress provoked by the problem and the changes it demands" (p. 37). There is less likelihood of toxic cultures taking root if schools "create holding environments that allow and support developmental learning--- when a leader contains the stresses of adaptive work as much as possible by being supportive of persons at all stages of growth" (Lyman & Villani, 2004: 127).
Therefore, creating positive, collaborative school cultures should not be viewed as insignificant. Danielson (2006) states, “Given the pervasive influence of organizational culture and the importance of leaders in shaping culture, attention to culture is essential. The contributions of both administrators and teacher leaders are critical” (p. 46).

*Roles and Responsibilities*

Teacher leaders and their colleagues need ongoing communication through understanding and support in order to make the work meaningful and tangible (Hart, 1994). The establishment of trusting and collaborative relationships is pivotal to successful teacher leadership. York-Barr & Duke (2004) note, “Principals clearly are viewed as the individuals in the principal-teacher dyad with the greatest power, and the ones who set the tone for the relationship” (p. 273). Acker-Hocevar and Touchton (1999) substantiated this observation in a theoretical, qualitative study of six recipients of the Florida Elementary Teacher of the Year Award. Teachers were asked to participate in interviews that lasted one hour or longer where researchers investigated teachers’ perspectives of site-based decision-making structures within their work contexts and relationships. The study extended Bennett and Harris’s (1997) “Three Dimensional Model of Organizational Operation” related to mutual interdependence of culture, power, and structure to add stories told by teachers to investigate teacher leadership. Furthermore, researchers examined how the “Dimensions of Social Relationships: An Agency Model of Power” might be realized in practice. Participants received interview questions ahead of time and interviews occurred over a three-month period. Researchers recorded conversations and participated in the phone interviews using the conference call technique. Interviews which were taped and transcribed, assisted researchers in
identifying units of information. Next, agreed upon categories were grouped to determine
major subthemes across the interviews. Using a phenomenological approach to the
examination of everyday experiences of the teachers was a beginning point to discover
themes in participants’ language. Individual member checks which included all
participants in phone debriefing after interviews and, arriving to agreement on all codes
and categories, established trust among researchers and participants. Common themes to
come from the data consisted of: 1) decision-making structures; 2) personal narratives;
3) teacher culture; and, 4) the power/politics of their work. Findings from the teachers’
stories suggested that teacher leaders are able to see the “big picture,” and foresee the
global impact of decisions made by administration and colleagues. Additionally, the
stories illustrated how the power dimensions emerge under the framework of structure,
culture, and power. Acker-Hocevar and Touchton (1999) further explained:

Power relationships, critical to the change process, can transform or maintain
the culture and structure of schools. The interdependence of structure, power
and culture is corroborated by these teachers’ stories over and over again, no
matter what the situation—empowering or disempowering. Teachers cannot
be given power (empowered) without accepting it...On the other hand,
administrators must know how to create conditions that foster empowerment
and release their control over teachers, alter their roles, and engender
commitment (p. 26)

The research literature suggests ways in which principals can foster the conditions for
teachers to serve as collaborative leaders. Drago-Severson (2004) offers core principles
that ground leadership approaches to include activities where principals:
1. share and include others in leadership (e.g., seeking feedback, distributed leadership);

2. build relationships within the school community (e.g., engaging in "conversation," informal gatherings);

3. embrace and help people manage change and fostering diversity (e.g., evaluation, celebrating ideas for policy improvement, and implementing changes) (p. 40)

Principals also need to consider spending time to build trusting interpersonal relationships.

Principals also need to consider spending time to build trusting interpersonal relationships.

Professional Development

Teacher Preparation

Drago-Severson (2004) offers a "new model of learning-oriented school leadership that facilitates transformational learning" (p. 17). Professional learning primarily consists of traditional in-service approaches that promote informational learning to increase knowledge and skills. According to Ladson-Billings (1994) the, "teacher sees herself as technician, teaching as a technical task" (p. 34). Drago-Severson (2004) purports,

When transformational learning occurs, a person develops increased capacities (i.e., cognitive, interpersonal, and intrapersonal) for better managing the complexities of daily life and work--for this to occur, attention needs to be paid to shaping school contexts wherein adults have opportunities to examine their own assumptions. Examining assumptions is essential for the
development of lasting change and the successful implementation of new practices (p.17).

Sherrill (1999) named a core set of teacher leader competencies to apply to all teacher leaders during various career stages. The stages consist of pre-service, induction, and ongoing professional development. The core competencies include demonstrating excellent teaching and learning, understanding theories of adult development, understanding theory and research about teaching and learning, knowledge of clinical supervision, and guiding colleagues by means of inquiry and reflection. York-Barr and Duke (2004) report:

- expectations of teacher leaders who support experienced teachers included
  being able to assess and prioritize district and teacher needs, knowing how to
  create a positive school culture, establishing positive relationships with
  administrators, understanding action research inquiry, expanding colleagues’
  instructional methods.

- and offering effective workshops and presentations (p. 279).

Research on teachers’ knowledge in general is ample. However, Montero-Sieburth (1989) asserts, “research that focuses specifically on teachers’ knowledge in urban schools or on urban teaching is limited” (p.339). Montero-Sieburth further emphasizes, “part of the reason for this is that the conclusions with regard to teachers’ knowledge have not been differentiated between, urban, suburban, rural, or semi-rural schools but have been described in universal terms” (p.339). As a result, research that comprehensively examines teachers’ preparation, knowledge, and leadership in urban school settings appears inadequate. This view is further substantiated by Kopetz, Lease.
growth, collaboration, and shared vision/values for developing teachers as leaders. This reflects the approach of leadership development through knowledge, experience, and self-reflection in building confidence to act and define oneself as a leader.

Katzenmeyer and Moller's (2001) development of a comprehensive teacher leadership model promotes personal assessment (Who Am I?), changing schools (Where Am I?), influencing strategies (How Do I Lead?), and planning for action (What Can I Do?) as the framework for helping teachers develop as leaders. In their work they claim teacher leadership thrives on meaningful professional development experiences, including those involving leadership development (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001).

Summary

Summary of findings from the teacher leadership literature presents various definitions of teacher leadership reflecting the complexity of roles and responsibilities of teacher leaders. Teacher leadership embedded in other leadership theories compounds the difficulty of developing conceptual frameworks. Small, qualitative case studies provide empirical research coupled with a limited number of large quantitative studies. The teaching profession offers multiple paths for teachers to lead, however, mostly through formal hierarchical designations. Collaboration and relationship building are teaching practices that support teacher leadership. Organizational structures, school cultures, principal/teacher roles, and responsibilities are critical factors. Obstacles to teacher leadership in urban schools come with a unique set of problems. The dominance of a deficit mindset (beliefs and attitudes) as a reference to explain the academic failures of students who are economically challenged Black, Hispanic, English Language Learners and Students with Disabilities, is especially problematic. Teachers can grow and develop
the necessary skills and will learn to lead through knowledge, experience, and self-
reflection. The purpose of this study was to describe how teacher leaders collaborate to
recognize and challenge deficit thinking, and explore what influence their work had on
their colleagues’ thinking. This researcher was engaged in the development and
implementation of a program to support teacher leadership in urban settings. This study
focused on a subgroup of urban teachers using a qualitative case study design as outlined
in Chapter Three.
CHAPTER III: RESEARCH DESIGN METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to describe how teacher leaders in two urban elementary schools collaborate to recognize and challenge deficit thinking. The study also explored what influence the teacher leaders’ work had on their colleagues’ thinking. Teacher leaders interpreted their experiences based on their interactions and their thought processes associated with deficit thinking. In this study, teacher leaders are defined as teachers who collaborate and lead beyond the classroom. This included, but was not limited to, adaptive work to reduce teachers’ persistent perceptions of deficits among urban students. By describing teacher leaders’ experiences within their context, the study: a) offered a specific set of teacher leader role behaviors; b) described transformative processes to achieve teacher leaders’ objectives in recognizing and challenging deficit thinking; and, c) identified factors that followers (classroom teachers) consider when engaged in learning that is led by teacher leaders.

This chapter includes six sections. The first section provides a general perspective that identifies the problem statement as part of the introduction. The second section offers in-depth information on the research context, while section three provides a description of the research participants and selected site locations. Section four presents detailed procedures of the qualitative data, information, and tools to be used in data collection. The fifth section describes data collection and formal analysis of data used.
General perspective

After more than 30 years of educational reform, the achievement gap and deficit thinking are two intractable problems faced in the high poverty educational community (Lyman & Villani, 2004). Insufficient exploration of educators' unwillingness to assume responsibility for students' low achievement and failure (Berman & Chambliss, 2000), continues to impede urban school districts in improving schools. Reform efforts are weakened by educators' deficit views and by their beliefs about the children who are the objects of reform (Valencia, Valenzuela, Sloan & Foley, 2001). Deficit thinking is placing the blame on students for their academic failure that is associated with lack of material, social and cultural capital (Valencia, 1997). The problem of deficit thinking can be further explored through examination of teacher leadership.

Examination of teacher leadership was explored using a symbolic interactionist framework to guide the descriptive multi-site case study. Blumer (1969) defines symbolic interactionism as "activity in which humans interpret each other's gestures and act on the basis of meaning yielded by interpretation" (p.65-66). Blumer (1969) further identifies three principles of symbolic interactionism as: 1) individuals act toward objects in their surroundings based on the meanings those objects have for them; 2) meanings produced from the social interactions individuals have with one another; and, 3) individuals use of interpretive processes to determine, adjust, and make sense of these meanings.

The relationship of the symbolic interactionist framework to this study was to guide the exploration of institutional and individual practices, assumptions, and processes in order to describe how teacher leaders recognize and challenge deficit thinking. Through working with teacher leaders, they interpreted their experiences based on their
interactions with each other, with other classroom teachers, and shared those experiences with each other to describe the meanings of the experiences. Classroom teachers also interpreted and related their experiences based on their engagement and participation in the equity projects facilitated by the teacher leaders.

This study examined teacher leaders’ experiences and interpretations of how they worked together to identify and address issues associated with deficit thinking and what influence, if any, their work will had on other classroom teachers in order to develop a detailed analysis of two cases. Creswell (2007) indicates that, “case study research involves the study of an issue explored through one or more cases within a bounded system. i.e., a setting, a context (p.73). This descriptive, multi-site case study is qualitative in inquiry and design. With a descriptive case study, anchored in real-life situations, insights can be construed as tentative hypotheses to help future research (Merriam, 1998). The multi-site case study was designed to observe and examine the process of the teacher leaders’ experiences during implementation of equity projects.

Through the teacher leaders’ implementation of equity projects, the study presents processes to challenge deficit thinking. The research questions for the study were:

1) How do teacher leaders collaborate to recognize and challenge deficit thinking?
2) What is the influence of the teacher leaders’ work on their colleagues’ thinking?

These questions help to provide a descriptive analysis that presents useful, thorough information that is not guided by established or hypothesized generalizations (Creswell, 2003).
Research Context

This study took place in two urban elementary schools located in a large urban city in Western New York. Data was collected over a six-month period from January 2008 through June 2008. The school district where these schools are located serves approximately 33,000 students with 74% of the students qualifying for federal free or reduced lunch. For the district as a whole, the 2006 Basic Education Data System (BEDS) reports approximately 68% of students are African-American, 20% are Latino, 6% are Caucasian, and 6% are classified as “Other.” Students in special education make up 14% of the population, and English Language Learners (ELL) make up 8% of the student population. Students speak thirty-five different languages. The teaching workforce is 77% Caucasian, 14% African-American, 6% Latino, and 1% classified as “Other.” The district provides education to students in 39 elementary schools and 19 high schools. Elementary schools are divided into zones (northwest, northeast, south) with 6 schools designated as city-wide draws. Schools that are city-wide draws enroll students from all areas of the city.

For purposes of confidentiality, the schools, participants and the leadership program in this study are identified with the fictitious names of Urbanville Elementary School, Citiville Elementary School, and the Collaborative Teacher Leadership Program (CTLP). The demographic information regarding school personnel at each of these sites can be found in Table 3.1.
Table 3.1: School Demographics for Urbanville and Citiville Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Schools</th>
<th>Student Poverty Rate</th>
<th>Student Population</th>
<th>Student Ethnicity</th>
<th># of Staff Personnel</th>
<th>Teacher Ethnicity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Urbanville</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>80% African-American</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>3% African-American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>9% Latino</td>
<td></td>
<td>97% Caucasian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>9% Caucasian</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1% Asian</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citiville</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>413</td>
<td>90% African-American</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>7% African-American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4% Latino</td>
<td></td>
<td>93% Caucasian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3% Caucasian</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3% Other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Urbanville Elementary School is a well-preserved, old school building that serves students in grades Kindergarten through Grade 6. The students (general education, Limited English Proficient, and Students with Disabilities) are enrolled in fully integrated classes. The academic approach is to use students' personal experience and intellectual growth to promote self-discovery and construct knowledge. Emphasis is on inquiry-based learning, the development of compassion, and respect for diverse learning styles, backgrounds and needs.

Staff members include the principal, teachers, special subject teachers, related special services teachers, paraprofessionals, clerical, custodial, and cafeteria staff. Twenty-five percent of staff members are certified teachers. The principal has six years of experience as the school's leader. Urbanville Elementary School has been designated
by the New York State Education Department (NYSED) as a School In Good Academic Standing. The school received an award in recognition of their strong professional learning community that has led to a positive school culture and successful student achievement.

Citiville Elementary School is a recently renovated school (within the last two years) that serves students in grades Kindergarten through Grade 6. Students are enrolled in general education, special education (modified and functional), and integrated classes. Approximately one-third of the students are classified as having special learning needs. Students are enrolled from the south side of the city. Additionally, students of this school experience an academic philosophy committed to the development of student success by recognizing and building on students’ individual talents. Special emphasis is placed to provide students with learning opportunities for acceleration and enrichment through the performing arts programs, Major Achievement Program (MAP), Project STRIDE (peer mediation and conflict resolution program), and a variety of community partnerships that includes a very active Parent-Teacher Organization (PTO).

Staff members include the principal, assistant principal, teachers, special subject teachers, related special services teachers, paraprofessionals, clerical, custodial, and cafeteria staff. Sixty-five percent of staff members are certified teachers. The principal has six years of experience as the school’s leader. Citiville Elementary School has been designated by the New York State Education Department (NYSED) as a School In Good Academic Standing. The school has received national recognition for closing the achievement gap among student sub-group populations.
Both schools were selected based on specific characteristics. These characteristics include: 1) school-wide support for teacher leaders' implementation of equity projects; 2) positive school cultures; 3) teachers participation in the CTLP; d) principals’ active support of teacher leadership; 4) principals’ shared leadership styles; and, 5) active parent involvement.

The teacher leadership team of Urbanville School designed an equity project titled, “An Urban Expedition.” The project involved teachers forming into teams led by parents to go into the communities where their students live and discover what the people in those communities possess in terms of resources. Parents collectively worked with teachers to implement the project. The principal, teachers and parents returned to their school, shared their findings, and incorporated findings into the school’s curriculum. Teachers also developed lessons and inquiry-based learning activities using their students’ communities as the resources for productive learning. In this project’s design and implementation, teachers were willing to take the time to learn more about the lives of their students outside of school and celebrate their uniqueness.

The Citiville School teacher leadership team designed an equity project to improve students’ vocabulary skills by implementing a rigorous school-wide vocabulary development and enhancement action plan titled, “The Vocabulary Wizard.” The project’s goals were to increase teachers’ understandings of culturally acceptable modes of communications and capitalize on the students’ cultural strengths to improve language development. Another aspect of this project was to increase parental involvement in academic support of language development for their children. This project involved a monthly theme focus on specific vocabulary words incorporated into the entire school
community. Example activities selected, included but were not limited to, program assemblies, lunchroom activities, student-led vocabulary activities, visual word displays, and daily public address word announcements. During the project's design and implementation phases, teachers were willing to engage in a school-wide targeted, cohesive approach to increase vocabulary skills for all students.

Research Participants

According to Merriam (1998), “purposeful sampling is based on the assumption the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (p. 61). This researcher was engaged in the development and implementation of the CTLP in partnership with a local university. The major purpose of the program was to prepare teacher leaders to collaborate to promote equity for all students. Promoting equity would entail a way of being that supported meeting the needs of all students regardless of socioeconomic and ethnic status.

Thirty-two teachers from eleven schools (located in the same school district as Urbanville and Citiville Schools) voluntarily participated in the program. Leadership teams were comprised of teachers designated or recognized as leaders in their school buildings. These teachers are interested in taking on leadership roles, but do not aspire to become school administrators. The teachers made a two-year commitment to participate in the program. During this time, teacher leadership teams collaborated with key stakeholders to develop and implement equity projects based on an area of need identified from their schools' School Improvement Plan (SIP). Nine of the eleven teacher teams have participated in professional development focused on equity-oriented
pedagogy during the 2006-07 school year. Furthermore, the nine teacher team designed school-wide equity projects for implementation during the 2007-08 school year.

A sub-group of two teacher leadership teams were asked to participate in the study stipulating anonymity and confidentiality as factors to encourage participation. There were three teacher leaders on each of these two teams. These six teacher leaders either had formal leadership positions or serve as informal leaders in their respective urban schools of Urbanville or Citiville. All six teacher leaders hold master’s degrees and have met the New York State Certification requirements for teaching within the State of New York for their respective tenure areas. Additionally, principals viewed these teacher leaders as having the prerequisite skills, attitudes, and dispositions to develop, implement and reflect on a project from conception to completion. The names are fictitious to protect anonymity. Table 3.2 provides demographic and professional information specific to the teacher leadership teams from two urban elementary schools.

Table 3.2: Participant Demographic and Professional Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Leadership Position</th>
<th>Grade/Area</th>
<th>Years of Experience</th>
<th>Years at School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Katie</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Informal</td>
<td>3rd</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shayla</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>Formal</td>
<td>ELA Specialist</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rob</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Informal</td>
<td>6th</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dee</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Formal</td>
<td>ELA Specialist</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grace</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Informal</td>
<td>4th</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cynthia</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Informal</td>
<td>5/6 Inclusion</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3.2 illustrates six teacher leaders who have been engaged in the CTLP for a year and a half. The purposeful selection of the two teacher leadership teams in the proposed study was based on: 1) leadership capacity of the teacher leaders as identified through letters of recommendation from administration and teacher colleagues; 2) focus of their projects; and, 3) the support garnered from their school communities.

Furthermore, additional research participants consisted of one school administrator and nine classroom teachers from Urbanville School and two school administrators and fifteen classroom teachers from the Citiville School who volunteered to participate in the study.

**Instruments Used in Data Collection**

A case study seeks to understand or interpret meanings and relationships that blends a description of events with analysis of them (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000). This case study required the collection of several data sets in order to produce an in-depth study of teacher leaders and to better understand the ways in which they collaborated to recognize and challenge deficit thinking. Several instruments were used for gathering data in the proposed two cases that included interview protocols, survey, document analysis criteria worksheets, and a research notebook (methodological notes, field notes, and research memos).

**Research Notebook**

A research notebook was kept to document and systematize all notes throughout the course of the research study. The research notebook included methodological notes, field notes, and research memos.
Field Notes

The observation instrument used as a data source was field notes to gather information “first by observing as an ‘outsider’ and then by moving into the setting and observing as an ‘insider’ (Creswell, 2007:130). The researcher became a participant observer who engaged in activities being studied and was known to the participants in order to obtain information about them and their setting. An observational protocol worksheet (see Appendix E) was used in the field to record interactions among the leadership teams and others (students, parents and other teachers) to ascertain responses regarding to equity project activities. These field notes were recorded immediately following each interview and each of the two visits per school (Urbanville & Citiville Schools).

Research Memos

Research memos are “the theorizing write-up of ideas about categories and their relationships as they strike the researcher while coding” (Glaser, 1978:83). Memos were written to work out insights gained during the coding process. Writing memos served as a reflective tool to record questions and ideas after interviews to assess the accuracy of the recorder’s perceptions and interpretation of session discussions. Data was coded in the following categories: leadership practices, collaboration, recognition, challenge, and deficit thinking.

Interview Protocols

Interviews were the primary data source for this study. Interview protocols for semi-structured interviews were used in this study to gain an understanding of the participants’ experiences and interpretations based on the research questions.
Face-to-Face Interviews

Phase I employed face-to-face interviews of teacher leaders and school administration. Blumer (1969) explains a two-step interpretive process. First, an individual communicates with himself by using his or her thought processes to identify which social objects have meaning. Next, the individual selects, regroups and transforms these meanings based on current situations. Face to face interviews were used to capture individuals' interpretive meanings in light of their varied participation in equity project activities.

An initial interview was conducted with each teacher leader participant and the school administration during January 2008 at the school site. After the initial face-to-face interviews, second interviews were conducted two months later during Phase II. The teacher leaders' second interview was carried out at the school site except for one teacher leader’s second interview was conducted at a professional development center. The principals’ second interview was also held at the same professional development center. The second interview for the assistant principal of Citiville School was held at the school. The purpose of the second interviews was to follow-up with probing questions to gain more in-depth meaning from research participants.

The interviews began with a brief overview of the purpose of the study and review of the interview protocols. The protocols included identifying the number of questions and informing the participants of their ability to ask clarifying questions. Participants were told that they would be asked a series of questions related to teacher leadership practices, deficit thinking, collaboration, equity project implementation, and school outcomes. If the participant hesitated or requested clarification, a prompt was
given by the researcher. The interviews provided qualitative data based on the teacher leaders' and school administration responses. The face-to-face semi-structured interviews allow some control over the line of questioning. All interviews were 45-60 minutes and professionally transcribed to ensure accuracy. The interview questions were categorized under specific headings (See Table 3.3). Table 3.3 depicts interview questions that were developed to capture the teacher leaders and school administration perceptions while engaged in the implementation of the equity projects.
Table 3.3: Research Participants Interview Questions

**Defining Teacher Leaders**
- How would you define teacher leaders?
- How do you see teacher leaders?
- What do you believe to be the role of teacher leaders in your school?
- How do other teachers respond to teacher leaders in your workplace?
- How do you see yourself as a teacher leader?
- Think of a time when teacher leaders effectively led a collaborative effort that positively impacted student learning. What did these leaders do that led to the positive result?
- What skills, attitudes, and behaviors do you have and use that demonstrate your capacity as a leader?
- What skills, attitudes, and behaviors have you observed in the teacher leaders that makes them effective? Not effective?

**Supporting Teacher Leaders Through Collaboration**
- What is collaboration?
- What do you believe about collaboration?
- Is it important for teacher leaders to collaborate, and if so, why?
- Why did you choose to participate on a leadership team?
- Describe how collaboration worked in your team.
- Describe how collaboration works with teacher leaders in your school.

**Recognizing and Challenging Deficit Thinking**
- What is deficit thinking?
- Is it important to recognize deficit thinking, and if so, why?
- Is it important to challenge deficit thinking, and if so, why?
- How do teacher leaders recognize deficit thinking?
- How do teacher leaders challenge deficit thinking?
- Do you challenge deficit thinking, and if so, how do you do this?
- What do you believe about equity?

**Selecting Equity Topic**
- How did your team determine the equity topic?
- Why was the topic selected?
- What types of support are given to help teacher leaders lead?
- Why do you think the leadership team selects the particular topic as a project?

**Identifying Outcomes**
- Having a well-focused issue is a key concern to the teacher leadership team's equity project. What cultural ramifications can you identify as a result of such a focus? What social ramifications can you identify as a result of such a focus?
- What do you think is the impact of your work on your colleagues’ thinking?
Table 3.3 incorporates all face-to-face interview questions. Refer to appendices A, B, and C for interview question formats specifically used to interview teacher leaders and school administration. School administration was included in the interviews to ascertain their perceptions about the teacher leaders based on similar research questions. Also during Phase I, teacher leaders provided dates and times for the observer to visit and view ongoing equity project activities. Simultaneously, field notes were developed from observable actions of participants while engaged in equity project activities and from teacher leaders continued participation in professional development weekend sessions. Scheduled observations (a minimum of 2 school site visits), field notes, and research memos were maintained in a research notebook throughout the entire research period.

Teacher Efficacy Scale Survey

In order to develop meaningful focus group questions without a pilot group, Phase II involved utilizing the Teacher Efficacy Scale Survey to define the context of focus group questions asked. This scale measures teacher efficacy linked to behaviors and attitudes on students and relationships related to personal and general teacher efficacy, expectations, and environmental factors that represent deficit thinking. The survey was sent to classroom teachers at both schools on-line using Surveymonkey.com. Of the 25 Urbanville classroom teachers, 15 returned the survey information by the deadline for a return rate of 60%. Of the 41 Citiville teachers, 29 returned the survey information for a return rate of 71%. The six teacher leaders did not participate in taking the on-line survey because they had taken the survey the prior year as part of their CTLP coursework. Participants responded to twenty items listed on the Teacher Efficacy Scale Survey pertaining to 10 personal teaching efficacy (PTE) and 10 general teaching efficacy items.
Responses to each item was along a six-point Likert scale from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree.”

In Phase III and IV, the actual focus group sessions were facilitated with classroom teachers and CTLP teacher leadership teams at separate times in each school. Focus group protocols were designed to determine what influence, if any, the equity projects had on classroom teachers’ perceptions of deficit orientations. The protocols for the focus group sessions were developed from data collected using the Teacher Efficacy Scale Survey. The professor who co-facilitated the CTLP Program professor from the local university conducted focus group sessions with classroom teachers and CTLP teacher leadership teams at the school sites to determine the impact of the equity projects on their ways of thinking. These sessions occurred at convenient times as designated by groups of four to seven classroom teachers and the three teachers on each leadership team. Based on the responses to specific survey items, three focus group questions were developed and used to interview the nine Urbanville teachers, eleven Citiville teachers, and the two teacher leadership teams. The teachers who volunteered from both schools were divided into two groups. The Urbanville focus groups consisted of one group of four teachers and another group of five teachers. The Citiville focus groups were comprised of one group of four teachers and another group of seven teachers. The focus group questions for the Urbanville classroom teachers were:

1) How did the Urban Expedition experience influence your views about parents in your school related to the ways in which they:
   a) support the academic success of their children?
   b) care about their children?
c) value education?

2) How did the experience influence your ability to:
   a) communicate with parents?
   b) recognize students’ strengths?

3) What motivated you to participate in the equity project?

The focus group questions for the Citiville classroom teachers were:

1) How did participation in the Vocabulary Wizard activities influence your views about:
   a) home and street language vs. Standard English?
   b) teaching and learning?
   c) school impact vs. home impact?

2) What did you learn about the students in your school as a result of their participation in the Vocabulary Wizard activities?

3) What motivated you to participate in the equity project?

The first two questions were the same for the focus groups consisting of classroom teachers and for the teacher leaders’ focus groups who led the equity projects. The third question for the teacher leaders was worded, “What motivated you to initiate the equity project?” These focus group sessions provided additional in-depth information based on questions developed from survey results. Consequently, focus group sessions were arranged to verify relationships and distinguishing characteristics of each case and across the two cases.
Documents

Official documents were collected to provide background information about each school. Documents included information from the district website, equity project visual materials, and CTLP assignments that were reviewed using document analysis criteria worksheets. Additionally, journals were maintained by the participants for the duration of the 6-month period. One teacher leader submitted a reflective journal. The other five teacher leaders felt that the on-going equity project work and coursework captured their: 1) reflective thoughts related to experience from the implementation of projects; 2) leadership practices; and, 3) acquired knowledge used based on participation in CTLP. Public and private documents were cost effective because of a reduction in transcribing expenses.

Instruments Reliability and Validity

When conducting case studies, multiple sources of evidence encourage convergent lines of inquiry that is relevant during data collection (Yin, 2003). While operational sets of measures (interviews, documents, observations, surveys) may be viewed as subjective, their analysis can establish a common point of understanding. Internal reliability and validity resulted from finding patterns and discovering commonalities within the data collected from the instruments that can be considered for replication.

To test for internal consistencies of reliability of the Teacher Efficacy Scale (TES) used in Hoy and Woolfolk’s study and subsequently their 1993 article Teacher’s Sense of Efficacy and the Organization of Health, the Cronbach’s Alpha Coefficient of Reliability was computed to determine the degree of correlation of item responses collected at the
same time. The alpha coefficients for the TES calculated in their sample were .77 for personal teaching efficacy, and .72 for general teaching efficacy. Given the fact that these values are greater than .70, they show an acceptable level of variance to consider the values generated by the items on the TES as consistently reliable. The result of Hoy and Woolfolk’s (1993) tests for internal consistencies for reliability coincide with past tests for internal validity done by Gibson and Dembo (1984) whereby multivariate-multimethod analysis of reliability yielded the conclusion that TES’s set of items represent a reliable scale.

For this analysis, given that the purpose for using the TES was to help determine focus group questions, and as such the TES was used as a pre-data generating procedure, there were no tests for internal consistency conducted on the groups surveyed.

Data Analysis

Throughout the four phases, data collection and analysis conducted was an ongoing process of continual reflection about data, asking methodical questions, and writing memos throughout the study (Creswell, 2003). The primary instruments used for gathering data were: 1) interview protocols, 2) focus group protocols, 3) survey, and 4) document analysis worksheet.

According to Wolcott (1994), “In qualitative research, data collection and data analysis are intertwined, iterative processes” (p. 238). Data analysis occurred during and after data collection. Teacher leaders began equity project activities in August 2007. Data collection analysis from these equity project activities transpired from January through June 2008. Data analysis was carried out in phases using qualitative methods.
Interviews

Information gleaned from Phase I interviews was organized and transcribed in search of early impressions of themes or common threads. The face-to-face semi-structured interviews allowed some control over the line of questioning. The researcher began by reading the transcripts to code data tentatively in the categories of leadership practices, collaboration, recognizing deficit thinking, challenging deficit thinking, and responsiveness to teacher leaders in the workplace. Second interviews were conducted with participants and transcriptions were read to summarize segments of the data for pattern coding. The second round of interviews yielded in-depth information that expanded on and provided additional insight to the responses from the first interview. Miles and Huberman (1994) explained, “for the qualitative analyst, pattern coding can reduce large amounts of data into a smaller number of analytic units” (p.69).

Simultaneously, the researcher wrote memos to use as a ‘place-holding memo’ to capture an idea that came to mind during interviews, and to tie together data into a recognizable grouping. Memos also expanded on the significance of the codes and assisted in determining the final categories to code all responses. Mapping out and tallying of all coded responses allowed for seeing the interconnectedness of codes to establish themes and sub-themes within specific categories.

Focus Groups

Meaning is influenced by context (Gay & Airasian, 2000) and without a thorough description of the context actions, interactions of teacher leaders’ authentic interpretation is hampered. Blumer (1969) noted that individuals are active and purposeful when responding to environmental stimuli. Individuals give meanings to social objects based
on their uses for those objects. Social objects can include physical objects, human-made objects, other people, emotions, symbols, ideas, perspectives, and ourselves. It is through symbolic interaction with one another that individuals give meaning to the world (Charon, 1995; Blumer, 1969). Therefore, focus group sessions were held to derive meaning from the survey results obtained through administration of the Teacher Efficacy Scale Survey. Administration of the survey on-line was a cost effective way of accessing large number of study participants. Typically, the return rate of surveys is low and awarding incentives for returns can become cost prohibitive. The return rate from both schools averaged above 50%.

Survey items 1, 4, 9, 11, 13, 16, 19, and 20 (See Table 3.4) were selected for the Urbanville School to develop focus group questions because the items related to the teacher leaders’ equity project of “An Urban Expedition.” Table 3.4 depicts selected personal teaching efficacy (PTE) and general teaching efficacy (GTE) survey items related the Urbanville teacher leaders equity project, Urban Expedition. The project involved teachers forming into teams led by parents to go into the communities where their students lived to discover resources.
Table 3.4: Urbanville Selected Survey Items

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>GTE</th>
<th>PTE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Item 1</td>
<td>The amount a student can learn is primarily related to family background.</td>
<td>75% disagree</td>
<td>25% agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 4</td>
<td>A teacher is very limited in what he/she can achieve because a student’s home environment is a large influence on his/her achievement.</td>
<td>88% disagree</td>
<td>12% agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 9</td>
<td>When it comes right down to it, a teacher really can’t do much because most of a student’s motivation and performance depends on his or her home environment.</td>
<td>94% disagree</td>
<td>6% agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 11</td>
<td>Generally, when parents do not participate in school activities, they “Just don’t care.”</td>
<td>100% disagree</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 13</td>
<td>The attitudes and habits my students bring to class greatly reduce their chances for academic success.</td>
<td>75% disagree</td>
<td>25% agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 16</td>
<td>The hours in my class have little influence on students compared to the influence of their home environment.</td>
<td>88% disagree</td>
<td>12% agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 19</td>
<td>Education is not valued in many homes, teachers must get students to value learning.</td>
<td>69% disagree</td>
<td>31% agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 20</td>
<td>If parents believe in education, then success is achievable for their children.</td>
<td>88% agree</td>
<td>12% disagree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The researcher concluded from the data analysis of the Urbanville survey results that:

1) the respondents have a high sense of general and personal teacher efficacy;

2) 100% of respondents believe that parents care about their children’s education;

3) the respondents believe they have the capacity to effectively teach students regardless of home environment; and,

4) 31% of respondents believe they must get students to value learning resulting in a higher degree of difference in beliefs between the respondents.

These results provided a focal point for developing focus group questions specifically related to the theme of Urbanville teacher leaders equity project. Statements pertaining to parental and home environment were selected to develop probing questions to gain additional insightful information of teachers’ collective views related to the equity.
projects. The participants were confident about their general and personal teaching beliefs to influence positively student outcomes.

Survey items 3, 5, 7, 10, 12, 14, 15, and 17 (See Table 3.5) were selected for the Citiville School because the items related to the teacher leaders’ equity project of “The Vocabulary Wizard.” Table 3.5 depicts selected personal teaching efficacy (PTE) and general teaching efficacy (GTE) survey items related the Citiville teacher leaders equity project. The Vocabulary Wizard. The project involved promoting a school wide focus on vocabulary development and providing classroom teachers with the tools to improve and scaffold vocabulary instruction. Table 3.5 depicts the selected statements that relate to Citiville teacher leaders’ equity project, Vocabulary Wizard. The focus of the equity project dealt purposely with academic instruction and language acquisition.

Data analysis of the Citiville survey results concluded that:

1) 96% of respondents believe if they really try hard, they can get through to even the most difficult or unmotivated students;

2) there was less confidence among respondents regarding general teacher efficacy in comparison to Urbanville teachers; and,

3) 90% of the respondents spend more time on love and care than academics.
Table 3.5: Citiville Selected Survey Items

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>When I really try, I can get through to most difficult students.</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>If a student did not remember information I gave in a previous lesson, I would know how to increase his/her retention in the next lesson.</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>If one of my students couldn't do a class assignment, I would be able to accurately assess whether the assignment was at the correct level of difficulty.</td>
<td>97%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>If a student uses their home or street language, my role as the teacher must be to tell the student how he/she is speaking is incorrect.</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Many of the students I teach are not capable of learning the material I am suppose to teach.</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Even a teacher with good teaching abilities may not reach many students.</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>When a student gets a better grade than he usually gets, it is usually because I found better ways of teaching.</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>When my students need love and care, I spend more time on the love and care than I do on the academics.</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These survey results provided teacher efficacy perspectives that structured the development of focus group questions in relation to Citiville equity project. The focus group questions were specifically related to teaching academics and language acquisition to gain in-depth information on teachers' views based on the theme of the equity project. The participants were more confident in their beliefs about their personal teaching abilities.

An analysis of the data survey results allowed the researcher to develop focus group probing questions to capture the essence of the data. The literature suggests that focus groups were easy to conduct, require less preparation, are inexpensive, and make
accessible the ability to collect a large amount of data in short time. It is also suggested that they can include: a) participants’ unequal participation in the group discussion; b) limited to verbal interaction; c) less control over data, and 4) requires “lively engagement.” However, the professor who conducted the focus groups in this study reported the opposite occurred during all focus group sessions. Using focus group protocols increased equal participation and verbal interaction within the groups, improved control over data, and promoted enthusiastic engagement.

Documents

Document analysis criteria worksheets (Appendix F) were maintained on equity project activities, CTLP coursework, and information gleaned from each individual schools’ improvement plan. Document analysis assisted the researcher in learning the contextual elements of the schools in terms of successes and challenges. Additionally, participants’ coursework from the CTLP assisted the researcher in providing additional avenues to engage the participants to continually reinforce the rapport that had already been established. This variety of data allowed the researcher to examine and triangulate information to draw conclusions.

Key participants of the study reviewed the case study reports during the composition phrase of the research. Validation of findings occurred throughout the four phases using triangulation, member-checks, peer debriefing, use of rich, thick descriptions, and clarification of researcher’s bias (Creswell, 2007).

Triangulation

Triangulation was used as one of the validation strategies to ensure credibility. Creswell (2007) describes triangulation as a process that involves corroborating evidence
from different sources. Multiple sources of evidence were collected to gain various perspectives. Coursework documents and field notes substantiated participants' responses.

**Member-Checking**

In member-checking, the researcher requested participants' views on the credibility of the findings and interpretations (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This technique is believed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) to be, "the most critical technique for establishing credibility" (p. 314). Member-checking occurred during the interviews. The researcher often reviewed main points of the interview and asked for clarification when needed. Participants clarified responses and expanded on viewpoints, in most cases, without prompting from the researcher.

Another strategy used for member-checking was providing rough drafts of the researcher's work for participants to reflect on the accuracy and provide vital observations or interpretations. These methods allowed the participants to correct information or provide additional information and challenge interpretations.

**Peer Debriefings**

Peer debriefings provided an external check of the research process. Lincoln and Guba (1985) define the role of the peer debriefer as a "devil's advocate"; an individual who keeps the researcher honest. The researcher frequently discussed her findings with colleagues who hold doctorates in philosophy and with a doctoral student who asked thought-provoking questions about meanings and interpretations.
Summary

This chapter presents detailed descriptions of the methodology for a qualitative research design and outcomes of the study. The study was designed and carried out according to the symbolic interactionist perspective and case study research design. Data sources included interviews, observations, surveys and documents (A Timeline is outlined in Table 3.6)

Table 3.6: Research Timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase I</th>
<th>Phase II</th>
<th>Phase III</th>
<th>Phase IV</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>→ Semi-structured interviews held with teacher leader teams</td>
<td>→ Field observations</td>
<td>→ Scheduled focus group sessions at both schools</td>
<td>→ Conducted focus group sessions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ Semi-structured interview held with each principal</td>
<td>→ Disseminated Teacher Efficacy Scale Survey electronically</td>
<td>→ Coded &amp; analyzed class assignments and project artifacts</td>
<td>→ Triangulated data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ Established dates and times to view equity project activities</td>
<td>→ Collected class assignments and project artifacts and code</td>
<td>→ Field observations</td>
<td>→ Conducted member peer debriefed data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ Field observations</td>
<td>→ Scheduled &amp; conducted follow-up face-to-face semi-structured interviews</td>
<td>→ Mapped and tallied coded responses</td>
<td>→ Triangulated data</td>
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<tr>
<td>→ Collected class assignments</td>
<td>→ Started initial coding process first round of semi-structured interviews</td>
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<td>→ Peer debriefing</td>
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<tr>
<td>→ Disseminated research study informational letter to faculty</td>
<td>→ Pattern-coding, second round of interviews</td>
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<td>→ Triangulated data</td>
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<td>→ Peer debriefing</td>
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The research notebook, as a tool, recorded the overall case study protocol, timeline and database. The notebook served as a monitoring and documentation tool to maintain organized files of critical information and data collected during the entire research study. Much of the information filed in the research notebook contained detailed descriptions of observations, field notes, and methodology reports. The notebook was a useful tool that assisted the researcher in writing a report detailing a thick, rich description of how teacher leaders collaborate to recognize and challenge deficit thinking and what influence occurred with other classroom teachers from their leadership practices in executing the equity projects. The written report is presented in the next chapter of this study.
CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

Introduction

As stated in Chapter 1, the study was to describe how teacher leaders collaborate to recognize and challenge deficit thinking, as perceived by selected teacher leaders in two urban elementary schools. The study also explored the influence teacher leaders' work had on their colleagues' thinking.

The six teacher leaders were selected employing purposeful sampling. They participated in the Collaborative Teacher Leadership Program (CTLP) over a two-year period. The purpose of the CTLP was to develop collaborative teacher leadership teams who serve as a catalyst within and beyond the classroom to influence others towards equity-based educational practices and school improvement. School leadership teams consisting of three teachers, who were considered as formal or informal leaders in their respective schools engaged in professional development sessions once a month. The diversity-centered leadership professional development sessions entailed urban teacher leaders examining the beliefs within the context of societal issues such as racism, sexism, classism, and other "isms" coupled with studies on team effectiveness as a way to foster expanded collaborative leadership roles in schools. Teacher leadership teams collaborated with key stakeholders to develop and implement the equity projects based on an identified area of need derived from the School Improvement Plan (SIP).

This study was carried out in phases using qualitative methods during the implementation of the equity projects over a six-month period. Semi-structured
interviews, CTLP coursework, and focus groups were the primary methods used in the study. The purpose was to gain deeper understanding of how teacher leaders worked together to identify and address issues associated with deficit thinking and the influence their work had on other classroom teachers.

Findings

This chapter is divided into two sections. The first section outlines the results of the Urbanville School case study and the second section includes the results of the Citiville case study. Each section includes an introduction to each individual teacher leader, responses from each teacher leaders’ interviews, and a compilation of collective perspectives from teacher colleagues and school administration. Verbatim responses highlight key points in the data of the teacher leaders’ individual points of view and their colleagues’ viewpoints that established the categories for each school case.

Urbanville Case Study

Introduction to Teacher Leaders

In this segment, introduction of each participant is through the Collaborative Teacher Leadership Program (CTLP) coursework. General information related to years of teaching experience, feelings about working with diverse students, and overall participation interest in the CTLP is discussed. These introductions accentuate perspectives based on individual meanings derived from interactions and interpretations of the human experience.

Katie. Katie taught at Urbanville Elementary School for nine years, mostly in the primary grades. She credited her principal’s inclusive leadership style for developing a
common shared vision for the school. At the time of this study, Katie taught third grade.

Her desire to become a teacher began at an early age. She wrote in an essay:

My picture of what my students would look like and where my school would be located was completely different than what it has become. I grew up and attended schools in suburban and rural communities. After high school, I attended ... College, where I began to interact with people from different backgrounds. Through a program at college, I had my first opportunity to work in a diverse, low-income, and low performing school. I was amazed at how much different this school looked than the ones I attended. The students had so much less than children I knew growing up, yet they never complained about anything. They were very thankful to get a pencil. From that point, I knew I wanted to learn more about their cultures, why they had less than their peers in more affluent districts, and what I could do to help. The children in my current school, and every other low-income that I have encountered, encouraged me to find answers to my questions due to their unquenchable thirst for knowledge.

Katie further noted, "One question that I find myself continually thinking about is how do I provide an equitable education for all of my students?" Katie's attention to continual learning led her to seek out the principal and share the information about CTLP. She was very interested in the topics listed to be discussed. She was also interested in an equity-based project the would provide funds to bring back to the school. The principal suggested that she share the information at the next staff meeting, and establish a specific
meeting date and time for those who were interested. Katie wrote, “At least ten teachers came to the meeting or showed interest. One person who had agreed, declined and the principal recruited another teacher.” The program accepted team applications of 3 to 4 members in a group. Katie chose to participate in the CLTP to accumulate new knowledge in increasing her understanding of the strategies that engender academic success among urban youth.

Shayla. Shayla, an ELA/AIS instructional specialist, taught at Urbanville for 14 years, and previously taught in another elementary school in the district for two years. She wrote, “People say that home is where the heart is, however.” Shayla’s heart belongs to the school district where she is employed. She revealed in her essay:

My relationship with XYZ began in 1990 when it was a time to choose a school for my daughter, Jessica. Jessica is biracial. I felt it was imperative to place Jessica in an educational environment that would allow her to interact and form friendships with people of different races, cultures, and socioeconomic levels; an environment in which she could grow as an individual yet understand her role in a group or community. Shayla’s teaching career began as a classroom volunteer through the encouragement of a teacher that had assigned Shayla to present lessons to students about India. She further wrote:

I was absolutely thrilled to provide workshops. I was grateful to be given the opportunity to share my heritage in a meaningful manner instead of the assimilation model that was strongly emphasized in my own childhood experiences as a first generation immigrant.
Eventually, her experiences led to a career in teaching. Shayla aspired to share knowledge and expertise. Her basic philosophy is to create an environment that combines both rigorous academics and social development. As she moved toward the second half of her career as an urban educator, Shayla’s interest in the program stemmed from wanting to learn about ways to sustain deep change. She wrote:

How do you maintain the culture of the building if leadership or staff should change? How do you continue to motivate your strong teachers as well as the weaker teachers? How do you continue to build community partnerships? She completed this writing by stating, “I am so very interested in discovering ways to tap into the strengths of our low-performing students. Thus, finding avenues for our low-performing students to shine will ultimately improve academic achievement.

Rob. Rob, a six-grade teacher, has five years of teaching experience. He has taught at Urbanville School for three years. Teaching is a second career choice, and prior to teaching at Urbanville School, Rob worked in community agencies with students and/or adults with disabilities. Rob has a strong dedication to teaching in urban settings. He wrote:

My parents emigrated from Scotland in the early 1960’s and left their home for two reasons; to see the world and to move away from discrimination. This desire to see and learn about people and places in the world was instilled in me at a very young age. As a result, I have lived in a variety of places from the Bronx, New York, to Phoenix, Arizona, to Caerlon, Wales. These experiences have given me a strong understanding
of cultures and educational systems. I am fortunate enough to have married a woman who is equally interested in experiencing and learning about our world. We both share this love of learning with our three children. Learning about different people, places, and cultures is a passion of mine.

Rob continued his essay to explain the discrimination practices his parents experienced in Scotland and its influence on his teaching career. He further clarified:

There were two worlds in Scotland permeating the educational system and the employment sector. As a result of my parents experiences in Scotland and living the city of XYZ in the 1960’s and 1970’s, I developed an early understanding of discrimination and the role education plays in tearing down discriminatory barriers. Consequently, my teaching career is driven by these two passions; to learn about the world and play a part in chipping away at the barriers of discriminations.

This highlighted Rob’s commitment to working with diverse students and his interest in participating in the CTLP. With Rob’s love of learning, it was his hope through participation in the program to become skilled at and create improvement strategies the school and district could embrace that would make the educational system a more dynamic place for urban children, their families, and his colleagues.

Research Question #1: How do teacher leaders in two urban elementary schools collaborate to recognize and challenge deficit thinking?

In the Urbanville case study, five main categories emerged from the semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and coursework. The categories are relational
leadership, group process, commitment to diversity, strategic thinking and planning, and
effects.

According to the teacher leaders in this study, their life and professional
experiences influenced recognition of deficit thinking. Their developed leadership
abilities, establishment of group process, commitment to diversity, strategic thinking and
planning enabled them to challenge deficit thinking and influence its affects on their
colleague's thinking at the Urbanville School. Within these 5 categories, 11 themes, and
8 sub-themes were commonly discussed by the teacher leaders as being pertinent to how
they collaborated to recognize and challenge deficit thinking. The category, effects, was
corroborated through focus group interviews that provided information on the influence
of the equity projects on their colleagues' thinking. Figure 4.1 provides the reader with
an outline of the categories, themes and sub-themes. Following the chart (Figure 4.1),
each theme and sub-theme is discussed with supporting examples from the data.
Figure 4.1. Categories and Themes of How Urbanville Teacher Leaders Recognize and Challenge Deficit Thinking and the Influence on Their Colleagues’ Thinking

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category 1 – Relational Leadership</th>
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<tr>
<td>Theme 1: Self as Leader</td>
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<td>Category 2 – Group Process</td>
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<td>Theme 3: Capacity-building</td>
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<td>Theme 4: Consensus-building</td>
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<td>Theme 5: Developing Common Language</td>
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<td>Category 3 – Commitment to Diversity</td>
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<td>Theme 6: Life Experiences</td>
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<td>Category 4 – Strategic Thinking and Planning</td>
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<td>Theme 8: Institutionalizing the Concern</td>
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<td>Theme 9: Problem-Solving</td>
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<td>Theme 10: Diplomacy</td>
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<td>Category 5 – Effects</td>
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<td>Theme 11: Adapting and Changing Practices</td>
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Interviews

All three teacher leaders and the principal interviewed from the Urbanville School were very engaging and open in their responses as noted by friendly demeanor, leaning near the interviewer during interview sessions, and reflective responses that encompassed personal and professional information. The interviewer’s professional relationship with
the teacher leaders as their instructor in the CTLP Program and collegial relationship with
the principal established a level of trust. These teacher leaders and the principal
welcomed the invitation to participate and made sure that they clearly understood each
question before giving their responses.

Category 1 - Relational Leadership

Each teacher leader discussed the importance of leadership in terms of building
effective relationships with others. These effective relationships are developed by
building trust, having a positive attitude, good listening skills, exhibiting patience, and
being passionate. All three teacher leaders referred to their principal as a role model of
effective leadership. They described their principal as an avid learner, who challenges the
status quo, and models shared leadership by creating and supporting leadership
opportunities for all.

Relational Leadership  Theme One: Self as Leader

The teachers viewed themselves as leaders based on their relationships with their
colleagues. Shayla who serves in a formal teacher leadership role as the ELA
instructional specialist recalled how teacher leaders helped her “by allowing me to make
mistakes and look at those mistakes as part of my growing period, and looking at those
errors as a way of expanding my own thinking.” Shayla now sees herself a change agent
in her formal teacher leadership role. She explained:

I don’t believe that I’ve always viewed myself as a teacher leader.

Reflecting back on that, I never see myself as the person who can actually
make that change happen single-handedly, but I can be that agent, can start
the conversations, can get my peers to take a look at what they're doing that's really working and what's missing, and how to fill those gaps.

Rob, for whom the teaching profession is a second career choice and only his third year teaching in the school, was very appreciative that his colleagues and the principal viewed him as having the potential for leadership. He shared that his colleagues may have thought, "by bringing that positive attitude to children and to adults that conveys he is a comfortable leader, he is a good leader whether it's leading a lesson in the classroom or coming to a meeting and leading."

Katie explained she never thought of herself as a leader until her colleagues affirmed that she is a leader. She further elaborated, "I am a leader because I collaborate really well with people and positive change does seem to happen as a result of that collaboration."

The three teacher leaders defined themselves as leaders based on their abilities to act in credible ways to support students, colleagues and the school in general. They saw leadership as relational in what you model and extend to others that is viewed most often as a reciprocal process.

*Relational Leadership – Theme Two: Interactions*

All respondents addressed building positive relationships through interactions with others. Kouzes and Posner (2002) described leadership as relational throughout every situation and every action. Interactions between adults that are respectful resonated with each teacher leader and the principal. Being respectful is directly linked with honesty in convictions and showing respect for differences.
Shayla noted, “That you really have to be respectful in your communication, and you really can’t be a know it all. You can’t be a teacher leader by being a lone ranger because you won’t be able to move people along. With maturity, you learn that we are all teacher leaders, it’s just dependent on the arena of the discussions.”

Understanding differences and honesty in communicating convictions has developed a school culture of trust and openness where every individual is viewed as having the potential to lead. Katie elaborated by explaining, “Teachers in our building respond positively to other teacher leaders because they can trust and talk to each other.”

Rob recognized that the principal’s role was key to creating the school culture. He stated, “I think our principal has a lot to do with that. I think the atmosphere that she creates here at school fosters this positive outlook on teacher leaders.” The principal corroborated by stating, “I think in terms of our school we’ve tried to find the leader in each teacher. In our small school environment, we see the parts of each person that offers uniqueness or strength, and that leads us in different avenues. Our teachers have learned to respect differences in others. I think that we’ve built respect around that understanding which has been part of our success with kids.”

Building relational leadership requires promoting interactions among individuals based on honesty in communication and a view of individual differences as an asset. This created a school culture of shared leadership and accountability for building a school community where every individual can play a pivotal role in the school’s success. The teacher leaders explained that this was an essential element for being able to generate “buy in” for supporting the equity project.
Rubin (2002) explains the purpose of collaboration as a “means of aligning people’s actions to get something done” (p. 38). To build and maintain effective collaboration, the teacher leaders established collaborative work processes and norms for the way in which they would operate with one another. The collaborative work processes consisted of capacity-building and consensus-building. Individual strengths, role delegation, and compromise emerged as sub-themes. The final theme in the group process category is common language. The teacher leaders defined what they meant by collaboration, deficit thinking and equity that enabled them to effectively communicate with their colleagues, principal, parents, and the community.

**Group Process Theme Three: Capacity-Building**

Capacity-building was seen as a collaborative process of open dialogue to discover individual strengths of the teacher leaders. The principal played an integral role in supporting the collaborative process to build capacity.

*Individual strengths.* For example, Rob stated, “We were very open and very explicit with each other. I found out quickly what each of our strengths were, and then we played on that.” Each teacher leader expressed comparable sentiments and the principal thought it was a “balance of strengths and weaknesses” among the three teacher leaders. Katie revealed:

I think I thought that at least Shayla and I could work well together. I never worked with Rob before so it’s important not to accept what you have in your head as the right thing, but to hear other people’s ideas and either build upon or change your own.
Shayla further elaborated:

I think we’re kind of all on the same page, but when it came to this project, we had very different perspectives walking in. It was about being objective. Our principal was an integral part of this. We had countless discussions. So, the four of us came into this project with our own point of view. We made sure in the process we would include all four of the major things that we were really interested in.

Group Process- Theme Four: Consensus-building

Balancing of strengths and weaknesses was achieved through consensus-building. One aspect of consensus-building was role delegation.

Role delegation. Katie described role delegation as, “The delegation of responsibilities, of breaking down the work so each person is doing something different and not all doing the same thing, and people just doing things that they know needed to be done.” Shayla stated, “We could delegate tasks to each other and trust that it was going to get done, but we delegated the right tasks.” Rob concurred with this assessment because he felt they came to discover each other’s strengths and weaknesses.

Compromise. Another aspect of consensus building was the ability to compromise. Shayla shared: “Well we knew that Katie and I were teaching summer school and that we would be absolutely horrible at maintaining records...so Rob said, ‘I’m not teaching summer school, why don’t I pick up that leg of it.” Throughout the individual interviews, the three teacher leaders explained the importance of compromise. They entered into the CTLP with different ideas about what the equity project should be.
Through frequent discussions and looking at the bigger picture, the teacher leaders moved beyond the personal need for the project. Shayla explained.

For me it was largely about us getting on the same page. It was about what is being culturally responsive. I wanted the Urban Expedition to be more than just an outing. I wanted to make a curricular connection. For Katie, it was more emotional. She wanted to kind of stir things up and get people out there and feel what it’s like. For Rob, it was about how are we going to communicate better with children. He wanted teachers and kids to be able to speak to one another in the most positive manner. The three of us really had different goals and looked at the data for objectivity and included parts of each person’s thinking in the project.

Rob further explained that compromising expanded beyond the leadership team to include the entire faculty. He stated:

We opened dialogue initially with teachers to find out what their concerns were, sometimes what their fears were about teaching and going out into the city, and then discussed that. We discussed what the strengths are of urban schools and what the challenges are, and by opening up that dialogue, I think we got the teachers in the building to start thinking more deeply about teaching and the role of being a teacher, and how important that is.

This ability to compromise extended beyond the professional to thoughtfulness regarding family obligations. Katie stated, “We’re very compromising in term of our families. We all think family comes first even though we are very dedicated to our school. We are
willing to forgive each other for things that come up because that's bound to happen with a team. Part of the teacher leaders' ability to compromise transpired from the development of a common understanding of critical words as they discussed and planned their equity project.

*Group Process  Theme Five: Developing Common Language*

Another component of the group process was developing a common language. The participants engaged in continuous dialogues to define jointly what collaboration, deficit thinking, and equity meant to them as individuals and as a collective group.

*Word meanings.* All three teacher leaders and the principal described collaboration as the ability to work together. However, they expanded on the term and described collaboration as more than working together. Katie stated, “I think collaboration is not just working together, but challenging each other to think in different ways.” Rob expounded by explaining that collaboration was, “collectively coming together for a common goal and then moving in that direction.” Shayla detailed, “You can collaborate at a low level, let me do this for you, let me do that for you, but real collaboration means you are on the same page about what you want for your organization.” She also noted that her principal participated in many discussions with the team to explore the meanings of the terms.

Katie defined deficit thinking as, “actions, body language....I guess mostly comments and the thought that not everybody is capable of something.” Rob explained deficit thinking as, “focusing on excuses for why a person can’t do what either they need to do, or they want to do, for where they need to get.” Shayla viewed deficit thinking as,
“a willingness to blame things on things you don’t have any control over.” All three teacher leaders saw deficit thinking as a lack of empowering self to make a difference.

The term equity evoked similar responses from the teacher leaders. Equity is associated with needs. Shayla commented, “I think equity is something you strive for forever, it’s fluent and it’s about giving people what they need, but what I needed yesterday may not be the same thing I need today or tomorrow.” Rob described equity as, “being conscious of individual needs” and Katie expanded on the term equity by stating, “Equity is not necessarily equal. You don’t get the same thing, but you provide people what people need and how they need it.” From the teacher leaders’ perspective, this need was translated into an obligation to provide the best education for their students. The principal summed up the teacher leaders’ thinking in this way, “I believe that no matter where you live, no matter who you are, you should get the best education possible, and our job is to do that. I think our school is moving towards doing that.”

Clarity in word terminology and having a collective understanding of the terms was a vital component of the teacher leaders’ ability to communicate with others in explaining the equity project. Even though the term deficit thinking was never referred to with other colleagues, the teacher leaders developed a common understanding of the term from participation in the CTLP.

*Category 3 - Commitment to Diversity*

As collaborative leaders, the teachers’ commitment to diversity was predicated on their personal and professional experiences. By participating in professional development focused on equity, social justice and diversity issues, the teacher leaders examined and reflected on their own life experiences and its influence on their worldviews. They also
developed a practical body of knowledge to understand that diversity is not something you accomplish. Diversity was viewed as an on-going process of self-appraisal and engagement with others to promote respectful and inclusive practices. In the process of self-appraisal, teacher leaders were flexible and humble enough to move beyond pre-determined views, engaged in self-reflection, and self-critique of the imbalance of social, political and economic power, revealing their cultural humility.

*Commitment to Diversity- Theme Six: Life Experiences*

The teacher leaders attributed their life experiences as playing a significant role in their willingness to recognize and challenge deficit thinking. This willingness translated into a commitment to diversity.

In 1999, Zlata Filipovic, noted author, wrote the foreword in the book *The Freedom Writer's Diary*, and it reads:

I see a parallel between the Freedom Writers and myself because we've all been subjected to things in our surroundings that could have made us feel like victims. Life brings good things and bad things. It makes people sad and happy in their homes, within their families, in school and on the street. Sometimes we suffer because of many things over which we have no control: the color of our skin, poverty, our religion, our family situation, war. It would be easy to become a victim of our circumstances and continue to feel sad, scared or angry; or instead, we could choose to deal with injustice humanely and break the chains of negative thoughts and energies, and not let ourselves sink into it (p. xiv-xv).
Katie's commitment to diversity arose from the inequities she witnessed within school systems. She recalled the differences in the resources she had as a young student versus the lack of resources in poorer communities. Katie also acknowledged:

I don't think a lot of teacher leaders do recognize deficit thinking. I think in our building we have that...comments people make about students or people in general. I think that is just not sitting back and remaining silent. I think it's taken me a while to get the guts or the nerve to speak my mind, and to know that there's enough other people out there who believe the same things as me. I feel like I'm starting to raise questions about race and disparities between races and our educational system.

Especially for me being a White woman, I feel like I shouldn't have the option to back down because there are so many people discriminated against and who are held down because of what they look like. And I, yes I'm a White woman and that holds me back in some areas, but I have the privilege of being White, so if I have that privilege. I need to take the opportunity to use my voice to speak for others who can't use theirs.

Katie was very candid about her advocacy and commitment to diversity. At a professional workshop, she recalled an experience when a white educator in the group was talking about all the reasons why African-Americans don't succeed. She continued by stating that the White educator talked about parents not caring and "all those negative things that you hear commonly in urban schools." Katie challenged him by asking, "have you ever considered that some parents have three jobs and they can't make it into school?"
They are supporting their students at home in another way. I challenged him to think beyond what he was already thinking.” She also commented on how her commitment to diversity was reinforced through participation in professional development. She added:

The CTLP taught us some new and valuable information related to many -isms, including racism, classism, sexism, and other issues that affect our children. Many things were read about and discussed in the program were things I had already begun researching and confronting my own issues, especially through my personal relationships. The readings and conversations deepened my understanding of these issues and allowed me to share what I have experienced or learned with other educators in our district.

Seemingly, Shayla’s life experiences compelled her to honor diversity and challenge deficit thinking through ensuring increased student performance regardless of ethnic, social or economic status. She stated:

I have to be honest and tell you that I truly did not understand what deficit thinking was up until this year. I think instinctually I had known all my life. Now I can put a name to it. I think all my life I have gasped when I heard people say, they can’t do that. Doing my student teaching, I requested to come to the city because I’m a woman of color. I don’t think those white kids are going to like me and they’re not going to know what I am. They’re going to wonder about what my ethnicity is, and I’m going to spend all of my time just worrying about that. So to me, that was a kind of fear, even though I’m married to a White guy, ‘cause in my upbringing, I
was always the different one. I didn’t want to be the different one, so I said, put me in the city. Everybody asked why would I go to the city. I said because the children are beautiful. Teacher leaders challenge deficit thinking through performance, number one. If I am a teacher who does not believe in deficit thinking, and I want to combat deficit thinking, then I have to show that my kids can read and understand and perform at the same level as any other child, given the fact that I have control over them. I think deficit thinking takes the realm of control away from the person who can really make that change and puts it out into the external.

Rob shared that he believed his commitment to diversity comes from having the ability to have “open honest discussions with peers in challenging deficit thinking…there is a way to do that in a way that isn’t confrontational and upsetting. There have been times when there’s been difficult situations with a teacher, and I’ve challenge them on it.”

Commitment to Diversity: Theme Seven- Cultural Humility

The teacher leaders’ participation in professional development focused on topics such as racism, classism, sexism, and sexual orientation helped to examine their personal lives and beliefs and its relation to their roles as urban educators. Rob noted:

One of the things I found very helpful in the CTLP was some of the videos we watched, the discussions about the “isms” and the discussions about everyday people and challenges we face in our communities. I think there is a lot of power in still images but also video recordings.

Shayla added, “My attending the CTLP helped me to put a name to a lot of things that I’ve been feeling all along, but didn’t really know what is was, including deficit
thinking.” She further explains, “I think the CTLP made a big difference in my personal life. We had more discussions at home than we’ve ever had before about race or any other “isms” which is interesting because I’m in a bi-racial marriage.”

Also, developing and implementing the Urban Expedition Equity Project brought into awareness the extensiveness of the imbalance of power in parent-teacher communications that stimulated on-going dedication among the teacher leaders to promote and sustain authentic and meaningful relationships with parents. Katie commented:

I have developed some of the best relationships I’ve ever had with parents since this project, and I am much more ready to speak to parents now. I’m a shy person, but now I’ve learned so much from the parents. Just seeing a relationship between your teacher and your parent is a huge thing, especially when there are so many issues in society, and with the majority of students being African-American, I can understand why white people are can be viewed horribly. The black community is angry for a lot of reasons based on things that are attached to their history, and rightfully so. Your child goes to school, and you have a white teacher; it might be hard for the parents to accept. But, when you’re seeing that not all White people are bad, and not all African-Americans are bad, then we can come together and work together to help our students. That’s why we are here!

Rob mentioned the importance of using time effectively. He replied, “It is important to carve out time and to find a comfortable place to have honest discussions with parents and that might be in their home, it might be in a coffee shop, it might be
anywhere:” Shayla’s view of authentic and meaningful communication was to embrace cultural humility in the form of releasing control. In developing their equity project, the teacher leaders decided to search for the answers through their parents. Parents served as team leaders for the project and engaged in a courageous and honest education process. Shayla responded, “We asked parents to take the role of leader versus the role of let us tell you what to do, and if you follow through, then your child will have success. This was exactly the opposite and it forced us to let go of some of the control and really trust the parents to know that they know about their communities and their children.”

The teacher leaders’ recognition and respect for others’ cultural knowledge and experiences facilitated a collaborative planning process, not just among them, but extended to parents and the administrator. Their process of continual self-reflection and self-critique fostered a willingness and openness to reexamine patterns of unintentional and intentional “isms.”

*Category 4 - Strategic Thinking and Planning*

As part of the CTLP professional development, the teacher leaders were required to produce and implement a product (equity project) from their collaborative venture. The strategic thinking and planning moved the teacher leaders to action based on a common vision connected to the interests of their school.

*Strategic Thinking and Planning: Theme Eight - Institutionalizing the Concern*

The principal’s role in institutionalizing the concern was crucial to gain support from the faculty and staff for implementing the Urban Expedition Equity Project. Institutionalizing the concern meant generating a heightened sense of awareness about school issues. The principal took an active role developing awareness about school issues
that became embedded in the hearts and minds of its educators. This was a school concern, not an individual concern. The principal stated:

I had been reading a book by Carol Tomlinson on differentiation. We always sit in a circle, and I shared with the staff what was powerful about the book. I read 10 quick bulleted items about differentiation. Even though, I felt the items characterized my teachers, I wanted to go to a deeper level. I wanted us to recognize how our own thinking holds us back, therefore, holds back our kids. I really felt a need to send a message to them.

She further elaborated by explaining her focus of delving deeper into the data. She noted:

In the summer, I had done a session about closing the gap and what is the gap. People say they know what the gap is, but they really don’t know the gap. They don’t understand what the sub-groups are, and what is really causing the gap in achievement. We were nailing the instruction, becoming better educators, but that next step was really about our attitudes. I was really compelled to take a closer look at data, and realized that any gap is really about low expectations.

The principal and the teacher leaders collaborated during the planning phase of the project to promote faculty and staff input, buy-in, and participation. Strategic thinking and planning incorporated ways to institutionalize the concern through data usage, use of problem-solving skills with an emphasis on forward-thinking, and the use of diplomacy. The use of data was the impetus for gaining school-wide support.
Data usage. Examination of data collected and incorporated into the school’s improvement plan was the first step teacher leaders used to generate dialogues among themselves and with their principal. After many dialogues and discussions, the teacher leaders decided upon a course of action for gathering data from staff to provide additional insight on how to proceed in the development of the project. Katie noted:

We began by surveying our staff about what their thoughts were about equity, parent involvement, poverty, cultural responsiveness, experience and comfort with home visits, and experience with a favorite teacher.

After analyzing the survey with our staff we felt we needed to connect with the local community more to support our expeditions and to include families more as partners in education.

Shayla substantiated Katie’s words by stating, “Let’s look at the data. Let’s look at the surveys and see if what we’re thinking is really what it is showing, because maybe we’re being judgmental. We really analyzed that survey and got a lot of feedback from the staff.” She also observed that people said, “I don’t think the kids in the city can pass the ELA exam.” Shayla revealed that she responded by asking, “What kind of information or data can I show them that not only can they see, but what they can experience.”

Strategic Thinking and Planning: Theme Nine – Problem Solving

The teacher leaders asked questions of each other, their colleagues and parents to ascertain potential challenges in the implementing their project. Katie elucidated:

At first, I think our conversations were about how teachers talk to kids, but then we decided we needed to step back and ask ourselves, why do teachers talk that way to kids? Why are they using those kinds of words?
Why would you treat a child that way based on their experience and your experience? The three of us agreed we wanted parents more involved, and that we knew we’d get to know the kids better if we knew the parents better.

Rob and Shayla concurred that the crucial first step was in spending an inordinate amount of time dedicated to asking questions of each other to facilitate meaningful dialogue and understanding for building a collaboration process. The collaborative process included thinking and planning about what they really wanted to achieve.

*Forward thinking.* Developing a common understanding of project goals led to an action plan that built bonds between parents and teachers. Strategically, the teacher leaders were forward thinking by taking into account relationships between colleagues, parents’ individual skills, and the community knowledge level of faculty and staff. Katie stated:

One thing we were very careful about was who was in each group. We wanted to “balance the boats”. We didn’t want people who always work together to be in the same group. We felt this may prohibit them from listening to the guides, and instead, become involved in side conversations about summer activities. We had a basic understanding from the surveys about what people thought about equity, parent involvement, home visits, and poverty. We wanted some people with a higher level of understanding about these things and a lower level to mix together. In addition, we felt some staff members needed more of a challenging experience and others needed to start off with a less challenging experience.
Collectively, the teacher leaders envisioned what they wanted the school to become, and not just academically. They wanted continual improvement that encompassed better relationships among students, faculty, and parents. Shayla’s understanding of her role in assisting the school to continually move forward meant seeing herself as a visionary person who wants to “always do better, or teach better, for her students.” She added, “It always kind of what’s the next step.”

Rob concurred with Shayla’s thoughts about looking forward to the next steps for improving the project. He answered by explaining, “We’re looking long term so we can do this again next year, and we’re planning on doing something deeper, better, like doing the equity project with a service piece spend on it.”

The teacher leaders were forward-thinking in their planning to predict and offset possible problems, and to plan ahead to seek opportunities for equity project improvements. They asked questions for finding solutions, to improve understanding, and to foster in-depth thinking among the teacher leaders in order to meet with success.

James-Wilson (2007) asserts:

Teacher leaders working for equity and social justice believe it is their responsibility to become involved in decisions related to equity issues and to put their interest of students and families before their own. They are willing to take risks to achieve results. Through their work with others, and their professional development, teacher leaders work to enhance their ability to use problem-solving approaches, consider options, predict possible consequences, and take action” (p.134).
Strategic Thinking and Planning: Theme Ten - Diplomacy

The teacher leaders knew that tact and diplomacy in engaging their colleagues and the parents would lead to a successful equity project. They thought it was imperative that colleagues and parents saw the project as a strength-building activity for the purpose of opening honest communications among all stakeholders in a non-judgmental manner. To facilitate, the teacher leaders actualized diplomacy by taking seriously the suggestions, comments, and recommendations of administration, colleagues, and parents. A collaborative process was created to support the sharing of ideas that was valued and acted on. Shayla explained how the principal had countless discussions with them and was an integral part of the planning. She stated, “Our principal had a different perspective about the project. All four of us came into the project with our own point of view. We made sure that in the process we would include all four of the major things that we were really interested in.” Diplomacy in a collaborative process is striking a balance between one’s own interest and the interest of the whole group. Rob elaborated further by explaining the need for diplomacy in engaging with colleagues. He stated, “We’ve always tried to balance the boat when we have to have a dialogue with teachers in the building, so there’s not one person’s viewpoint being heard.”

Katie commented that being diplomatic meant using the parents’ voices to assist their colleagues in better understanding children. She explained, “I think we all believed that the teachers who are not parents treat children differently, or talk to children differently, than the ones who have their own children.” She and her team members felt that some teachers’ approach and tone were not as respectful when engaging with children. Katie further elaborated by stating, “Hearing from parents themselves on these
tours would get through more to them than hearing it from their colleagues.” The teacher leaders’ acts of diplomacy were driven by selflessness. Their egos had no place in building and maintaining relationships with administration, colleagues, and parents.

Focus Groups

Research Question #2: What influence did the teacher leaders’ work have on their colleagues’ thinking?

Findings gleaned from the focus groups sessions determined what influence, if any, did the Urbanville teacher leaders’ equity project had on their colleagues’ thinking. Based on the findings, affected areas were school structure and operations, communication between parents and teachers, and teachers’ instructional practices.

Category 5 - Effects

Danielson (2006) purports, “All leadership activities take place within a cultural context encompassing the school’s culture and ethos. This culture influences not so much what people do but how they do it” (p. 45). As a result of the equity project, Urbanville teacher leaders and their colleagues identified ways in which their participation influenced their thinking in relation to their views about parents: a) supporting academic success; b) caring about their children; c) valuing education; d) communicating with parents; and, e) recognizing students’ strengths. Direct quotes from the interviewees defined their interpretations. Many responses to sub-set questions overlapped and interviewees espoused the same or gave similar interpretations. These quotes captured some of the interpretive thoughts of all nine Urbanville participants followed by quotes from the three teacher leaders.
Effects – Theme Eleven: Adapting and Changing Practices

The teacher leaders and their colleagues shared how they have adapted and changed their practices. These altered practices stemmed from an enhanced critical consciousness and openness to having crucial conversations among faculty and parents fostered by their participation in the equity project, Urban Expedition.

Critical consciousness. Critical consciousness is awareness that our ideas and beliefs come from a set of life experiences and having the ability to trace our ideas to our experiences (Hinchey, 2006). It is also the ability to admit that other people’s ideas and beliefs are equally valid. Critical consciousness involves accepting what is normal for one person may not be equally normal for another person (Hinchey, 2006). The participants explained how developing a greater awareness validated, reinforced or changed their level of understanding of parents and the community in which they worked. Two participants agreed with their colleague when she replied:

What I think the Urban Expedition did for me was it kind of reinforced the struggle that so many still had to come across. There were wonderful things that you got to see within the community. But it still brought to life, and kept fresh in my mind: even though parents want what’s best, the day-to-day struggles that can be so difficult for so many of our parents is something that we must keep in mind, not so much as an excuse, but just as a fact of life. If you don’t have a car and you have to walk two miles to get to a grocery store, that impacts your daily life, and those kinds of things then relate back to the classroom.
Another participant commented:

A lot of times people may view that parents are not participating in school functions or doing things because they don’t care when in actuality some of my parents are working three jobs, working at night, but might be home during the day. So like was mentioned before, the Urban Expedition really didn’t change my view about how I felt my parents viewed their child’s education success...but it did kind of make me take to heart what they go through and kind of see the struggles they encounter.

Respondents dialogued similar point of views in responding to the focus group questions.

To expand on the sub-theme of critical consciousness, a participant answered:

The Urban Expedition actually kind of gave experiences in walking in the shoes of our parents. Being able to interact with our parents that led our tours and getting to ask them questions, and talk about the struggles, caused me to reflect about how hard it must be to balance everything and still be able to give care to their kids. Not being a parent, I don’t have that understanding of what it is to be a parent. but it made me appreciate the parents that are in my classroom even more...that they just amaze me how they do it all.

Some respondents spoke about their increased knowledge of community resources. This knowledge improved their confidence and ability to assist parents. The participant explicated:
I just want to piggyback on what --- said about the Urban Expedition.

What impacted me is when we went out into the communities. We saw so many other community resources that could be brought back into the classroom, and being a special education teacher, we have students with needs. We can bring these resources to our students and parents.

One participant further added to this issue when she espoused, "It changed my view to realize how many more community services were out there that some of the teachers were unaware of." Some teachers saw becoming conscious of community resources as an opportunity to provide support to parents. Another respondent replied:

I guess what the Urban Expedition sheds to light that even though there are parents within our building or school who don’t have the supports and who are struggling, there is still the basic care of their children. They may not be meeting all of their worldly needs, but in terms of emotional support, the basic care is there. It opened my eyes of what was within specific neighborhoods that I could perhaps help support a parent.

A participant concurred and interpreted by adding:

I don’t think it exactly changed my views. I think it more enhanced my views than changed it. I was able to see a little more clearly the needs of the community that maybe I was aware of, but not specifically looking into neighborhoods, seeing what’s available for the kids to have academic aftercare.

This was followed-up by her colleague sharing how the Urban Expedition reinforced her views on student strengths, and how her students come to school wanting to become successful. She stated:
My students don’t have some things readily available to them and yet they come to school, persevering, doing their homework, making sure they have all their work done, being a model citizen, making the right choices, and wanting to do well. Some have real hardships and are not making excuses. You’ve got to persevere no matter what. You’ve got a problem, let me know, let me see what I can do to help you out. I think I’m a little more quick to assist and get things done.

Other comments made by participants in the focus group addressed how their views of parents changed by stating:

R 1 - I always thought the parents cared about their children, but after talking to parents in the neighborhood; talking about some of the problems they have; talking about the questions that they have about their children, about their education, I think I value their concerns about their children more because they all care deeply about their children. The way they now come to us and ask questions and communicate with us are all very different, and I saw that through the Expedition.

R 2 - I always feel that parents care about their children. It did change me slightly when you’re out in the community, and you hear those parents talking about their children as we met some of the parents in the community. Yeah, just brought it home and made it more real; these are real parents; these are real kids...they do care about their kids. They can’t always be there.

Katie concurred with these teachers observations when she commented:
I would say that there’s a good handful that really have looked at how they teach students and what kind of relationship they have with them, and not just the students, but especially with the parents. I think having our parents lead those tours and be so involved and dedicated to being there, following up with the things that they’ve done in our school this year, has shown our staff that parents really do care about their kids in urban education, and that they want to help, to make a difference. It’s starting to change how the teachers operate in their everyday lives with their classrooms and their students.

Conversations. The teacher leaders and classroom teachers often referred to the conversations among themselves and with parents as a vital adaptation or change in their school practices. In the book, *Schools That Change: Evidence-Based Improvement and Effective Leadership Change* (2008), author, Dr. Lew Smith writes, “The subjects of our conversations reflect what we consciously or unconsciously consider important, what we believe in, what we value” (p. 195). The participants explained how participation in the Urban Expedition Equity Project improved their communication with parents. Each participant expressed developing a level of confidence in having crucial conversations with parents that they were either uncomfortable having or did not have the courage to have before participation in the project. One participant stated:

It has influenced my ability for communicating the restrictions that a lot of our families face with jobs, transportation, child care and so forth, to the point of when I am calling for a conference. I offer to meet the parent needs, like do a phone conference as opposed to this is when I have
available time, and finding ways to be more flexible. Finding out how many of my parents worked evenings was surprising. For this year, I really am delving into where my parents are coming from, what is their situation and really trying to understand each individual family unit as a separate entity, and what I can do to support and communicate with them.

Other respondents shared similar viewpoints and replied:

R 3 - In terms of communicating with parents, besides having a lot more agencies that we’re aware of that we can get help for the parents, and we can suggest to parents if they have concerns, I think we know that we can go now to our parent liaison. Also, I think it opened up for us the need to divide parents up in terms of the areas the kids are coming from because of time consuming public transportation.

R 4 - I think what the Urban Expedition experience showed me is that parents have a lot to say, and very often, we just don’t hear it because we may not have the exposure as we did before this program.

R 5 - My ability after the Urban Expedition to communicate with parents was deepened because I was able to understand where the parents were coming from, that maybe if they didn’t have a car or ways of communicating, that we could find different alternatives.

R 6 - I think it made me more patient. Even though I knew all the struggles that were out there, it made me realize that I had to be more flexible.
R 7 - The experience influenced my ability to communicate with parents in what I do in regards to tutoring help. Having the Urban Expedition I am more aware of which zip code my students live in and where I can find a tutoring center. So just being able to answer certain parent questions and being more aware of their community.

R 8 - The experience in terms of communicating with parents gave me a little more confidence. In the past, I’ve always had an open communication with parents, but if a parent told me they were homeless or whatever, I would have empathy and perhaps try to do something, but I really didn’t know what to do. It is so much easier now after the whole experience, if a parent says something like ‘money is really tight,’ or ‘I’m struggling for food.’ I can react so much faster now. I know who exactly to run to. I just feel like I have a bit more control over assisting my parents. So I see a big change in me with communicating with parents.

You’ve got a problem, let me know, let me see what I can do to help you out. I think I’m a little more quick on trying to assist and get things done.

The teacher leaders had similar perspectives about the effects of the project on their colleague’s thinking based on their interactions. They shared how the experience of leading the equity project influenced how the school changed some of its practices. For example, Shayla reported:

I think the biggest change in communication for me is my own listening and to be able to really effectively listen before I respond to a parent in any way. I also agree with Katie that I feel much more comfortable now
speaking to parents about race of any of the "isms" that before I don't think I would have had the courage to bring out. I feel as though I can say those things now without feeling defensive myself or feeling as though I've insulted somebody. It's a conversation that can be had in a meaningful manner. We've had some of these conversations, even at our school-based planning team meetings, and it did not become heated.

Another viewpoint Shayla expressed was, "I think our project opened the doors to more in-depth conversation, but my gut feeling is we still have a long ways to go. I don't think one project is going to erase deficit thinking, but I think what it's allowed us to do is have conversations about it now."

Katie explained how the Urban Expedition had a huge effect on the PTA. She stated:

I think a lot of the parents who helped to create the tours for the Urban Expedition have their own eye opening experiences with their own community. Some of their biases and prejudices against where they live, and what they assume about where they live came to light. Those voices are on the PTA and they've come to rethink a lot of things to help people in our community who may not have the opportunities that others have.

The Urbanville PTA no longer charges a fee for parents to participate. The teacher leaders believed the decision was made as a result of parents' involvement with leading the equity project. Additionally, Shayla further elaborates by adding:

I think on top of that there's finally an avenue now that's opened these conversations. That's what I think is the biggest impact of the Urban
Expedition. It has opened the door to have those conversations in two different ways, between teachers and parents, but also among teachers and among parents. I think now there’s a lot of people here who went through the Urban Expedition and are saying to themselves, “I don’t want that deficit thinking going on.”

Rob concurred with his colleagues’ observations by replying:

Because of our Urban Expedition, there’s this different atmosphere where we can open up these dialogues with each other and feel more comfortable in having these open discussions; these really productive dialogues.

The classroom teachers who participated in the focus groups substantiated the observations. One respondent’s comment summarized the Urban Expedition Equity Project by divulging:

I guess to build off what everyone has said, the three teachers that actually did this project and brought it to us provided a great opportunity for us to really help educate ourselves and make us better professionals and teachers in our setting. We thrive on opportunities like this to educate ourselves and we appreciate being a part of the project. This project was so perfect for our school. The teachers keyed into what we needed and what we could do to benefit our school as teachers. It was just phenomenal and such a great experience!

Coursework

From the coursework, the Urbanville teacher leadership team described their process of collaboration employing a symbiotic metaphor (See Figure 4.2 and Figure
4.3.). The metaphor reflects the collective viewpoint of the teacher leaders about how they collaborated to recognize and challenge deficit thinking through the development and implementation of the equity project.
Tree-Cycle of Collaboration for the Urban Expedition

Universally, trees are often seen as powerful symbols of life's most valued virtues. "The Tree of Life" often represents wisdom, generosity, protection, strength, beauty, hope, and regeneration. Trees can also serve as a symbol of human growth as we draw from our deep and strong roots to strengthen our trunk. With a strong trunk, the tree can now extend its branches skyward and grow life-sustaining leaves. The tree can bear fruit for all to share and regenerate with nurture and care.

Our tree serves to embody the collaboration cycle responsible for the success of the Urban Expedition. Our families, principal and instructors are our roots. They provided us with essential nutrients to learn and grow. Our patient families gave us unconditional love, honest feedback, words of encouragement and the gift of time to pursue our goals. Our thoughtful principal, embraced our ideas, motivated us to strive for excellence and generously offered financial support. Our wise instructors filled our brains with new knowledge, built our confidence as teacher leaders, and inspired us to branch!

We, as the trunk, grew stronger and extended our reach to find others willing to support our work. Now our tree began its skyward ascent as we connected with the true leaders of the Urban Expedition, parent expedition leaders. The tree continued to grow tall and strong. Almost immediately new branches and leaves emerged as we deepened our relationships with school staff and members of the community at large.

As the year progressed, we began to witness the fruits of our labor. As a staff, we felt more confident in communicating with parents. We developed a greater sense of understanding and respect for each other, our students and their families. Many staff are now excited to engage in more active and responsive forms of teaching and learning through stronger curricular connections to our local communities. We continue to maintain and develop a culture of high expectations in which we place the needs of our students first.

Our tree is firmly rooted in our school and in our teaching lives. It has truly become a "Tree of Life." We look forward to growing together as we continue to reach new heights as a school community.
Figure 4.3: Urbanville Teacher Leaders Pictorial View of Collaboration
Citiville Case Study

Introduction to Teacher Leaders

In this section, Citiville teacher leaders are introduced through the Collaborative Teacher Leadership Program (CTLP) coursework. General information related to their interest, commitment to continuous learning and development, years of teaching experience, stance about working with diverse students, and overall participation interest in the CTLP is highlighted.

Cynthia. Cynthia has been in the teaching profession for eight years, where four of those years she has been an intermediate teacher at Citiville School. Becoming a teacher was a second career change. Her current assignment as a grade 5/6 inclusion teacher assisted Cynthia in developing her coaching and leadership skills. She has learned to co-exist in a classroom that required her to share space and teaching practices. This team teaching experience has encouraged Cynthia to seek opportunities to fulfill her goal of becoming a formal instructional leader. She wrote:

My goal is to become an instructional leader in the XYZ School District; first, by becoming a mentor to new teachers in the district and eventually a building specialist. It is vital that I keep abreast of and be knowledgeable concerning the latest research data, proven methods, and strategies. In order for my students to be successful, I participate in the district’s professional development opportunities and collegial circles.

Cynthia continued in her writing stating:

I am constantly seeking strategies and ways to improve my students’ performance and their success. The CTLP will provide me with the
leadership skills to become a leader within my school and an advocate for diverse and low-performing students. My background has been primarily in an inclusive/integrated classroom. I create engaging and motivating lessons to ensure that all students experience success. My commitment to my students extends beyond that of the classroom. I am active in afterschool activities, basketball games, talent shows, mother/son dinner, father/daughter dinner, and performing arts. I strongly believe that my students see and feel that I am concerned with their social and emotional growth as well as their academic growth. I firmly believe that my students know that I am genuinely concerned about their success, and it improves their self-esteem and drive to do their best. I set high and achievable goals for my students, and they know that I have their best interest at heart.

Cynthia’s deeply felt commitment to her students extends beyond the classroom. In her personal statement regarding what she hoped to gain by participating in the CTLP, it was espoused that she would, “like a more visible role within the building as a leader by modeling effective lessons, and assisting the leadership team with research and data that can be utilized to improve student test scores.” She believed her participation in the CTLP would play an integral role in becoming an effective instructional leader within her school and in the district.

Grace. Grace, a fourth grade teacher, taught twenty-nine years at the Citiville School. She has worked at a variety of grade levels and believed she would bring her own skills and experiences as an educator to the CTLP. She wrote:
Throughout my time as an educator, I have worked with students at a variety of academic levels and abilities. I have worked with students with severe and mild disabilities, students who are working on grade level, and those who are above. I have taught a variety of grade levels and age groups. As an elementary teacher, knowledge of every subject has been an expectation. Recently, as my school science liaison, I have worked with the science department in many capacities. I have also been able to attend a variety of professional development training sessions to help me work toward becoming a science resource for our building, and increase my knowledge base. Involvement in a variety of teaching situations has also been a part of my experience. Over the years as a special education teacher, I team taught with regular education teachers as well as special education teachers.

Grace’s vast experiences provided her with many collaborative opportunities. She explained that, “currently, as a Major Achievement Program (MAP) teacher, I have been involved in a modified teaming situation.” This has afforded Grace the opportunity to participate further in extended day learning opportunities and increased involvement with planning for a variety of students. The array of Grace’s experiences provided her the ability to relate to diverse situations and experiences that other members in the CTLP would bring into the sessions. Grace also revealed:

The CTLP would provide an opportunity for personal growth and help me use the skills that I will develop for the betterment of our school. I do have many attributes as an experienced educator, and I am willing to increase
my knowledge base in all areas. I would like to be able to inspire others to work together to achieve common goals. To advance our students forward, we need to be able to look outside our own classrooms and look for a cultural change in our whole building that will move all students. The Collaborative Teacher Leadership Program’s vision seems to hold promise, as well as tools, that will help us become leaders.

Grace’s assertion that educators need to lead beyond the classroom served as a channel for moving outside her comfort zone and seeing the possibilities in working with two teachers who she only knew on a superficial level.

Dee, Dee, an ELA instructional specialist, taught for fifteen years, where six of those years have been at the Citiville School. Throughout her career, Dee has placed professional emphasis on the implementation of effective, rigorous instruction. She has a profound belief that as an educator she has and continues to make a difference in students’ lives through the delivery of quality instruction. She wrote:

My interests have always focused on two essential questions: “What else can I do to help my students succeed” and “What do I need to do for myself to prepare them for the journey?”

Dee continued by explaining how she has been devoted to professional learning “through collegial learning circles, professional development opportunities, course work, teacher action research, team-collaboration, curriculum mapping and analyzing student data.” She further exemplified her philosophy of teaching in the words of Richard Henry Dann, “He who dares to teach must never cease to learn.”
Dee viewed her formal role as an instructional leader as an active advocate for students in the areas of affective development and academic intervention. In her efforts to support students, she has worked towards the development of multi-cultural school environments where a sense of community is demonstrated among students, educators, and parents. Dee’s desire was to “inspire students and staff members to embrace diversity and to appreciate multiple perspectives.” She saw this as “a huge step in encouraging respect and sensitivity to cultural differences, which requires a commitment to social responsibility.”

Dee’s additional thoughts about her interest and participation in the CTLP revealed in her writing:

I am interested in participating in the program to help promote life-long success for all students by collaborating with others to promote academic achievement as well as social and emotional development.

Simultaneously, I would like to sharpen my leadership skills through more collegial learning and effective learning experiences. I would like to pursue a more vital role as an asset to my school community, including supporting my building administrator in any way that I can. I am also interested in learning what research says about effective school improvement projects in other urban districts around the country.

The three teacher leaders from the Citiville School expressed a dedication to continuous learning to improve self and to influence others within their school community to grow and learn for the sake of the students.
Research Question #1: How do teacher leaders in two urban elementary schools collaborate to recognize and challenge deficit thinking?

In the Citiville case study, five main categories emerged from the semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and coursework. The categories were servant leadership, group process, commitment to learning, strategic thinking and planning, and effects.

The Citiville School teacher leaders viewed professional learning as a critical element of enhancing their leadership abilities and understanding of group process. Their commitment to learning, strategic thinking and planning, empowered them to recognize and challenge deficit thinking and promote conditions to have an effect on their colleagues' thinking. Within these 5 categories, 11 themes, and 7 sub-themes were commonly discussed by the teacher leaders as being pertinent to how they collaborated to recognize and challenge deficit thinking. The category, effects, was substantiated through focus group interviews that provided information on the influence of the equity projects on their colleagues' thinking. Figure 4.4 provides the reader with an outline of the categories, themes and sub-themes. Following the chart (Figure 4.4), each theme and sub-theme is discussed with supporting examples from the data.
Figure 4.4: Categories and Themes of How Citiville Teacher Leaders Recognize and Challenge Deficit Thinking and the Influence on Their Colleagues' Thinking

Category 1 - Servant Leadership
Theme 1: Self as Leader

Category 2 - Group Process
Theme 3: Capacity-building
Theme 4: Teamwork
Theme 5: Developing Common Understandings

Category 3 - Commitment to Learning
Theme 6: Life Experiences
Theme 7: Professional Development
Theme 8: Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Category 4 - Strategic Thinking and Planning
Theme 9: Data-driven decision-making
Theme 10: Instructional Support

Category 5 - Effects
Theme 11: Reinforcing and Adapting Practices

Sub-themes: Varied Instruction Conversations Motivation

Interviews

The three Citiville School teacher leaders, assistant principal, and principal interviewed were impassioned, receptive, and candid in their responses as noted by welcoming behavior, attentiveness during interview sessions, and thoughtful responses that provided personal and professional information. The interviewer's professional relationship with the teacher leaders as their instructor in the CTLP Program and
congenial relationship with school administration established a level of trust. These teacher leaders and school administration were amenable to the invitation to participate. The researcher made sure that they clearly understood each question before giving their responses.

Category I - Servant Leadership

Robert K. Greenleaf (1977) defined servant leadership as an approach to legitimate power and greatness. He described servant leaders serving others from a values-based perspective while maintaining focus on organizational goals. Characteristics of the values-based leadership are calling, listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to growth of others, and building community (Barbuto & Wheeler, 2007). Modern educational theorists such as Bolman, Deal, Sergiovanni, Covey, Fullan, and Heifetz made reference to this form of leadership as essential for being effective. The three teacher leaders and school administration from the Citiville School addressed serving others as an effective way to lead.

Servant Leadership - Theme One: Self as Leader

The teacher leaders self-view of leadership developed through avenues of facilitating growth amongst themselves and those who work with them, and devoting themselves to meeting the needs of others. Cynthia described her leadership style as, "being open, being able to listen and being able to surround myself with getting others to walk with me, not so much with me being out in front." Her analogy of this type of leadership was explained through the skills she observed on the CNN documentary about
African-American leaders, namely Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Cynthia continued her explanation in the following manner:

I started thinking about how I am in this teacher leadership program.

When you look at Dr. King, what skills did he have that made him an effective leader? It was the people around him, his aids, and his attorneys.

If you look closely, he always had a close group of people near. I even noticed while they were marching. These people were all standing at his side. He wasn’t always in front leading. And being an inclusion teacher for the last 3 years, I have another teacher and teacher assistant who work with me. We’ve learned to be leaders side by side.

Cynthia further elaborated that she saw herself as a strong leader. “one that’s willing to lead, one that’s willing to follow, and one that’s willing to surround myself with people to help the goal to be met.” The other teacher leaders shared this perception of self as leader. Even though Grace and Dee described themselves as shy people, Grace stated, “I’m a very hard worker. I’ve always been, and I’m willing to do anything that anybody asks me to do.” Grace explained this statement within the context of her willingness to assist colleagues and school administration in meeting the needs of adults and students to support academic achievement.

Dec’s view of self as a leader highlights the collective view of her team members, especially given her formal role as an ELA instructional specialist in her school. She stated, “I never turn anybody away. A lot of times, if teachers need anything, they’ll come and I try to meet their needs.” The assistant principal agreed with the teacher leaders’ views of self in that she explained, “They tend to listen with a clear head, and
they’re open to new suggestions.” The principal described teacher leadership at the Citiville School as, “We do the colleague mentoring, so when other teachers have problems, they will go to each other to help out.” From the school administrators’ perspective, the teacher leaders’ belief in helping others as a leadership arrangement has promoted stewardship that has embodied the teacher leaders contributing to the greater good of the school community. They also felt this form of leadership has encouraged receptiveness, genuine interest in the views and input of others, and positive interactions among educators.

**Servant Leadership—Theme Two: Interactions**

The teacher leaders mentioned positive interactions as having the ability to communicate well with others and engage others on a foundation of trust. Kouzes and Posner (2002) assert, “Handy as virtual tools are for staying in touch, they are no substitute for positive face-to-face interactions” (p. 258) and “At the heart of collaboration is trust.” (p. 244). Cynthia expounded on this idea by explaining her experience with other teacher leaders in that, “They came to us individually and said, ‘what do you need?’ You know your students. What do you need for us to do to help you plan so that students can be more successful.” She expressed on-going positive interactions of support created opportunities for teachers to work in teams.

Grace responded about her credibility as an educator that has developed over time in urban education. She attributed a positive attitude as a reason for her capacity to lead based on the number of positive face-to-face interactions with colleagues over many years. Grace revealed:
negative thinking. They believe children can learn, and the teacher leaders can bring people who are on the fence to their side by communicating effectively. They’re open and honest. They don’t hide anything from the school.

The principal added by stating, “I think people have opened up the trust. They’ve seen over the years how much we’re doing and how much we’re focused, and it’s all about kids.” She also espoused, “You have to be able to communicate, not just orally, but in writing, and a lot of my teachers are able to do that. And when we say communicate, you have to be able to communicate effectively.” The teacher leaders are viewed at Citiville School as selfless with valuable communication skills that promote respectful interactions and provide service to others.

Category 2 - Group Process

Danielson (2006) states, “The skills of collaboration are central to a teacher’s success as a teacher leader” (p. 133). Establishing group norms required the teacher leaders to determine the expectations of the group. Additionally, the teacher leaders had to ascertain what each group member could expect from one another. Since the principal requested the three teachers to join as a team and apply for entrance into the CTLP, the teacher leaders spent time getting to know each other better as individuals, not just as professional colleagues. The principal stated that she encouraged the three teachers to apply to the leadership program. Since “they are three of the ones that teachers would go to anyway, and I wanted to enhance their ability to work with teachers.” Emergent themes of capacity-building, teamwork and developing a common understanding described the teacher leaders’ collaborative work processes. Individual strengths, being
I seem to get along with everybody. I use to teach special education, and I have a closeness with those people in terms of how I can understand what they’re going through and their perspective on some of the things we do as a staff. Now, I’m at the other extreme teaching math, and I’ve also taught regular education population, summer school, extended day, and a lot of other things. I think that it helps me have a global look at the school, because I have been in so many different positions. I think that adds a little credibility to my leadership skills because people say, “Oh well, she did that!”

Grace’s reflection of her interactions amongst colleagues was built on trust and her willingness to share knowledge and resources with others. Dec confirmed the importance of building trust among colleagues by divulging:

The word I would use to describe my relationship with teachers is trusting and that wasn’t always there. They always come to the room, needing things, and I would never turn anybody away. I try to meet the needs of all the teachers when they come. They may come for a graphic organizer they can use, or they may come to ask what kind of picture book could I use to go with this strategy. I always sit there, talk with and get feedback from them.

The collaborative leadership process sustained through trust and effective communication was substantiated by school administration. The assistant principal elucidated:

Communication would be number one. They’re able to communicate their vision and their ideas to colleagues in a positive way so that it’s not
task-oriented, the ability to compromise, and shared values emerged as sub-themes. The teacher leaders created time amongst themselves to work as a team towards a common goal.

*Group Process – Theme Three: Capacity-Building*

Capacity-building was viewed as capitalizing on the individual strengths of each team member. This became especially significant as explained by Grace when she stated:

> It’s hard because we’ve never worked closely together before. It wasn’t like we really chose to work together necessarily. Our principal put us together as a group. I mean if I had actually picked those two people to work with, I’m not sure I would because I don’t know them. But now I think it’s really helped me to get to know them more. I think that’s been really good, and it’s amazing that we do get along so well.

Grace interpreted getting to know the other teacher leaders in her group as building on each other’s individual strengths.

*Individual strengths*. For example, Grace noted, “Everyone has a strength, like my two partners feel more comfortable being in the forefront. I rather do the behind the scenes kind of thing.” As a case in point, Cynthia espoused “We have three distinctive personalities. We feed off each other.” Dee described the “feeding off” of each other as, “we look at our strengths in the group. We all have different strengths, and we kind of look at that.” She further explained, “When I look at people’s strengths, I try to utilize them wherever I can. what’s going to be beneficial for the entire group.”
The three teacher leaders depicted teamwork as a cooperative and collaborative process of working together; being task-oriented and having the ability to compromise were seen as necessary in their ability to lead. The principal clarified this viewpoint by stating, “When I hear the word collaboration, I think of a team. In order to run this school, you have to work as a team. An administrator can’t do it alone, specialists can’t do it alone, you have to do it together in order to move a school.”

Task-oriented. Being task-oriented meant understanding the need for organization and the delegation of tasks suited to the individual strengths of each team member. Grace emphasized, “Splitting the work up has helped in getting more organized as a team.” She further elaborated, “As a group, we actually divided up the tasks.” Grace illustrated an example by explaining how the team launched a vocabulary home project with parents. She detailed:

We divided up the classrooms. We talked to all the children and explained to them what the home project was going to be, and where they could get the papers. All three of us divided up that task, and then we determined where the location of the papers would be, and where the kids could come and pick up the vocabulary activities.

She also noted the challenges with finding the time to work on the equity project. She mentioned, “We’ve all tried to take on a leadership role, but I think it’s hard to get out of the classroom. Dee has more flexibility because of her formal leadership role in the school.” Dee affirmed Grace’s statement sharing the importance of organization. She stated, “It’s being organized. You work on this part, I’ll work on that part in order to
distribute tasks to avoid one person having all of the responsibility.” Cynthia and Dee revealed that being task-oriented was complemented by a readiness to be flexible and compromising.

**Compromise.** Compromising included demonstrating respect for each other’s ideas and being considerate of each other’s time constraints. Dee commented, “It’s being able to agree when you disagree about something.” Cynthia described how one team member used mediating skills because of strongly held positions in order to reconcile differences that enabled the team to move forward. She stated, “We both like to see our own programs off the ground, and sometimes our way of doing that may not be what everyone may agree on. We can be stubborn, but then we have that person in the middle who helps us to stay focused and reminds us that we’re doing this for the school.”

Additionally, Grace divulged:

I think the three of us are all very busy and not just in school, but at home.

We all have children still at home, and I have a lot of issues with my mother. I know Cynthia has her grandmother. There’s a lot of family things that we have to take care of.

Compromise was viewed as critical to the teacher leaders’ ability to perform as an effective team. Dee supported this perception stating, “When we meet as a group, I don’t look at myself as everything having to go my way. I always look at the group and say, ‘What ideas do you have?’ and everybody shares and it’s no top down thing.”

**Group Process – Theme Five: Developing Common Understandings**

Developing common understandings required the teacher leaders being open to learn about each other. Even though the teachers worked in the same school, rarely did
they sit on the same school committees, and/or work on any previous projects. They knew each other superficially. However, their principal discerned their individual leadership abilities and determined their compatibility for becoming a leadership team to address equity issues in the school.

*Shared values.* Kouzes and Posner (2002) stress that for values to be truly shared, people must be able to, “enumerate the values and have common interpretations of how those values will be put into practice” (p. 82). The teacher leaders worked toward a unified voice from engaging in dialogue and discussion about their personal beliefs and educational values. Cynthia noted:

We’ve gotten to know each other on a more personal basis. We’ve found that we share a lot of the same family values. I knew that she was an awesome teacher, but I never felt comfortable just walking into her classroom. I’ve found that she’s so committed to her students and the only thing she wants to do is teach all day long. Now that we’re working together, I really feel privileged because she’s such a good teacher.

Cynthia continued this observation by explaining how the teacher leaders shared values related to instructional practices. She discussed at length:

What’s interesting about this leadership team is that all three of us are very strong, passionate teachers, and we were thinking about how are we all going to work together. We realized that we share a lot of the same ideas and a lot of the same beliefs about what we need for our children to be successful. No matter what we’re doing, we find a lesson that we can teach. If we’re doing something outside the classroom on weekends, we
are thinking about how we can use this in our classroom, how we can do this for our kids.”

Grace and Dee acknowledged Cynthia’s perspectives by commenting on how well they worked on the team, and how they complemented each other based on having similar personal and professional beliefs and values.

*Category 3 - Commitment to Learning*

As collaborative teacher leaders, the teachers defined their commitment to learning within the context of their personal and professional experiences. Their dedication to learning was based on a fundamental belief of life-long learning as educators influenced by their personal experiences. They saw their participation in professional development with a focus on equity, social justice, and diversity issues as the bedrock of having the capacity to share knowledge with colleagues and being of service to the school community. Professional development served as the vehicle for how they themselves recognized and challenged deficit thinking. The teacher leaders’ insistence that students could engage in high levels of learning and that this translated into effective teaching practices of vocabulary skills utilizing culturally relevant pedagogy served as the focal point of their equity-based project. As urban educators, the teacher leaders looked to incorporate innovative ideas and implement proven vocabulary strategies intended to improve student learning. They saw this as a way to address deficit thinking, especially since all shared how they were personally touched by other people’s beliefs and attitudes about the inability of children to learn.
Commitment to Learning - Theme Six: Life Experiences

The teacher leaders attributed their life experiences as playing a considerable role in their willingness to recognize and challenge deficit thinking. Each teacher leaders’ philosophy of life and teaching defined their commitment to continuous learning. John Perricone (2005) authored the book, *Zen and the Art of Public School Teaching*, in which he states:

> Never in my life I have been more convinced that it is our philosophy of life that dictates our philosophy of teaching, and that it is this “philosophical identity” (or lack of same) that we envelope ourselves in each day as we walk into our classroom that ultimately distinguishes those who find joy and passion in the profession from those who find drudgery and then just pick up a paycheck two weeks later (p. 25).

Dee exemplified the philosophy of life connected to her teaching by disclosing:

> I personally have a child who has a learning disability. I thank God that I’m in the position I am in right now because I’m her advocate. I have to make certain that she’s getting what she needs on a daily basis where she is, and it hasn’t been easy. It has been a struggle ever since she was in preschool. I make sure that I’m there, and I make sure that’s she’s getting what she needs. Don’t tell me because my daughter has this, she’s not able to learn. No, I am not going to accept that, and I make certain that she’s getting what she needs in her school and in her community. I feel that way with these kids here at school. I always said that whatever I taught in my class, I want them to get what I would give my own kids at home. So
exposing all the kids to vocabulary where they are able to participate and communicate with any audience is important.

Grace expressed comparable thoughts and explained:

I know my own daughter was not a good student. She had a lot of issues, not behavior, but a lot of issues with vocabulary. I had the ability to take her to Sylvan Learning Center, and a lot of our parents don’t have that resource. I can see how my daughter would get discouraged and I think about how some kids must feel and why they give up. I know a lot of teachers never tried to do anything different for my daughter. She also had a lot of problems with math. I think our whole school system is set up for students who are typically middle class, average or above average intelligent students. If you don’t fit into that mold whether you are urban, suburban or rural, teachers don’t know what to do with these students.

Grace’s frustration with the educational system is steeped in a conviction of, “I should be doing more, I should be doing more.” Her discontentment has driven Grace to continue to learn in order to share gained knowledge with others.

Cynthia’s philosophy of life and teaching also stemmed from her family experiences. She was reluctant to become a teacher. She divulged:

I came from corporate America during a time of lay-offs and my youngest son was in kindergarten. My son was in an all day kindergarten and once I got both of my kids off to school. I didn’t have anything else to do. I started spending a lot of time in my son’s classroom.
Cynthia attributed the family legacy of their commitment to education that led her to realize the call to teaching. She added:

My mother retired from the school district, and she kept saying, you’re really good at working with children, older and younger children. Why don’t you just try teaching? Well, my sister and I said we would never become a teacher because our mother worked day and night. My mother spent holidays working. But when we saw the satisfaction that she got from teaching, I said let me give it a try. Because of my family experience and being surrounded by teachers (my mom and aunts), I guess it was really embedded in me all along. Once I actually set foot in the school building, I loved it, and I wanted to do more. I saw participating on this leadership team as way to reach more teachers and, in turn, reach more students.

All three teacher leaders sought to challenge deficit thinking by strengthening their own professional practice and that of their colleagues.

Commitment to Learning: Theme Seven- Professional Development

The teacher leaders and school administrators referenced professional development as the essential element in helping the teacher leaders collaborate to recognize and challenge deficit thinking. Most importantly, the teacher leaders’ ability to provide training to their colleagues was viewed as instrumental in helping their colleagues address diversity through instruction. Dee noted:

I have learned a lot being part of a leadership team. I mean there were a lot of ideas I had, but would never try to share or implement them in a whole
group. Since I've been in the CTLP, it has allowed me to force or push myself to do those things that I really wanted to do. I think because of what I already had in me, plus the readings, I learned a lot more about racism, biases, and teaching about deficit thinking. For me a lot of it started like a flower, and I just started to open and blossom. I felt people needed to know about this. People needed to hear about this and you don't want to keep it to yourself. You want to share!

Dee's desire to teach the concept of deficit thinking meant having the ability to explain to colleagues. She stated, "I know in our building we've kind of made it known what deficit thinking means and we use that language, the word, deficit thinking." Dee recognized deficit thinking "by people's reactions and things that come out of their mouths." She explained you would hear some teachers saying, "That person will never make it to high school" or "I've tried everything with this kid, it doesn't work, so this is the best we can do for him and that's it." So I look at deficit thinking as when we actually give up on our students." Grace expressed a similar view about recognizing deficit thinking in that, "sometimes teachers give up because they don't see that they're making a difference for that child because of their circumstances, or because they're academically low."

Cynthia described an incident between herself and another teacher that illustrated how participation in professional development on the subject of diversity gave her the confidence to recognize deficit thinking. She explained:

I noticed every time this teacher came by, he always had a negative comment or something that just rubbed me the wrong way in what he said.
about why a student wasn’t doing well. The teacher had his brother last
eyear and he stated that my student was the same as his brother who doesn’t
care about anything. The home life is not so good, he is probably going to
end up just like his brother. Well, I didn’t have his brother, and I don’t
know anything about his brother. I don’t know anything about this student
because he his new to me.

Cynthia believed that the teacher was attempting to plant negative thoughts in her mind
about the student. She also felt that the teacher was judging the student based on home
life and the parents. Cynthia admitted that this really bothered her, but once she started in
the CTLP, she developed the courage to examine her own thinking about the situation
and reached out to this teacher. Cynthia summed up deficit thinking as, “teachers making
negative comments about students.” All three teacher leaders believed professional
development that focused on innovative instructional practices, leadership and diversity
training were effective methods for challenging deficit thinking.

Grace shared the importance of providing information to colleagues through
professional development. She shared how the team implemented a professional
development leadership activity learned from participation in CTLP and the favorable
responses from colleagues. She revealed:

We had several people come up to us afterward. One of the men on staff
said, “I never really thought about different leadership styles.” That was
really one of the better PD’s we had. It just made me think about myself.
He said, “I just thought there were two kinds of leaders, one that just told
everybody what to do, and one that was more guiding.
The school principal validated the significance of professional development and its influence on helping the teacher leaders and their colleagues address diversity issues. She highlighted:

The CTLP really brought out the potential in the teacher leaders. They are coming back utilizing a lot of things that they've learned in the program, where they're working with other teachers. They're talking about the program, they're doing the word enhancement program and that's happening all throughout the building. It is school-wide and the teachers have really embraced it.

*Commitment to Learning: Theme Eight- Culturally Relevant Pedagogy*

Another aspect of the teacher leaders’ commitment to learning was their need to make teaching and learning right for children by addressing instructional inequities. Ladson-Billings (1994) states, "If students are to be equipped to struggle against racism they need excellent skills from the basics of reading, writing, and math, to understanding history, thinking critically, solving problems, and making decisions: they must go beyond merely filling in test sheet bubbles with Number 2 pencils" (pp.139-140). The teacher leaders saw that being culturally relevant meant presenting vocabulary concepts and materials in a manner that embraced students’ cultures, and utilizing passionate, fun-filled teaching methods that were meaningful. Cynthia viewed this as vital since she acknowledged that, "some teachers may feel that our students don’t speak well because of their background or because of their culture, because they’re African-American or because they’re Black." To challenge this way of thinking, Cynthia further asserted:
We’re trying to bring our parents into the whole vocabulary project. We had a really good meeting with the parents last week. We mentioned that if you go into the corner stores, and if you listen to the Black radio station on Monday mornings, you will hear our “Word of the Week.

Cynthia believed that making the connection to students’ home lives improved the likelihood of students taking ownership of building their vocabulary. Dee corroborated Cynthia’s viewpoint when she shared her observations about visiting teachers’ classrooms. She revealed, “When I go into classrooms, I notice the literature they display, the books they are teaching, and I see those connections to African-American culture. They’re bringing in other cultures as well. So they’re exposing the kids to different cultures and trying to make those connections.”

Grace elucidated her thoughts about her own teaching. She focused on idioms that she had done every year with her students. However, Grace commented:

When I started talking about some of the idioms, I said to the students, “You know, you probably don’t hear these, but I bet your grandparents, if you asked them, they would know what a lot of these idioms are.” People don’t use them anymore, but yet they appear in text.

Grace admitted she is paying more attention to incorporating the students’ background into their learning experiences. In her dictionary of idioms, Grace noted:

One of the interesting idioms, *messing with someone*, has it origin in African-American culture, and I never thought of the fact that it was an African-American term. There is a lot to think about with language and vocabulary.
The principal also recognized the need for teachers to enhance their cultural knowledge of students they worked with to improve teaching practices. She elucidated:

All of the kids are bringing their culture into school. Teachers just can’t rely on their own cultural background because kids come in with a wealth of knowledge. Kids have a lot to offer us. What children bring from their culture, their knowledge, we’re trying to scaffold in order to enhance what they know but open children for more learning.

*Category 4 - Strategic Thinking and Planning*

The teacher leaders were required to produce and implement a product (equity project) from their collaborative venture during participation in the Collaborative Teacher Leadership Program (CTLP). Strategic thinking and planning acted as a catalyst to propel the teacher leaders to implement their equity project in an efficient and organized manner utilizing data decision-making to provide systematic instructional support to teacher colleagues.

*Strategic Thinking and Planning: Theme Eight - Data-driven Decision-making.*

In determining the type of equity project, the teacher leaders analyzed their school’s improvement plan. Cynthia commented:

Our students seemed lacking in comprehension. We looked at tests, student work, and we actually looked at the students. We thought about not only how they look on paper, but how they speak, talk and communicate with each other. We said the common factor is vocabulary.
Dee concurred with Cynthia’s assessment by stating, “We looked at the authentic pieces of student work, we looked at state assessment scores, we looked at Development Reading Assessment Scores (DRA), and we looked at report cards. Grace added:

We really looked at our school improvement plan. Comprehension was a huge issue and even with my Major Achievement Program (MAP) students who can obviously read very well. They don’t always get the meaning, and they’re not able to always infer and interpret what they read.

All three teacher leaders confirmed that there was common agreement among teachers as to the need for increasing student vocabulary; thereby, enhancing reading comprehension.

The school administrators corroborated the teacher leaders’ perceptions explaining how the focus from the teachers was to enhance vocabulary. However, the teacher leaders were cognizant of their colleagues’ workload. This awareness of teachers’ work responsibilities led to the teacher leaders planning how to engage their colleagues in participating and executing vocabulary development activities that would not be viewed as another add-on to an already overloaded curriculum.

Strategic Thinking and Planning: Theme Nine  Instructional Support

Instructional support encouraged school-wide participation in implementing the equity project. The teacher leaders acted as a resource to their colleagues by providing vocabulary activities, lessons, and professional development to help teachers understand that our children can do more. Cynthia explained the huge support from special subject teachers by stating, “They’re usually coming to us with things that they had in mind or something they’ve read about to increase the student’s vocabulary.”
Grace replied that instructional support was provided to teachers by making available resource materials for vocabulary development in a tactful manner. She explained, “We didn’t want anyone to feel threatened about their instructional program or teaching methods. We presented information and offered materials as a way of supplementing and enhancing what you do.”

Dee elaborated on the importance of making sure the teachers did not see the vocabulary equity project as something extra on the workload. She explained that instructional support was arranged by, “having the kids take ownership.” An example Dee shared was how the students took responsibility for reading the book of the month (which have to do with vocabulary). Literature responses, weekly activities, and writing assignments are included to help students develop independent reading and writing skills while simultaneously developing their vocabulary skills. Additionally, Dee masqueraded as the “Word Wizard” doing informal assessments to see if students were able to use words correctly.

The assistant principal acknowledged that instructional support extended to how time was spent during the school day to build on the equity project. She noted:

In common planning time, teachers have been able to collaborate with their grade level teachers about their vocabulary projects and many teachers have given the kids tasks to write a poem using many of the words of the week.

From the perspectives of the teacher leaders and school administration, providing instructional support to teacher colleagues and directly to students increased school-wide participation.
Focus Groups

Research Question #2: What influence did the teacher leaders’ work have on their colleagues’ thinking?

Findings gleaned from the focus groups sessions determined what influence, if any, did the Citiville teacher leaders’ equity project had on their colleagues’ thinking. Based on the findings, affected areas were school culture and teachers’ instructional practices.

*Category 5 - Effects*

Sergiovanni (1994) contends, “Schools must first become purposeful communities...they must become places where members have developed a community of mind that bonds them together in special ways and binds them to a shared ideology” (pp. 71-72). As a result of the equity project, Citiville teacher leaders and their colleagues identified ways in which their participation influenced their thinking in relation to their views about: a) language development; b) student learning; and, c) teacher motivation. Direct quotes from the interviewees delineate their interpretations. Many responses to sub-set questions overlapped and interviewees espoused the same or similar interpretations. These quotes shared below captured some of the interpretive thoughts of all fifteen Citiville participants followed by quotes from the three teacher leaders.

*Effects – Theme Eleven: Reinforcing and Adapting Practices*

The teacher leaders and their colleagues shared aspects of their practices that were reinforced or adapted resulting from their participation in the equity project. All agreed that the equity project did not change their views about street, home and school language. However, focus group respondents did agree about the importance of teaching Standard
English while understanding that their roles were not to disparage students' home and street language. Altered practices did develop through varied instruction, motivation and vital conversations among faculty and staff due to their participation in the equity project, "Vocabulary Wizard."

Varied instruction. Kopetz, Lease, & Warren-Kring (2006) assert, “Effective and varied classroom management strategies can improve students’ abilities to attend to tasks and engage in the learning process” (p. 217). Eight respondents addressed adjustments in their instructional practices to improve student learning. One respondent stated:

I know when they (teacher leaders) did the assembly using the *Akeela and the Bee* movie, and he got into the word origins, it made me started asking my students about street language, i.e., Where did that word come from? Why did you start using it? Did it have any other meanings besides that one so the students can relate?

This respondent further noted, “Sometimes the students use the same word in standard English, but in a totally different form.” Another respondent explained how word wizard activities made her more aware by “using the strategy of stopping when I’m reading to address a vocabulary word that the children don’t know and spending time on the word.” A colleague concurred and expanded on that thought by stating, “it actually reinforced my teaching as far as when I’m reading the book. If I come across a word that I think they don’t know, I’ll try to expose them to that word.” While another colleague explained, “I think it reinforced my views that it’s okay for them to socialize using their language and talk back and forth between them. But when they are speaking to adults or speaking to other people that standard English is important to know.
Additional respondents also acknowledged their heightened awareness that caused them to become more reflective and make adaptations to their instructional delivery by understanding how to make vocabulary-building more exciting for students.

One more respondent revealed:

Having grown up in the city and being familiar with non-standard English and how it’s used in the neighborhood, I have a pretty open policy in terms of what happens in the classroom of kids talking to each other, but when they’re answering a question in their conversations with me, the expectation is that it is going to be standard English. I think that the vocabulary wizard project was an opportunity for us to explore language in such a way that we could look at the benefit that street language can have for students when they’re communicating with each other, that those words come from somewhere.

He elaborated further to explain:

It reinforced my belief that vocabulary is really the thing that drives learning. I mean the greater the vocabulary, the greater your ability to comprehend anything. One of the things that I focus on in my room is etymology. So when we had a word that we were studying, I wanted the kids to explore where the word came from, its roots and what other words stemmed from that root as a means to build vocabulary. By the same token, I think street language evolves in similar ways, and if I was able to make that connection for kids and make it relevant for them, then I feel like it was a positive thing."
A different respondent who served as a formal teacher leader in Citiville School summed up the thinking of many of her colleagues and the teacher leaders who lead the equity project when she stated, “It’s important to learn the English, but we do have a place for the home and street language. I think the vocabulary wizard activities just brought into consideration when you would use each.”

An accompanying feature of varied instruction noted by the teacher leaders and focus group respondents was the teachers’ engagement across content area disciplines and instructional programs. Citiville School was comprised of a highly diverse academic population. Students were enrolled in programs ranging from the gifted program, Major Achievement Program (MAP), to Alternative Curriculum Education (ACE) for the mentally challenged with an IQ of 50 or below. The focus group respondents divulged that the reinforcement and adaptations to instructional and school-wide practices influenced them in the following manner:

R 1 – I think it made us as a unit stronger. I think it encouraged the children to work on those vocabulary words. They saw us working as one and it encouraged them to learn more words. When they went to art class, it was across the board, across the curriculum, the library, or to gym. They were continuously exposed to those vocabulary words.

R 2 – The other thing that I thought was really good is that we had the whole school impacted with the activities. If we went to the library, we were told that there were certain books that we could get that would have the words in them.
R 3 - I also work with students that are in the ACE program. My students are 5th and 4th graders. Most of my students have severe language issues, so the fact that we had a program where we could focus on how to put sentences together and how to use language increased the focus I had. It's very important for the children to learn the appropriate Standard English. I don't have a problem with some of the street language when they're talking with each other, but if they're speaking with me, and we're doing an activity, I expect them to answer with complete sentences and using more of the Standard English.

R 4 - I think these activities reinforced what I always felt---that even though my children learned at a slower pace, they can learn! They can learn new words...they really impressed me with how they learned the words and their meanings. Sometimes out in the hall, they would say, “Oh, I know what that means.” They would hear somebody else talk, and I was impressed with how they took that in and really learned. I've always felt that no matter how low functioning cognitively a child is, they can always learn.

R 5 - What I did see was how the whole school doing the same project helped the children see how important vocabulary is. It was fun, and we could all share—from the secretaries, to the art room, to the librarian, to the teachers. I think that was very important to the children.

Motivation. All respondents agreed that participation in the equity project motivated them to strengthen their instructional focus on vocabulary-building which
caused an increase in student motivation. Teachers expressed divergent views about student motivation being of intrinsic or extrinsic value. Nevertheless, respondents described the enthusiasm and excitement for learning about words that permeated the school. Respondents reported the following:

R 6 – Especially in the morning with buses and getting the kids off, the younger kids have an excitement about them, and they talk to their parents with excitement about the word wizard.

R 7 – I do believe that the excitement of the kids and their capacity to learn was very evident in this vocabulary activity. I also like the whole idea about kids having fun and that learning doesn’t have to be a drudgery kind of thing... I think that made a big difference with the kids and the kids building words with kids. I’m just so excited! Kindergarteners saying some of the bigger words and it didn’t matter if it was an intermediate word. Some of them went right ahead and pronounced it, tried to learn new meanings. It was quite exciting.

R 8 – There’s so much more excitement to learning vocabulary words that they didn’t have before we started this program.

R 9 – It made me realize how our colleagues can motivate others and students to work together to make one goal and that is to build up our vocabulary.

R 10 – I loved the fact that the children were so excited about the words, and how they really motivated each other, and how as a staff we came together.
I’ve seen a little more transference where some kids are recognizing things outside the classroom.

The Equity Project implementation generated synergy through the adoption of varied teaching methods for learning new vocabulary that reinforced adults and students perceptions that learning can be enjoyable.

*Conversations.* The teacher leaders and classroom teachers shared the significance of having enhanced and deepened conversations among adults and students. Conversations transpired between adults, between the students, and among students and adults. A focus group respondent replied, “It did make conversations between the older students because I have special education 6th grade students, and they definitely went home and had conversations about vocabulary with their parents.” Another colleague corroborated by stating, “It’s a whole different atmosphere and attitude of the kids. I really like that you have 4th graders talking with 6th graders about words.”

The focus group sessions confirmed that the teachers were engaged in more dialogue about their instructional practices. One respondent replied, “I had a conversation with some teachers about things I was doing in the classroom and the vocabulary project just opened up that conversation. I probably wouldn’t have had any conversation with them as to say what are you doing with this or how are you doing this… it was a way of communicating.” These conversations also took form in open dialogue about race. Dee disclosed, “The conversations were great. and they’re not afraid talk about race. You know, race is a touchy kind of thing, and people don’t like to talk about it. It is making people think. and even if they don’t share right now, they’re having a personal thing going on inside of them. I think that’s very, very important.”
Coursework

From the coursework, the Citiville teacher leadership team wrote about their collaboration within the context of developing Vocabulary Wizard activities. They described their actions as a collaboration cycle. The writing and illustrations of the teacher leaders reflected their collective viewpoint, and how they collaborated to recognize and challenge deficit thinking through teaching and learning. The teacher leaders decided to challenge deficit thinking within the context of teacher instruction. The school-wide focus on vocabulary instruction served as a vehicle to challenge teachers' deficit views about perceived student limitations regarding language acquisition and development. Promoting quality instruction was viewed as the course of action to counteract deficit thinking and promote school community collaborative efforts. (See Figure 4.5 and 4.6)
As our team began to collaborate about our Equity Based School Improvement Project, we had a difficult time agreeing on one specific issue to focus on. After a careful analysis of our School Improvement Plan and the profile of our entire student body, our team agreed that we should target vocabulary as a means to enhance reading comprehension and expose all of our students to the same vocabulary. We believed that the avenue of vocabulary was a powerful way to connect students, teachers, parents, and our community together.

Finding a common interest with our team really got "the ball rolling" for us. Two of the members developed an acronym for the project and named it, "Word of the Week/W.O.W." The project's design was to be implemented on a daily basis over the P.A. System in the morning. We also thought that the "Words of the Week" could be announced through the media via television and radio. The words would be visible throughout the entire building: in classrooms, in hallways and in our "Book of the Month" display case. Teachers would be given a list of the words in advance in an effort to plan how to incorporate the vocabulary words into the daily lesson plans and routines. It was decided that the words chosen would be content-based in an attempt to make connections with words across content areas. In addition, we concluded that test words, Tier I, II, and III words were equally important.

As our project continued to develop, we brainstormed various ideas and activities that would capture the essence of our Equity Based School Improvement Project. We desired actions that were value-based and meaningful for our students and wanted them to take full ownership of this project.

In addition, we incorporated the "Book of the Month" to our equity project as a means to promote reading and writing through reader response activities, while integrating some of the words of the week into their writing responses.

During our journey throughout the Collaborative Teacher Leadership Program, our affiliation with one another has strengthened and empowered us as individuals and we have developed into a stronger, cohesive team.
Figure 4.6: Citiville Teacher Leaders Pictorial View of Collaboration
Comparative Analysis of Citiville and Urbanville Case Studies

Each teacher leadership team developed and executed equity projects based on an identified need of their individual school. The equity projects were vastly different in context and delivery. However, organizationally antecedent conditions existed to enable teacher leadership teams to collaborate to recognize and challenge deficit thinking regardless of context and delivery. The antecedent conditions were district-level support, principal leadership, diversity training, and school culture.

**District-level Support**

The school district supported innovation in expanding teacher leadership development beyond the traditional career ladder approach reflective of bureaucratic hierarchy. The school district allocated resources (monetary, personnel, and materials) to support the development of teachers as collaborative leaders utilizing character dimensions (not formal titles) and a team-based approach as the prerequisites for program enrollment. In partnership with a local university, the Collaborative Teacher Leadership Program was implemented to fill the void in teacher leadership program development. Researchers found that using models emphasizing and incorporating collaborative activities and staff participation in school improvements created productive schools (Murphy & Hallinger, 1992).

**Principal Leadership**

The Citiville and Urbanville School principals modeled shared, distributive leadership. Both principals actively supported and engaged teacher leaders through the development of mutual purposes for intended equity project outcomes, resource allocations, and being a follower. The Citiville principal selected and encouraged the
teachers to participate in the CTLP based on observable interactions with their colleagues. In the case of the Urbanville School, a teacher garnered support from her principal to recruit other educators for participation in the program. In both instances, the principals served as catalysts in promoting teacher leadership. Principal leadership was viewed as a critical factor in advancing teacher leadership by both teacher leadership teams. In fact, the teacher leaders believed successful implementation of equity projects was largely due to the principals’ ability to establish the conditions that fostered empowerment. The research suggests that principal leadership can either promote or derail teacher leadership efforts.

_Diversity Training_

Teacher leaders participated in a two-year diversity-training program to examine themselves in relation to leadership, equity, and social justice. The program provided direction for collaborative engagement among teachers to address equity issues as defined within their schools’ improvement plans. Additionally, the program challenged teachers to examine and resolve their own personal biases and prejudices. The shift toward investment in the development of collaborative teacher leadership teams addressed the continuous need for the urban district to support inclusive practices given the diverse student population and lack of diversity in its teaching ranks. This move towards non-traditional modes of professional development offered urban educators relevant, job-embedded training and application to address issues within the context of urban schooling.

The District’s student population consisted of 68% African-American, 20% Latino, 6% Caucasian, and 6% classified as other. Students in special education made up
14% of the population, and English Language Learners (ELL) made up 8% of the student population. Students spoke thirty-five different languages. The District's teaching workforce was 77% Caucasian, 14% African-American, 6% Latino, and 1% classified as other. James-Wilson (2007) asserts, "Teacher leaders need to understand and value the complexity of schools where students with different abilities, sexual orientations, religious beliefs, and a variety of racial, ethnic, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds come to learn and build relationships with others" (p.136). This necessitates a for teacher leaders to understand students' diverse backgrounds in their daily work celebrating similarities and differences.

School Culture

Results from the Teacher Efficacy Scale Survey demonstrated that the classroom teachers from both schools had elevated efficacy. Teachers judged that they had the capability to execute actions and believed in their ability to influence student learning regardless of external conditions. Emergent themes from both schools supported communication and problem-solving practices. In Shaping School Culture: The Heart of Leadership, Deal and Peterson (1999) emphasize, "In school cultures valuing collegiality and collaboration, there is a better climate for the social and professional exchange of ideas, the enhancement and spread of effective practices, and widespread professional problem solving" (p. 7).

Urbanville and Citiville schools were similar in that administrators and teachers played active roles in shaping the school culture. A strong value of collaboration and teamwork was evident in both schools based on the artifacts, ceremonies, and priorities drawn from equity project activities.
Emergent categories, themes and sub-themes based on anecdotal information derived from interviews, focus groups, coursework depicted equivalent and divergent thoughts. Figure 4.7 illustrates a comparative analysis of the Urbanville and Citiville case studies.

Figure 4.7 – Comparative Analysis of Urbanville and Citiville Case Studies

Figure 4.7 illustrates common categories, themes and sub-themes that emerged.

The two outer circles portray categories, themes, and sub-themes reflective of each
teacher leadership team, classroom teachers, and school administrators' meanings derived from engaging in the equity project. The center square represents the common categories, themes, and sub-themes that emerged as the same from teacher leadership teams, classroom teachers, and school administrators. All provided descriptions of their experiences and interpretive meanings to describe how the CTLP teacher leaders collaborated to recognize and challenge deficit thinking within each school and its effects on their colleagues' thinking.

Findings from both case studies emphasized antecedent conditions, categories, themes, and sub-themes to: 1) provide a specific set of teacher leader role behaviors; 2) identify factors that followers (classroom teachers) consider when engaged in learning that is led by teacher leaders; and, 3) describe transformative processes to achieve teacher leaders' objectives in recognizing and challenging deficit thinking. The research participants described the following:

1. **Teacher Leader Role Behaviors** – Being a risk-taker, showing enthusiasm and passion for the work, patience with self and others, and effective communication skills (active listening and ability to share knowledge) were viewed as essential leadership behaviors.

2. **Classroom Teachers as Followers** – Classroom teachers were willing to follow the teacher leaders based on: a) receptiveness to seek and incorporate colleagues’ ideas; b) open and honest communication of personal convictions that exemplified self-sacrifice; c) willingness to be a follower as well as leader, modeling humility; and, d) confidence exhibited in self and others’ abilities to add meaningful contributions.
3. Transformative Processes - Teacher leaders enhanced their self-efficacy and efficacy of others through a motivational process authorized with district and school level support that led to empowering teacher leaders to address deficit thinking in their schools through the Empowerment Trajectory as shown in Figure 4.8. The Empowerment Trajectory provides a conceptual, methodological framework of transformative processes to foster collaborative teacher leaders who recognized and challenged deficit thinking in order to influence others in collegial ways to achieve desired school improvement results.

Furthermore, the trajectory is an evolution of teacher leaders from hierarchical, technical modes of practice to genuine participatory modes of action that reflect community-building practices.

Figure 4.8: The Five-Stage Empowerment Trajectory

1. Enabling – Urban districts and colleges/universities form partnerships to develop and implement teacher leadership programs to support formal and informal teacher leaders working collaboratively to improve urban schools. Specifically, programs are equipped to conceptualize diversity work in terms of enhancing urban school cultures and allocating sufficient resources to promote positive changes.
2. Exploring - Professional development that incorporates diversity, equity and social justice issues through dialogues, discussions, extensive readings, video documentaries, reflections, and interviews with community stakeholders; hence, requiring urban teachers to explore and examine their personal and professional lives as to the beliefs, attitudes, and expectations they hold for diverse student populations, their families and communities. The combination of formal training and job-embedded learning support the development of teacher leaders' capacity to work beyond traditional formal roles to view their work within a school cultural context.

3. Evolving - Capacity-building of informal and formal teacher leaders necessitates evolving into a different paradigm of leadership. This paradigm shift endorses leadership based on promoting and sustaining effective, meaningful relationships with others and service to others. The ever-evolving, on-going process of leadership focuses on the united purposes of followers and leaders that embrace collaboration, teamwork, shared decision-making, and community building to create the conditions necessary to tackle problems unique to urban schools.

4. Engaging Others - Developing relational and servant leadership in others entails a long-term commitment by urban districts and school level administration. In order to move toward distributed leadership that cultivates confidence building of teachers as leaders (that is non-hierarchical in nature) districts must promote collaborative enterprises in safe, supportive working
environments while advocating for and encouraging authentic and culturally significant conversations.

5. Energizing Others – Empowering self and empowering others are synonymous in that teacher leaders and followers know there are opportunities for them to integrate their experiences, understandings, knowledge and skills in order to take the initiative to make a difference in outcomes. Opportunities take the form of a reciprocal process of exchanging and sharing of ideas based on mutual respect that creates synergy towards a common goal.

Unplanned Benefits

Two unplanned benefits incurred from the teacher leaders’ implementation of the equity projects. First, in the Urbanville case study, the sense of empowerment extended to parents because of their participation in the equity project. Providing meaningful opportunities for parents to engage in the development and implementation of the equity project, and having them serve as team leaders enhanced their personal view of self as leaders. Beyond empowerment, Katie noted, “because a lot of parents who helped to create the torch for the Urban Expedition had their own eye opening experiences with their own community, they were able to see some of their own biases and prejudices against where they live.” The Urbanville teacher leaders and the principal were in accord that parents who participated and led the community tours were significantly impacted. The experience had a powerful effect on the parents’ thinking that was the catalyst to operational changes in the school.

Second, in the Citiville case study, the teacher leaders decided to target vocabulary development as an approach to challenge deficit thinking through improving
instruction and learning. An unplanned benefit was the school administrators’ decision to address directly deficit thinking with faculty and staff through professional development utilizing film. Dee explained, “Just looking at the movie, Sticks and Stones, where the teacher believed every student was the same academically got the attention of the teachers.” School administration and the teacher leaders believed it was important to familiarize the school with the term, deficit thinking, and its meaning. Altering professional development plans to address deficit thinking in a direct and open forum among faculty was viewed as courageous by two of the teacher leaders.

The unplanned benefits that came from execution of the equity projects were not anticipated in advance. However, these benefits offered additional evidence of the effectiveness of the equity projects.

Summary of Findings

In summary, the teacher leaders indicated that they were able to recognize and challenge deficit thinking through execution of the equity projects that were determined by means of analysis of the individual school’s improvement plans. Furthermore, findings from focus group respondents substantiated that the equity projects influenced their ways of thinking resulting in reinforcing, adapting or changing instructional practices, relationship with parents, motivating students and overall school environment. However, both teacher leadership teams admitted that their work was just beginning and this was an on-going process. To highlight this point, an Urbanville teacher leader commented, “We noticed that there are still misconceptions on poverty, equity and other components of it, so we know that we just scratched the surface and we need to deepen the work.”
To conclude, this chapter presented the findings of how teacher leaders collaborated to recognize and challenge deficit thinking, including the effects of their work on their colleagues’ thinking. Individually, teacher leaders were introduced and antecedent conditions, categories, themes, and sub-themes were discussed in rich detail supported by verbatim responses of the teacher leaders, classroom teachers and school administration. In the Urbanville case study, five categories, eleven themes and eight sub-themes emerged. Five categories, eleven themes and seven sub-themes emerged in the Citiville case study. Three common categories emerged from the data: group process, strategic thinking and effects. Four common themes that surfaced for both teacher leadership teams were self as leader, interactions, capacity-building, and life experiences. Three common sub-themes to materialize were individual strengths, compromise and conversations. The next chapter will provide a discussion of the results to include implication of findings, limitations, recommendations and a summary of the study.
CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to describe how teacher leaders in two urban elementary schools collaborated to recognize and challenge deficit thinking, and what effects the teacher leaders' work had on their colleagues' thinking. This chapter begins with an implication of the findings, subsequently followed by limitations of the study. To conclude this chapter, recommendations for future research and a summary of the entire dissertation is discussed.

Implications of Findings

Findings from this study presented in Chapter IV support theory, professional practice, scholarly understandings, and decision-making in the field of teacher leadership.

Theoretical Implications

The study filled the void in existing research, in that, current research asserts teacher leadership roles are mainly formal and instructional in practice (Archer, 2001). Teacher leadership roles include responsibilities such as: a) resource provider; b) curriculum and instructional specialist; c) classroom support; d) learning facilitator; e) mentor; and, f) data coach (Wasley, 1991; Darling-Hammond, 1995; Odell, 1997; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 1996, 2001; York-Barr & Duke, 2004; Murphy, 2005; Moore-Johnson & Donaldson, 2007). This study explored the transformative process of teacher leader roles in addressing deficit thinking to promote equitable student learning environments. Garcia and Guerra (2004) state, "There are few studies of the
transformation process involved in developing an additive view of diversity and even fewer empirically supported guidelines for what works” (p. 151). The Empowerment Trajectory (Figure 4.8) provides a conceptual framework of a transformative process that consists of five stages. School districts can follow a course of action to promote teacher leadership to move beyond the formal and technical roles, to a combination of informal and formal teacher leadership roles that are team-oriented and collaborative to address problems associated with urban schooling.

Another aspect of the study was the contribution to existing research. Current preoccupation with teacher leadership tends to focus on tasks, people, and participative orientations. This study focused on teacher leaders’ behavioral dimensions that included envisioning, goal setting and empowering that was directed toward exploring transformational influence. Kanungo and Mendonca (1996) suggest that future research must be channeled toward exploring the basis of transformational influence. Even though each school leadership team developed and implemented an equity project within the context of their individual school improvement plans, common categories, themes and sub-themes emerged that suggest teacher leaders in diverse school settings share common envisioning, goal setting and empowering behaviors that influence certain facets of school transformation. These facets include adaptations of instructional practices and operational structures to better support students’ needs. It is important to note that the teacher leaders from both schools viewed their school administration as significant to their empowerment. Gordon and Crabtree (2006) wrote:

Input from the focus groups assisted Gallup researchers in developing hypotheses to be tested with a broader sample in a 2003 study. Gallup’s research interest focuses
on the greatest talents of outstanding principals— their most naturally recurring patterns of
thoughts, feeling, and behavior that can be productively applied (p. 192).

Three categories emerged from the research. The categories were: 1) motivating -
describes principals’ inspiration to self and others to improve student outcomes; 2) relating - includes ways in which principals garner support from the school and
community stakeholders and promote teacher growth and development, and 3) empowering the staff - explains how principals provide resources to ensure staff have
opportunities for continuous development. The research study on how teacher leaders
collaborate to recognize and challenge deficit thinking contributes to the existing body of
knowledge pertaining to effective principal leadership. By studying teacher leaders in two
successful urban elementary schools, the research substantiated principals’ behaviors in
connection with Gallup observations, while defining the principals’ role in order to affect
transformative dimensions of teacher leadership professional practices.

Professional Practice

While research on teachers’ knowledge is abundant, research that focuses
specifically on teachers’ knowledge in urban schools is limited (Montero-Seiburth, 1989).
Limited studies exist on the actual interrelationship of context and behaviors in urban
schools. Research studies of urban schooling tend to focus on teacher burnout, student
achievement, and the relation of school learning to workplace learning (Montero-
Seiburth, 1989). The study of teacher leaders’ collaborative efforts in urban settings to
recognize and challenge deficit thinking provided insight on the “how” and “why”
processes of teachers as cultural workers; an emerging vision— recognizing teachers as
critical to changing school cultures (Silva, Gimbert & Nolan, 2000). From the research
Study, attention and action toward providing professional development that emphasizes diversity training for all its educators is paramount to addressing deficit thinking. This is especially essential for urban teachers regardless of their racial and ethnic identities. Kopetz, Lease, & Kring (2006) acknowledge, “One of the main factors that prevent White pre-service teachers from embracing multicultural training is that within the training they are made to feel guilty for being White. Pride in their ethnicity is taken away, and they are not able to healthily accept other cultural groups” (p. 44). Developing and implementing teacher leadership programs that require teachers to seek out colleagues to participate jointly in diversity training and team-building skills can offset the view that diversity training is for White educators. As documented in the study, teachers and principals sought team members of similar philosophical beliefs or skill sets related to teaching and learning, which was not based on race or ethnicity. Garcia and Guerra (2004) further explained by stating, “Diversity training is not just for White educators. A logical corollary to the proposition is the recognition that socio-cultural and linguistic discontinuities between students and teachers are not exclusive to White educators but are also experienced by educators of color” (p. 155).

Research findings confirmed that professional practice also encompassed positive views of student learning exhibited by the teacher leaders, their colleagues and school administration. The results of the Teacher Efficacy Scale Survey indicated high teacher efficacy existed in both urban schools. This meant that urban teachers in the study believed in their capacity to influence student achievement and saw this as their personal responsibility to do so. The teacher leaders revealed: 1) high expectations; 2) making connections between school and home cultures; 3) aligning subject matter content
relevant to student lives’ and cultures; and, 4) engaging parents in their children’s education as professional practices that make a difference in students’ seeing themselves as being successful in the educational process. In the book, *Educating Everybody’s Children*, Cole (1995) noted in student achievement between students of color from diverse backgrounds and mainstream students that the differences were in the quality of teacher instruction, not the students’ ability to learn. Effects from teacher leaders and classroom teachers’ involvement in the equity projects demonstrated that instruction was changed, adapted and reinforced to improve meeting the instructional needs of students in both schools.

Also from the findings is the significance of principals’ professional practice. For teacher leadership to thrive, principal support is a critical factor. Principals who embrace and model shared, distributive leadership create the conditions for teacher empowerment, resulting in improved student and staff morale, and an increased willingness on the part of adults to adapt and make changes to improve student learning.

**Scholarly Understandings**

Based on review of related literature and data results, the researcher was able to discern an empowering process that may in fact, describe universal ways of empowering self and empowering others. The identified common categories, themes, and sub-themes support a proposition that there are likely specific steps that urban school districts can take to advance collaborative teacher leadership reflective of inclusive practices. Two categories, group process and strategic thinking and planning, surfaced as collaborative processes both teacher leadership teams utilized to work together and create conditions for effective equity project implementation. A collaborative leader is described as,
“strategic, logical, and systemic thinker who understands the steps that must be taken to make things happen and who can engage collaborative partners in productive and efficient planning process” (Rubin, 2002: 55). All six-teacher leaders highlighted group processes that identified and made the most of individual skill sets of each team member; thereby, “paying attention to the functional dynamics of the group” (Rubin, 2002: 73).

The four common themes in the Urbanville and Citiville case studies of self as leader, interactions, capacity-building and life experiences are consistent with the scholarly understandings of the importance of building relationships and service to others as characteristics of effective leadership. Through participation in the CTLP professional development, the teacher leaders engaged in sessions that supported a model proposed by Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001), based on:

1) Planning for Action - What Can I Do? (equity projects)
2) Personal Assessment - Who Am I? (life experiences)
3) Changing Schools - Where Am I? (self as leader)
4) Influencing Strategies – How Do I Lead? (interactions and capacity-building)

The teacher leadership teams in the urban elementary schools did influence others in accepting new ideas. Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001) assert, “Waking the sleeping giant of teacher leadership has unlimited potential in making a real difference in the pace and depth of school change” (p. 102).

Sub-themes (recognizing individual strengths, compromise, and conversations) emerged as common and influential strategies for initiating and gaining commitment of individual team members and classroom teachers. The teacher leaders knew their individual strengths and weaknesses while understanding, “that every leadership virtue
taken to excess can become a vice, and every strength can become a weakness” (Kouzes & Posner, 2006:133). They understood that their success in achieving their goals was based on an interdependent relationship. As Kouzes & Posner (2006) state, “we must have the humility and grace to admit that we depend on others as much as they depend on us” (p.133).

From the findings, compromising skills were a critical part of the teacher leadership teams’ ability to meet with success in developing their equity projects. To come to agreement, teacher leaders on both teams acknowledged the importance of being able to give up a little in order to serve the common good. However, in compromising, the teacher leaders integrated individual ideas to “seek a middle ground involving a give-and-take on the part of both parties” (Kopetz, Lease, & Kring, 2006:176).

Engaging in vital conversations that explored themselves as teacher leaders in relation to addressing equity and social justice issues were considered fundamental to building self-confidence. The teacher leaders’ developed self-confidence enhanced their ability in any situation to describe accurately their school’s reality without laying blame (Scott, 2004). This appeared in the findings that explained how educators were having authentic conversations with other adults “mastering the courage to interrogate reality” (Scott, 2004:13). Unplanned benefits substantiate this scholarly understanding in that both schools’ outcomes entailed parents and teachers discussing social issues more openly, and providing professional development specifically targeted to address deficit thinking.
Decision-making

At the district level, senior administration made the decision to invest in job-embedded professional development where teachers could voluntarily participate to create and work as a team to develop their leadership skills and address urban school issues. As a result, stronger working relationships between formal and informal teacher leaders developed to foster stewardship towards fulfilling commitments to a common purpose. Developing purposeful teacher leadership teams to “identify key challenges to the school’s instructional improvement and to engage others in examining practice and commitment to improvement” (Donaldson, 2006: 100) stimulated open conversation among administration, teachers, parents and students that led to individual and collective empowerment. Therefore, teacher leadership is inseparable from the concept of empowerment, which is frequently described as associated with organizational decision-making (Rice & Schneider, 1994).

Findings imply that judicious planning and execution of a teacher leadership program focused on the real work of urban schooling can cultivate collaborative learning experiences to connect people, purpose and practice.

Limitations

The research had two limitations. First, purposive sampling was utilized to select participants in this study. The sample size consisted of six teacher leaders from two urban elementary schools because of their enrollment in CTLP and the content of their equity projects. All six teacher leaders were viewed by their principals and colleagues as having success working with low SES students. Additionally, both schools have experienced successful improvement based on state achievement data and national recognition of
excellence. Concepts and processes that emerged from the research study might not have similar relevance in low-performing schools. Limitations can be the small sampling size and high performance of schools in that other readers or researchers may see application and results as not being generalizable.

Second, in the researcher’s job role as Chief of Diversity and Leadership Development, the study was conducted in the district where she was employed. The researcher’s status may be of concern to some participants and the possible problems inherent based on the researcher’s job role in the district should be acknowledged. However, since the principals, school personnel, and specifically, the teacher leaders know the researcher, the benefits of the researcher’s insider status outweighed any perceived limitations. While professional colleagues knew the researcher, access to problems was lessened, and relevant information was willingly shared because of trust already established. Furthermore, researcher’s collegial relationship with both schools contributed to the willingness and cooperation of the classroom teachers to participate in the study. This meant that the researcher’s insider status was viewed as an asset, in turn, allowing access to social situations.

**Recommendations**

Review of the literature and results of the study on teacher leaders suggest a need for further research. The teacher leaders who participated in the research study openly admitted the process of collaboration coupled with challenging the beliefs and attitudes toward diverse student groups and their families is continual work. Kopetz, Lease & Kring (2006) assert, “The failure to change teachers’ attitudes, beliefs, and expectations will result in failure among urban students with whom teachers work, thereby continuing
the cycle of failure for these students” (p. 41). Therefore, suggestions for future research can address the following questions:

1) Are the Empowerment Trajectory Stages linear or can there be several stages happening simultaneously?

2) Are the Empowerment Trajectory Stages developmental, such that how you perform in a prior stage affects how you perform in subsequent stages?

3) How can the work of teacher leaders be structured to sustain focus on urban schools equity and social issues?

4) What are the courses of action in which many formal and informal teacher leaders can lead beyond the classroom to influence school cultural norms?

The structure of teacher leaders’ role and work is directly related to the way principals exercise leadership. As noted in the findings, principals who genuinely practice shared, distributive leadership create employee ownership and empowerment that can lead to extraordinary results in improving schools. James-Wilson (2007) states, “the importance of developing administrators’ capacities to support teacher leadership should not be overlooked” (p. 139). In defining teacher leaders, one principal commented, “I guess over time my opinion or definition of teacher leader has evolved.” Future research on educational leadership needs to consider questions to identify the following: a) How do principals’ views of leadership change over time? What effects do these changes have on their practice? b) What types of educational leadership programs exist to prepare teachers and principals to work effectively together in urban school settings? What impact do these programs have on leaders’ abilities to improve urban schooling?
The implications from this research study and future potential research questions further suggest that colleges and universities play a critical role in preparing teachers and principals for leading urban schools. Leadership development needs to be reformed to meet the demands of urban education. Therefore, course curriculum and professional training that incorporates diversity, equity and social justice issues, coupled with inclusive practices into its field of education study, could foster deliberative, collaborative problem-solving competencies that better prepares future leaders for the challenges and rewards of leading urban schools.

Urban districts need teachers who can understand and recognize students' cultural background and urban conditions; have the capacity to care enough to persevere; and, recognize and act on the potential of every student regardless of their race, ethnicity and/or socioeconomic status in society. Consequently, the selection process for hiring qualified teachers needs to extend beyond technical knowledge and expertise. Urban districts need to consider utilizing diversity assessment instruments for potential teacher candidates to determine their suitability for teaching in urban schools.

In this era of high-stakes testing and accountability, education policy-makers need to rethink and reframe school improvement to move away from top-down mandates toward promoting those school districts that have modeled inclusionary leadership practices. School organizations that model inclusionary leadership practices, especially in urban settings, would likely demonstrate an increase in student achievement reflective of the enactment of common visions, missions and purposes, resulting in employee empowerment across all levels of the organization.
Conclusion

Deficit thinking coupled with traditionally held norms of teaching make urban schools problems appear insurmountable. The purpose of this study was to describe how teacher leaders collaborate to recognize and challenge deficit thinking, as perceived by selected teacher leaders in two urban elementary schools. The study also explored what influence the teacher leaders’ work had on their colleagues’ thinking. This study was the result of needing to address the barriers that seem to impede students in a large urban district located in Western New York from achieving at levels to result in higher graduation rates.

A large urban district and a local university formed a partnership to establish the Collaborative Teacher Leadership Program (CTLP). The purpose of the program was to provide direction for collaborative engagement among teachers who were to address equity issues as defined within their schools’ improvement plans. The shift toward investment in collaborative teacher leadership teams addressed the continuous need for the urban district to support knowledgeable, skilled educators. The CLTP existed to build the capacity of teacher leadership teams and to serve as catalysts for the promotion of equity and social justice throughout the district. Cohort teams of teachers from eleven schools participated in monthly sessions taught by this researcher and a university professor where equity-based pedagogy was explored.

Teacher leadership teams collaborated with key stakeholders to develop and implement the equity projects based on an identified area of need derived from the participants’ schools School Improvement Plan (SIP). Principals were a critical component of the program. The principals demonstrated their support by: 1) engaging in
discussions about how they support the work of the teacher leadership teams: 2) arranging of time and resources for professional development, input and feedback for the equity projects; and, 3) attending and participating at school-based meetings with the CTLP Teacher Leadership Teams throughout the year to support progress of their equity projects.

Examination of teacher leadership was investigated using a symbolic interactionist framework to guide the descriptive multi-site case study of two urban elementary schools, given the fictitious names of Urbanville and Citiville. The relationship of the symbolic interactionist framework to the study was the guided exploration of institutional and individual practices, assumptions and processes in order to describe how teacher leaders recognize and challenge deficit thinking. A sub-group of two teacher leadership teams were asked to participate in the study stipulating anonymity and confidentiality as factors to encourage participation. There were three teacher leaders on each team. These six teacher leaders held either formal leadership positions or served as informal leaders in their respective urban schools of Urbanville or Citiville. Through working with the six teacher leaders, they interpreted their experiences based on their interactions with each other, with other classroom teachers, and shared those experiences with each other to describe the meanings of the experiences. Classroom teachers also interpreted and related their experiences based on their engagement and participation in the equity projects facilitated by the teacher leaders.

This study was carried out in four phases using qualitative methods during the implementation of the equity projects over a six-month period. Semi-structured interviews, CTLP coursework, document analysis, and focus groups were the primary
methods used for gaining a deeper understanding of how teacher leaders worked together to identify and address issues associated with deficit thinking, and the influence their work had on other classroom teachers. Throughout the four phases, data collection and analysis was an on-going process of continual reflections. Phase I employed initial and follow-up face-to-face interviews of teacher leaders and school administration resulting in establishing early impressions of themes. During Phase II, follow-up interviews were conducted to gain additional in-depth information pertaining to teacher leaders and school administration views. Also, the Teacher Efficacy Scale Survey was administered to define the context of focus group questions to be asked of classroom teachers from both schools. The overall return rate from both schools was above 50%. Participants responded to twenty items listed on the Teacher Efficacy Scale Survey pertaining to 10 personal teaching efficacy (PTE) and 10 general teaching efficacy (GTE) items. Response to each item was along a six-point Likert scale from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree.”

During Phase III and IV, a professor from a local university conducted focus group sessions with classroom teachers and CTLP teacher leadership teams at the school site. Focus groups were established to derive meaning from survey responses and what influence, if any, did the equity projects have on classroom teachers’ perceptions of deficit thinking. These focus group sessions verified relationships and distinguishing characteristics of each case and across the two cases. Validation strategies included triangulation of data, member-checking, and peer debriefing.

Results from this research study suggests that teacher leaders can recognize and challenge deficit thinking and influence their colleagues’ thinking in ways to improve
instructional practices, student motivation, relationship with parents, and overall school climate. These concluding thoughts occurred from the findings of the emergent categories, themes and sub-themes of research participants' verbatim responses.

Findings from the two case studies imply there are antecedent conditions to support teacher leaders' capacity to address deficit thinking. The antecedent conditions were district-level support, principal leadership, diversity training, and school culture. These factors enabled teacher leaders to develop and employ school level equity projects leading to the cumulative emergence of seven categories, eighteen themes and twelve sub-themes. Descriptive coding was used to determine the seven categories (relational leadership, servant leadership, commitment to diversity, commitment to learning, group process, strategic thinking and planning, and effects) attributing a class to segments of transcriptions for identifying patterns. Employing pattern codes assisted in making inferences and determining explanations of themes and sub-themes. Themes and sub-themes emerged specific to each teacher leadership teams' experiences and interpretations. In the Urbanville case study, eleven themes emerged to include: 1) self as leader; 2) interactions; 3) capacity-building; 4) consensus-building; 5) developing common language; 6) life experiences; 7) cultural humility; 8) institutionalizing the concern; 9) problem-solving; 10) diplomacy; and, 11) adapting and changing practices. Eight sub-themes that emerged from the Urbanville study included individual strengths, role delegation, compromise, word meaning, data usage, forward thinking, critical consciousness and conversations.

The Citiville case study resulted in eleven themes consisting of: 1) self as leader; 2) interactions; 3) capacity-building; 4) teamwork; 5) developing common
understandings; 6) life experiences; 7) professional development; 8) culturally relevant pedagogy; 9) data-driven decision-making; 10) instructional support; and, 11) reinforcing and adapting practices. Seven sub-themes emerged consisting of individual strengths, task-oriented, compromise, shared values, varied instruction, conversations and motivation.

Collective categories included group process, strategic thinking and planning, and the effects on colleagues' thinking. Universal themes were self as leader, interactions, capacity-building, and life experiences. Common sub-themes consisted of individual strengths, compromise and conversations. Constant comparative analysis of categories, themes and sub-themes was utilized to: 1) provide a specific set of teacher leader role behaviors; 2) identify factors that followers (classroom teachers) consider when engaged in learning that is led by teacher leaders; and 3) describe transformative processes (Five Stage Empowerment Trajectory).

Research participants described being a risk-taker, showing enthusiasm and passion for the work, patience with self and others, and effective communication skills (active listening and ability to share knowledge) as essential leadership role behaviors. Focus group participants highlighted: a) receptiveness to seek and incorporate colleagues' ideas; b) open and honest communication of personal convictions that exemplified self-sacrifice; c) willingness to be a follower as well as leader, modeling humility; and, d) confidence exhibited in self and others' abilities to add meaningful contributions as teacher leaders' characteristics that motivates them to follow others.

Findings indicated that a transformative process (Five-Stage Empowerment Trajectory) occurred that empowered teacher leaders to address deficit thinking in their
schools. The Five-Stage Empowerment Trajectory conceptual and methodological framework consists of: 1) enabling, 2) exploring; 3) evolving; 4) engaging others; and, 5) energizing others. The trajectory serves as a model of a transformative process to foster collaborative teacher leadership in recognizing and challenging deficit thinking. Furthermore, the trajectory is an evolution of teacher leaders from hierarchical, technical modes of practice to genuine participatory modes of action that reflects community-building practices.

Implications of the findings fill a void in existing knowledge in that the Five-Stage Empowerment Trajectory provides a course of action for school districts to promote teacher leadership to move beyond the formal and technical roles to a combination of informal and formal teacher leadership roles that are team-oriented and collaborative to address problems associated with urban schooling. Additionally, the findings contribute to existing research to suggest teacher leaders in diverse school settings share common envisioning, goal setting and empowering behaviors that influence certain facets of school transformation. These facets include adaptations of instructional practices and operational structures to better support students’ needs. Teacher leaders in both case studies viewed their school administration as significant to establishing conditions for enhancing their sense of empowerment.

The research study also contributed to professional practice to suggest the development and implementation of teacher leadership programs that require teachers to seek out colleagues to participate jointly in diversity training and team-building skills can offset the view that diversity training is for White educators. Attention and action toward
providing professional development that emphasizes diversity training for all its educators is paramount to addressing deficit thinking.

Professional training also needs to be extended to principals to embrace and model shared, distributive leadership. Principals can create the conditions for teacher autonomy resulting in improved student and staff morale, and an increased willingness on the part of adults to adapt and make changes to improve student learning.

Recommendations for future research on teachers addressing deficit thinking can include: a) Are the Empowerment Trajectory Stages linear or can there be several stages happening simultaneously? b) Are the Empowerment Trajectory Stages developmental, such that how you perform in a prior stage affects how you perform in subsequent stages? c) How can the work of teacher leaders' be structured to sustain focus on urban schools equity and social issues? d) What are the course of actions in which many formal and informal teacher leaders can lead beyond the classroom to influence school cultural norms? Future research on educational leadership needs to consider questions to identify the following: a) How do principals’ views of leadership change over time? What effects do these changes have on their practice? b) What types of educational leadership programs exist to prepare teachers and principals to work effectively together in urban school settings? What impact do these programs have on leaders’ abilities to improve urban schooling?

In conclusion, leadership development and school improvement mandates need reforming by policy makers, colleges and universities, and school districts to meet the demands of urban education. Course curriculum, professional training that incorporates diversity, equity and social justice issues coupled with inclusive practices, and hiring
practices in the field of education study could foster deliberative, collaborative problem-solving competencies that better prepares future leaders for the challenges and rewards of leading urban schools.
References


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Appendix A

Interview Protocol Project: Teacher Leadership

Date:
Place:
Interviewee:
Position of interviewee:

(Briefly describe the project)

Questions for Teacher Leaders:

1. Think of a time when teacher leaders effectively led a collaborative effort that positively impact student learning. What did these leaders do that led to the positive result?

2. What skills, attitudes, and behaviors do you have and use that demonstrate your capacity as a leader?

3. How do other teachers respond to teacher leaders in your workplace?

4. Describe how collaboration worked in your team.

5. What is collaboration?

6. How do teacher leaders recognize deficit thinking?

7. How do teacher leaders challenge deficit thinking?

8. How did your team determine the equity topic?

9. Why was the topic selected?

10. Having a well-focused issue is a key concern to the teacher leadership team’s equity project. What cultural ramifications can you identify as a result of such a focus? What social ramifications can you identify as a result of such a focus?
Interview Protocol Project: **Teacher Leadership**

Date:

Place:

Interviewee:

Position of interviewee:

(Briefly describe the project)

**Questions for Principals & Assistant Principal:**

1. How would you define teacher leaders?
2. What skills, attitudes, and behaviors have you observed in the teacher leaders that makes them effective? Not effective?
3. How do other teachers respond to teacher leaders in your workplace?
4. Describe how collaboration works with teacher leaders in your school.
5. What do you believe about collaboration?
6. How do teacher leaders recognize deficit thinking?
7. How do teacher leaders challenge deficit thinking?
8. What types of support are given to help teacher leaders lead?
9. Why do you think the leadership team selects the particular topic as a project?
10. Having a well-focused issue is a key concern to the teacher leadership team’s equity project. What cultural ramifications can you identify as a result of such a focus? What social ramifications can you identify as a result of such a focus?
Appendix C

PROBING QUESTIONS

TEACHER LEADERS

1. How do you see yourself as a teacher leader?
2. Why did you choose to participate on a leadership team?
3. Is it important for teacher leaders to collaborate, and if so, why?
4. What do you believe about equity?
5. What is deficit thinking?
6. Is it important to recognize deficit thinking, and if so, why?
7. Do you challenge deficit thinking, and if so, how do you do this?
8. What do you think is the impact of your work on your colleagues’ thinking?

SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION (Principals & Assistant Principal)

1. How do you see teacher leaders?
2. Is it important for teacher leaders to collaborate and if so, why?
3. How do you support teacher leadership?
4. What do you believe about equity?
5. What is deficit thinking?
6. Is it important to recognize deficit thinking, and if so, why?
7. Is it important to challenge deficit thinking, and if so, why?
8. What do you believe to be the role of teacher leaders in your school?
9. What do you think is the impact of the teacher leaders’ work on their colleagues’ thinking?
Confidential, Blind Teacher Survey

A number of statements about people and teaching are presented below. The purpose is to gather information regarding the actual attitudes of educators concerning these statements. There are no correct or incorrect answers. We are interested only in your frank opinions, based on your experiences. Your responses will remain confidential.

Instructions: Based on your experiences, please indicate your personal opinion about each statement by circling the applicable response at the right of each statement.

Key: 1 = Strongly Agree  2 = Moderately Agree  3 = Agree slightly more than disagree  4 = Disagree slightly more than agree  5 = Moderately Disagree  6 = Strongly Disagree

1. The amount a student can learn is primarily related to family background.

1 2 3 4 5 6

2. If students aren’t disciplined at home, they aren’t likely to accept any discipline.

1 2 3 4 5 6

3. When I really try, I can get through to most difficult students.

1 2 3 4 5 6

4. A teacher is very limited in what he/she can achieve because a student’s home environment is a large influence on his/her achievement.

1 2 3 4 5 6

5. If a student did not remember information I gave in a previous lesson, I would know how to increase his/her retention in the next lesson.

1 2 3 4 5 6

6. If a student in my class becomes disruptive and noisy, I feel assured that I know some techniques to redirect him/her quickly.

1 2 3 4 5 6
7. If one of my students couldn't do a class assignment, I would be able to accurately assess whether the assignment was at the correct level of difficulty.

8. If I really try hard, I can get through to even the most difficult or unmotivated students.

9. When it comes right down to it, a teacher really can't do much because most of a student's motivation and performance depends on his or her home environment.

10. If a student uses their home or street language, my role as the teacher must be to tell the student how he/she is speaking is incorrect.

11. Generally, when parents do not participate in school activities, they “just don’t care”.

12. Many of the students I teach are not capable of learning the material I am supposed to teach them.

13. The attitudes and habits my students bring to class greatly reduce their chances for academic success.

14. Even a teacher with good teaching abilities may not reach many students.

15. When a student gets a better grade than he usually gets, it is usually
because I found better ways of teaching.

1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6.

16. The hours in my class have little influence on students compared to the influence of their home environment.

1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6.

17. When my students need love and care, I spend more time on the love and care than I do on the academics.

1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6.

18. As a teacher, I don’t think about the cultures of students. It’s really about students’ personalities.

1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6.

19. Education is not valued in many homes, teachers must get students to value learning.

1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6.

20. If parents believe in education, then success is achievable for their children.

1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6.


Appendix E

Observational Protocol Worksheet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Length of Activity</th>
<th>Minutes</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Descriptive Notes</td>
<td>Reflective Notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Draw visual</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix F

Document Analysis Criteria Worksheet

- Participants maintained journals

Comments: 

- Examine equity-project activity work

Comments: 

- Analyze public documents

Comments: 

- Analyze participants' coursework

Comments: 

School: ____________________________