Supporting Teacher Leadership Through a Team Lead Community of Practice

A Case Study

by

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ABSTRACT

In an era of educational transformation, teacher leaders play a pivotal role in facilitating systemic change within schools. This dissertation presents a single-case action research study investigating the support structures provided by a Team Lead Communities of Practice (TL CoP) to nurture teacher leaders. The primary aim of this research is to explore the effectiveness of the TL CoP in supporting teacher leaders at one school site. Utilizing qualitative data from interviews, participant journals, researcher memos, and agendas, this study captures the perspectives of team leads of interdisciplinary teams. The findings emphasize the need for flexible support systems tailored to the unique challenges teacher leaders face. Offering teacher leaders agency in their learning is paramount to their success. Additionally, structured time for collaboration and problem-solving within the TL CoP is crucial. One significant revelation is the importance of role clarity. Team leads need a clear understanding of their responsibilities to effectively lead teams and drive systemic change. This research contributes to the literature on educational leadership by highlighting the vital role of teacher leaders and the potential of TL CoPs in supporting their development. It advocates for the creation of such communities as a promising strategy to empower teacher leaders, providing them with essential support, dedicated collaboration time, and role clarity. As schools evolve to meet the demands of the 21st century, the insights from this study offer guidance for educational stakeholders seeking to cultivate a culture of leadership and foster systemic change through teacher leadership.

To Don: Thanks for being in the driver's seat while I rode in the back with my laptop (and with maybe some backseat driving, sorry about that). At the next light, let's change seats; now you can be the writer in the family.

And to my dad: Thanks for being proud of me. I'm proud to be your daughter.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

It was a Wednesday morning, and, as the team lead, I needed to make sure the team was ready for flexible scheduling, so I sent out a message to remind them. I finished double-checking the schedules for my advisory students and went next door to the sub for social studies. I made sure he knew where I was in case he needed anything, then left to ask the English teacher to check up on him throughout the day.

The math teacher found me in the hallway to ask what the plan was for one of his advisory students, Jason, who did not do well with subs. Could Jason go to another team teacher rather than social studies? We went into the teacher's classroom and changed Jason's schedule.

At this point, my college intern showed up and asked what she could do that day. I sent her back to my classroom to look at my lesson plans until I had time to talk with her, then headed to the science teacher's room, as she was just back from a couple of days off due to a family emergency. Was she doing okay? I wasn't sure if she was even there. She was, and she was okay, but she was worried about her mom. I listened to how she was feeling, noticed that we had 8 minutes before the first bell, and made plans to reconnect at lunch to check on her.

I headed back to my classroom and, on the way, made some students go back outside to wait for the bell. I really needed to talk to my intern. Wait, did I talk to the English teacher about checking in with the sub?

On my way to her room, I ran into the AVID elective teacher. She stopped me. 'You know, I really appreciate this team because we don't have any drama. And you know why? Because you listen. You listen, and then you do something.' Wow. I needed that. But I also needed to get back to my classroom and think about

teaching, which was feeling like a side gig to my team lead job at the moment. I crossed the threshold of my classroom door just moments before the first bell rang…

(Composite Vignette of Team Lead Experiences)

More than ever, schools are under pressure to provide quality education for all students (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009). In 2017, my junior high school in a large city in the Southwest considered how to address the challenges of preparing students for college and careers in a world very different from that of even a generation ago. Teacher and leaders asked, "What do we need so we can provide what students need?" When they decided they needed more local control over what was happening in the school, they created teams of teachers to wrap around students so they could meet both academic and pastoral needs. Teams were created with core content teachers, a special education teacher, and an embedded electives teacher to take the locus of decision-making closer to the actual instruction and classroom environment. The leaders moved each team into their own area of the school. They worked on team systems that would support the teachers and other systems that would support the students. They designated team leads to facilitate and run the teams.

As teaming matured over the years at the school, the team leads were relied on to innovate, make team and school decisions, oversee team functions and tasks, and communicate with administration. The school culture evolved to rotate around team leads as leaders as they worked within the teams and on other committees. Team leads became a vital part of the leadership structure of the campus. I was a team lead for three years at my school and saw firsthand how much the team leads did, how many roles we filled, and how difficult it was to balance leading and teaching. As someone who has always been interested in the practice of leadership, I often thought about the varied experiences of the team leads. As an educator, I wondered how we were learning to lead. In my doctoral journey, I brought those

ideas together to investigate questions related to my school site and find answers that could help with specific leadership development for the team leads. If teachers are to fill leadership roles, they need training and support, which requires dedicated effort. I hoped the end result of this inquiry would be that teachers would feel empowered in their decision-making and create a better educational environment for students. This study examines team leads in my school and investigates strategies to provide the support and training they need to take on leadership responsibilities on an interdisciplinary team.

As I discuss in more detail later in my dissertation, I conducted a case study to investigate my research questions. Case studies often include vignettes to illustrate aspects of the case (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2018). In this case study, I include fictional vignettes based on real-life experiences I had as a team lead and that reflect the perspectives that other team leads have shared with me, both in and out of the research for this project. The vignettes at the beginning of each chapter are included to help the reader step into the role of the team lead, understand the issues team leads face, and give context to the study findings. The following sections also provide information that puts the case for my research into context.

Larger Context

What should students learn? This question is a much-discussed topic in education as educators recognize the vital need to prepare students for a rapidly changing world. As a result, educators strive to employ teaching strategies and pedagogy to ensure students are ready for the 21st century. Teaching with future-focused approaches connects the curriculum to solving real-world problems and building skills that transfer beyond the classroom (Crockett, 2018). Such strategies and pedagogy focus on critical thinking, application of knowledge, and inquisitive

learning as educators prepare today's students for tomorrow's world—a world in which students' future jobs may not yet exist. Personalized learning is also a frequent and effective focus, as teachers strive to ensure all students can learn at their own pace and provide opportunities for student voice and choice in the learning process (Marzano et al., 2017; Twyman, 2014;).

With this need for modern pedagogical practices, there is a need for modern school structure and organization (Blair, 2020; Marzano et al., 2017; Twyman, 2014). Flexible scheduling, teaming practices, and student advisory support are ways to address the structures needed to develop a learning environment that meets these needs (Marzano et al., 2017). Nevertheless, to develop and maintain these models, teachers need leadership and support that facilitates change and provides focus on the vision of, for example, personalized learning or developing skills. Often, site and district administrators provide this support in a top-down structure that has been typical of American education since its beginnings; however, modern education demands leave little time and resources for current administrators to lead school improvement initiatives on their own (Danielson, 2007a; Supovitz et al., 2019). One study of principals in Florida found the participants spent just 13% of their time on instruction-related activities (Horng et al., 2010). Formal school leaders need help to enact and sustain changes in instruction.

Current workplace models outside of education are moving toward collaborative practices in which employees have a voice, and young workers want and expect opportunities to impact their profession and their world (Jordan & Sorrel, 2019; Kochan, 2019; Kochan et al., 2019). Similarly, old systems must give way to a new vision of leadership characterized by the interactions between all adults at a school rather than just the work of a few leading the rest (Supovitz et al., 2019). Teachers are looking for ways to work smarter to meet student needs, and they have

begun to rely more on leading and supporting each other to make this happen (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009). The education world must adopt these distributed leadership practices by involving teachers as leaders to ensure the new generation models democratic decision-making for each other and their students (Barth, 2001, as cited in York-Barr & Duke, 2004). To that end, understanding how leadership works in a school setting is vital to developing usable knowledge for school leadership (Spillane, 2006). This study examines one method for providing support for teacher leaders to lead interdisciplinary teams of teachers effectively.

Teacher Leaders

As the demands on teachers and administrators increase, many more teachers are stepping into leadership roles to meet the needs of change initiatives and curriculum development (Berry et al., 2013; Blair, 2020; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009; MetLife, 2013). To effectively and sustainably implement school improvement, teacher leaders are necessary in both formal and informal positions (Fairman & Mackenzie, 2012, as cited in Miller et al., 2022). Often, when leaders are mentioned in education settings, the reference is to administrative leadership; however, leadership is not confined to a formal position such as a principal or assistant principal (Blair, 2020; Barnes & Shudak, 2022). In reality, many teachers not seeking to leave the classroom for administrative positions take on informal leadership roles as they work to improve student outcomes (Barnes & Shudak, 2022). Teacher leaders provide valuable contributions to the classroom, campus, and district, yet teacher leadership is not a widely recognized or supported leadership structure.

Teacher leadership as a method for creating sustainable change in teaching and learning is an effective leadership model because it promotes active involvement by all levels of education staff (Blair, 2020; Spillane et al., 2001). Teachers are well-

positioned to evaluate the effectiveness of school or district-wide change initiatives. They experience the daily ups and downs of implementing recommended strategies or practices that create change and, therefore, have direct knowledge of the daily operations of the school and the impact of those operations on staff and students (Lieberman & Miller, 2004; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Teachers have an optimal perspective on change; they can provide feedback about implementing innovations as they constantly assess and adjust their interactions with other adults on campus and with their students as they teach.

Schools need collective action in the current dynamic teaching climate to create real, sustaining change (Blair, 2020). Yet the responsibility for leading and implementing change cannot rest solely on administrators' shoulders. The complex needs of schools cannot be supported with the traditional top-down approach, which means that administrators and teachers need to collaborate to support student learning (ASCD, 2014, as cited in Blair, 2020; Danielson, 2007a; Supovitz et al., 2019). Teacher leaders can have a tremendous impact on how innovation and change play out and are critical to ensuring changes are maintained (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009).

Effective teaching is all about assessing and adjusting to make needed changes, yet in top-down leadership structures, the teachers' perspective is not always valued. School culture is greatly affected by the level of teacher leadership, but often the practice of developing and supporting teacher leaders is overlooked by formal education leadership (Blair, 2020). Katzenmeyer and Moller (2009) state:

> Teacher leadership requires moving beyond graduate courses and in-service workshops to applying theories in the classroom; teacher leadership requires teachers to solve the multifaceted problems that they encounter daily in

classrooms and schools and to create knowledge themselves that is willingly shared with colleagues.

In today's dynamic education setting, teacher leadership is crucial to ensuring teacher buy-in, positive and supportive school cultures, and more autonomy for teaching staff (Blair, 2020). When employees have greater participation in an organization— such as more opportunities to lead and support each other—there is more commitment to shared goals and ownership in outcomes (Sutton & Rao, 2016; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). As schools embrace change, there must be a school-wide focus on learning with an expectation for teacher participation in leadership (Kazenmeyer & Moller, 2009).

As leadership lines blur, educators may find themselves addressing issues of power and position. Often, teachers want to be part of decision-making, but this role is often limited in traditional models of education structure (Blair, 2020). Further, teachers often advocate for students but rarely advocate for each other or for more voice in the education hierarchy (Blair, 2020). Many teachers express frustration with top-down models of leadership, which do not draw on the expertise and knowledge of teaching staff (Blair, 2020). These feelings of powerlessness and lack of voice can lead to teachers feeling isolated and ultimately leaving the profession (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009). Teacher leadership provides a way to bridge that gap, bringing teachers to the table to determine how to build systems and support for real, empowering change that impacts the students they teach. Teachers can take on these roles to advocate for what they are passionate about or grow professionally (Kazenmeyer & Moller, 2009). As teachers find ways to work side by side with administration as school leaders, they will be able to find their voice and develop a school culture of mutual learning (Supovitz et al., 2019).

Teacher leadership involves influencing colleagues to improve teaching and learning practices (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Collaborative practices such as working on teams help to achieve this goal. Successful teams embrace clear expectations for collaborative work practices and distribution of expertise (Mary Lou Fulton Teacher College, n.d.b; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Distributed expertise practices necessitate more than one teacher step into a leadership role to guide the team in their area of knowledge. For example, a team may have one teacher who is more comfortable with the technological needs of the group, while another may be an expert in analyzing data for grouping students in personalized learning experiences. As they work together on these team needs, collaboration and mentorship play critical roles in distributing expertise amongst colleagues (Blair, 2020). Teachers who work collaboratively develop respect and support for one another, which helps them feel that they can make a difference for their students (Blair, 2020). To facilitate the work, teams can have multiple leaders, or all team members can be leaders in their own ways. However, in most cases, a designated team leader is needed to oversee the team's actions, communicate with other teams or leaders on campus, and help develop the team culture.

Expectations for Teacher Leaders

Teacher leadership is now recognized as a distinct role, and many states have established supports and standards to clarify essential teacher leadership skills (Berry, 2019). Arizona and North Carolina, to name two, include a professional teaching standard specific to demonstrating leadership qualities (Arizona State Board of Education, n.d.; North Carolina State Board of Education, 2017). Districts and education organizations have developed strategies to support teachers, including teacher leadership self-reflection surveys and rubrics to guide teacher leadership skill development (CSTP, 2018). Some states have even created leadership frameworks

that outline the knowledge and skills needed for teacher leadership (Kentucky Department of Education, 2015). The effort to identify clear expectations is significant progress in developing teachers as leaders.

Specific teacher leadership skills are often referenced in teacher development rubrics and materials. For example, the Danielson Framework for Teaching touches on some of the skills of teacher leaders (Danielson, 2007b). A "distinguished" teacher takes on leadership roles in professional responsibilities such as participating in professional learning communities and making decisions (Danielson, 2007b). Others have developed specific frameworks for developing teacher leadership. The Center for Strengthening the Teaching Profession (CSTP) Teacher Leadership Skills Framework provides more detail by describing six critical aspects of effective teacher leaders: working with adult learners, communication, collaboration, knowledge of content and pedagogy, systems thinking, and equity lens (CSTP, 2018). The framework further breaks down these critical aspects into the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary for teacher leaders to be effective in these roles (CSTP, 2018).

Local Context

Support and training for teacher leaders is also needed at the local level. In this section, I review characteristics of my local context, including current school and district attention to meeting the needs of students through teaming practices and distributed expertise, teacher leadership development, interdisciplinary teaming at my site, and my personal context related to this work.

District and School Context

In my area in the Southwestern United States, there have been significant shifts in both the size of the population as well as the demographics of the city I work in. What was once a small farming town has grown into a major metropolitan

area with many inhabitants from other states and countries. The population has grown more diverse, and residents are likely to move frequently. Schools in my district often grapple with how to support students who may not spend much time in their care and come from varied backgrounds and with different socio-economic needs. In the recent past, the school district mindfully considered how to best meet the needs of a large and diverse population of students while addressing how to guide children in future-focused learning. The district engaged in an 18-month process involving internal and external communities to develop a Portrait of a Graduate, which outlines critical attitudes and skills students need to be successful in school and in the future as workers and community members. The district believes systems need to change, such as the traditional structures of schools, school schedules, pathways to certification, and staffing models, to ensure all children have an equitable route to success.

My school, the study site, was a junior high with students in 7th and 8th grades. Enrollment for the school was declining, settling around 650 students at the time of the study. Leaders at my school recognized to ensure students develop the Portrait of a Graduate attributes; they would need to create an organizational framework that addressed the fundamental changes that need to take place on our campus. In 2018, the school implemented a re-organization, which led to three main changes: a culture of teaming, flexible scheduling to personalize student needs, and distributed expertise.

Teaming In My Context

With the need for re-organization, our school decided to develop a teaming structure to meet the needs of the students on our campus. Teaming practices have been used in the business world to empower organizations to make meaningful systemic change (Burkus, 2023; Edmonson & Harvey, 2017; Hackman, 2002). In the

K-12 educational setting, interdisciplinary teams help to build deeper and personalized learning for students as teams of teachers distribute expertise throughout the team (Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College Next Education Workforce [MLFTC NEW], n.d.a). In this model, educators do not have to be "all things to all learners at all times" (MLFTC NEW, n.d.a) and individual educator strengths and roles on the team are accessible to all students (MLFTC NEW, n.d.b). Team teachers can focus on specific tasks and do them well, and the team as a whole provides opportunities for students to experience deeper learning (MLFTC NEW, n.d.b). With this collaborative and shared approach, the interdisciplinary teams at our school could make decisions on how to best meet the individual needs of students, while ensuring that the whole group of students continues to have access to rigorous and effective learning. The teaming model improves the effectiveness of teams and creates a system that better meets the needs of students (MLFTC NEW, n.d.b).

The move to interdisciplinary teams necessitated teachers step in to take on leadership roles across the campus. There were three main ways educators, administrators, and staff worked on collaborative teams, and each of these team structures involved teacher leadership. The first was Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), which were formed for academic content areas, community outreach, instructional support, student academic support, and student behavioral support. At my school, we utilized PLCs to take advantage of the distributed leadership culture we developed. Each of these PLCs had a teacher leader who facilitated the group, contributing to the school's distributed leadership culture.

A second team that was established during the re-organization was the guiding coalition. The guiding coalition consisted of school administrators, leaders of interdisciplinary teams, content PLC chairs, and representatives from classified and office staff. The coalition met regularly to discuss and make decisions regarding the

running of the school and how to support students best. The guiding coalition was recognized as the decision-making body on campus, and most school-wide issues and initiatives were discussed in this representative body.

The third collaborative team structure that was developed on our site was interdisciplinary teams. At the time of the innovation our school served the needs of over six hundred 7th and 8th-grade students on four interdisciplinary teams. Each team consisted of four content teachers for math, English, social studies, and science, and included one elective teacher and a special education resource teacher, and for some teams, a teacher to meet the needs of English language learners. Each interdisciplinary team shared a group of 150-180 students as they worked together to support students' academic and social-emotional needs.

While there are many opportunities to work with teacher leaders on my campus, I have chosen to work specifically with the teachers who lead interdisciplinary teams. The interdisciplinary teaming model at my school came out of discussions with site administration and teacher leaders in which they were looking for better ways to serve the school's diverse population. State assessment scores were a concern, but the group also felt the school should do more to address aspects of learning that are not measured on the state tests, such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and learning skills. Guided by the district portrait of a graduate, administration, and teachers asked themselves what could help and determined they needed to find a way to introduce more flexibility and autonomy for both teachers and students. They adopted interdisciplinary teaming to give more local control to teachers in meeting students' needs.

The campus also implemented a flexible scheduling model so teams could use data to schedule additional sessions for student needs and to give students controlled class choices for extension and intervention needs. This shift involved

many logistical hurdles that fell on teams to resolve, such as creating teacher schedules that changed each week, scheduling 180 students for a flexible schedule day, and taking attendance under this new system. It took many teachers and much expertise to work through the problems and pitfalls of such an innovative and dynamic change. The result was several teacher leaders stepped forward to work through issues and provide solutions.

As the teaming and flexible scheduling innovations played out, it became clear that a key component of the teaming and flexible model was that of distributed expertise. To that end, the school mindfully constructed interdisciplinary teams to include teachers with varied experiences, including years of teaching, skills with technology and organization, leadership skills, and classroom management expertise. With a broad knowledge base across the team, teachers could address individual student needs, support one another, tackle projects by taking on different roles, and collaboratively manage the day-to-day running of the teams. The school's culture changed from one of teachers closing their classroom doors and working alone to one in which teachers communicated and worked together throughout the school day. An additional structural change to support teams was each team moved to its own hallway, so face-to-face interactions could be natural and frequent, while additional communication could also occur through electronic team chat groups throughout the school day. If a teacher had a question or needed help, a colleague was just a step or chat away. Team meetings included updates on the roles and responsibilities of each team member, as well as problem-solving for student academic and behavioral needs. Novice teachers benefited from the experience of seasoned teachers, expert teachers benefited from the ideas and perspectives of newer staff, and students benefited from varied teacher expertise and experiences.

Interdisciplinary Team Leaders

Serving as a teacher leader on interdisciplinary teams was another way teachers took on leadership roles on my campus. Teacher leaders on these teams played a key role in the leadership culture at my school as they took on many of the responsibilities administrators typically handled at a school site. For example, student schedules were created entirely within the team, typically by the team leader and another team member who developed the schedule based on the overall elective and lunch schedule and who then created student schedules that included student support for special education, English language learners, interventions, extension and gifted sessions, and more. Additional responsibilities for team leaders included front-line behavior and discipline support and guiding the team in developing consistent discipline and classroom management practices. The team leader also facilitated twice-weekly team meetings, developed the meeting agendas, and collaborated with representatives from PLCs as they shared information with the team. The team leader heavily influenced team interpersonal dynamics, and often, leaders were approached by team members who needed advice or wanted help with interactions with other team members, students, families, and school administration. While site administrators also supported these endeavors, interdisciplinary team leaders were typically the first stop for teachers as they worked to build a successful team.

With this collaborative, flexible, and distributed-expertise culture, there was a need for teachers to step into leadership roles across the school. Distributed leadership went hand-in-hand with distributed expertise, as teachers led projects and filled various team roles. At the school, we openly acknowledged and encouraged teachers to step into these roles as they became more comfortable with leading and taking on more responsibility.

Teacher Leadership Development

While there were opportunities and a need for teacher leadership on my campus, we needed a systemic approach to developing teachers as leaders. In a traditional top-down school setting, site administrators have master's degrees in educational leadership or other formal training on leading other adults, change management practices, and other essential leadership skills. In a distributed leadership model, teacher leaders may not have this type of training, which was typically the case at my school. A handful of teacher leaders had administrative master's degrees, but most did not and were not planning on entering such programs. Teacher leadership training at my school was mostly one-on-one mentoring with administrators and other teacher leaders. Administrators were always very open and collaborative with teacher leaders, which provided a personal level of support for the team leaders on campus. Over the last three years, some Saturday guiding coalition professional development and planning sessions touched on related leadership projects. There was also a book study on how to have crucial conversations with colleagues. The Mary Lou Fulton Teacher College Next Education Workforce initiative partnered with my district for the last two years to provide support for implementing teaming models, and during the year of the innovation, they conducted three in-district training sessions for team leaders. This was the first time there was training in my district specifically for team leaders and the district provided a stipend for team leaders along with the extra meetings and duties. While these actions benefited teacher leaders as they took on new roles, ongoing training and support were needed to ensure they had the skills to feel successful and confident in their roles.

While team leaders did a fantastic job of leading and facilitating teams at the school, there were also times that leaders felt unsure about how to proceed or

expressed a need for building skills, particularly the soft skills of leading adults. Mediating, problem-solving with colleagues, and navigating the challenges of being a leader without the power and position of being an administrator were concerns of the team leads. Team leads also grappled with the issues of power differentials within their teams as they performed leadership tasks but did not have supervisory responsibilities for the teachers on their teams. Team members viewed them as leaders; however, they had different leadership power than formal administrators. Additionally, teachers did not see team leads as equals, which could create distance between the team leads and the other team teachers. Without efforts to acknowledge and address issues of power, we may have been inadvertently supporting a hierarchical leadership model. Leadership frameworks on teams differed; some team leads used top-down leadership styles, much like a traditional school, while others used distributed leadership on their teams.

Personal Context

As I have moved to different schools and held different teaching positions, one common personal theme across my career has been teacher leadership. When I started my career as a 7th-grade special education teacher, I quickly took on teacher leadership roles within my department and with my interdisciplinary team. As a team member, I provided leadership and expertise in special education strategies as well as differentiation for students across the team. I took on more formal leadership roles with the special education department by being a site leader for IEP accuracy and compliance. Additionally, I was on the site-based leadership committee and helped to make decisions that affected the school overall. I sought out mentors in seasoned special education teachers who could guide me and model leading a team of teachers as we worked together for our department and our students. While there were some teacher leadership opportunities at this school, I recognized the need for

more guidance for teams and team leaders. Teachers were working hard, but the top-down model remained, and leadership time was sometimes lost in management tasks rather than student-focused decision-making. Much district work had gone into creating teams and time for the teams to collaborate, but there needed to be more focus on teaching team leaders how to lead other adults.

After six years in American public education, I moved with my educator husband and our children to China to teach in the elementary division of an American-certified international school for the children of expatriate families working in the area. The setting was highly collaborative, and I soon became a team leader for one of the grade levels, which meant that I could put into practice some of the teaming strategies I had hoped for in my previous teaming experience. In particular, there were many opportunities to use soft leadership skills, mediating, guiding the group, doing the background legwork to get consensus on issues, and helping develop a distributed expertise culture. As I identified team needs, I decided to pursue more information on how to make leadership work in that setting, and I sought out my own reading materials to supplement my work. I also reached out to other team leaders to start a book study group for leadership practices and other topics related to leading instructional teams. The teams I worked with had great experiences and success, but again, there was no framework for ensuring that teacher leaders had the tools they needed to succeed and grow their skills. There were many strong leaders at this school, but they were left to create their own communities of practice to share information, develop instructional strategies, and seek out resources to improve their craft. These structures were outside of what was offered or acknowledged by the school administration. Again, teacher leaders were expected to step into the role with little guidance. Some did well, but others struggled.

My next move was to an American embassy-affiliated school in Morocco as a special education teacher at the elementary level. It was immediately clear to me this school had little in the way of collaborative and teaming practices. The school was small, with only two classrooms per grade level, so collaboration consisted of grade-level teachers meeting to plan curriculum together. The school's culture dictated my role was to work primarily in isolation from the rest of the school, both in classroom location and in interaction. Further, the practices and procedures of the special education department were not at American and international standards, so I approached the principal to let her know I was going to change the program. Fortunately, she agreed, and I began re-developing the procedures and materials needed to successfully implement learning support for students. A major part of this need was to change the school's culture from isolation to collaboration. I found ways to start that collaboration with some staff and implemented a Child Study Team so that teachers could get help with identifying strategies for students. Through this teacher leadership role, the entire outlook of the role of learning support changed over the five years I was there, and students were getting better support in the classroom and in my sessions. I could troubleshoot and plan with my principal and did a great deal of research on how other international schools were implementing special education practices. I was able to intern with my principal as I worked on a master's in educational leadership, which provided me with a formal opportunity to engage in building leadership capacity.

After ten years overseas, our family decided to move back to the United States, but I was worried about returning to American education context where teachers were typically isolated behind closed doors. Fortunately, I found my current school, which was preparing to implement teaming and flexible scheduling school wide. I went back to teaching special education at the middle school level, was

quickly asked to lead the special education department, and soon after, to be a team leader on one of the interdisciplinary teams. The culture of distributed leadership allowed me to reach out to other staff to ask questions and seek help, and the open and supportive nature of my administrators meant I could ask questions or troubleshoot when I needed more guidance. However, I was often uncomfortable with the difference between perception and reality regarding how much power I had as a team leader, which was amplified by my team members' disparate ideas and experiences with leadership. Further, I felt there were lost opportunities for team leaders to grow into leaders who supported distributed expertise and move beyond being managers of the many systems needed to make our flexible scheduling model work. Little time, lack of contact with other teams during most of the workweek, and a focus on systems all got in the way of further collaboration with team leader colleagues.

After three and a half years as a teacher, special education department chair, and team leader at my school, I was asked to step into an interim role as assistant principal when the position suddenly became open. When the position was officially posted for the following school year, I applied for and was offered the role permanently. The outgoing assistant principal took on the principal role, and as we worked together in our new capacities, we relied on the help of teacher leaders across the school to maintain the innovative and collaborative practices that make our school unique and successful. We discovered teacher leaders working together have the power to maintain momentum in school improvement efforts even when site leadership is in flux (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009).

I have been in education for twenty-one years, most of that time as a teacher leader. However, now as a site administrator, my leadership responsibilities have shifted in notable ways. I reflect on my many years of taking the initiative to find

mentors, seeking out other teacher leaders, and finding literature that could enhance leadership practice. Not everyone feels comfortable reaching out as I have done, nor do they have the time or resources to pursue learning about leadership. Many teacher leaders become frustrated when they do not know where to turn or how to build their leadership skills and abandon their pursuit of teacher leadership to focus on what they have been trained for: teaching students. Teacher leadership can transform classrooms and the profession (Blair, 2020). But, when teachers can not take leadership roles in schools, the opportunity for true and sustainable change for the teaching profession and their students is lost. As a school administrator, I must find ways to support and build teacher leadership mindfully and provide opportunities for teacher leaders to have ownership of their leadership development. This is what I address in this study.

Problem of Practice

Often, when creating teams, a teacher is designated as a team leader; however, just as often, administration assumes teachers can take on these roles without training or support (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009). As participatory leadership models take hold, care should be taken to ensure teacher leaders have the skills to guide collaboration, develop initiatives, and participate in school-level decision-making (Mangin & Ross, 2022). This requires a mindful focus on teacher leader development at the site level, beyond external graduate programs which may not be the goal of many teacher leaders (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Teacher leaders need opportunities to learn the skills required to lead other adults and guide instructional improvement within their teams without detracting from their work as classroom teachers (Danielson, 2007a).

My problem of practice is team leads need training to lead interdisciplinary teams of teachers. As education makes more demands on teachers through teaming

and collaboration practices, effective team facilitation is vital for groups of teachers to engage in teaming practices that promote innovation (Wilkins & Quizio-Zafran, 2022). Yet, team leads are being asked to step into these roles with little or no training, which puts a heavy burden on their shoulders. As my district continues to expand teaming practices across the district, more team leads are needed, and thus, we need distributive leadership systems that include support and training to ensure teachers have the skills they need to move into leadership roles. I developed an innovation to address this need, which provided flexible and targeted training and support.

Innovation Overview

I conducted my innovation at my school site to support our team leads and to build their own community of practice. The innovation began with team leads reflecting on their leadership practices. Next, the group chose a topic for guided development to explore collaboratively. Reflective participant journaling and bi-weekly sessions supported the chosen work of the group. Further details about the innovation and a timeline are outlined in Chapter 3 of this dissertation.

Purpose and Research Questions

In conducting this study, I proposed to provide support to teacher leaders who were leading teams of peer adults. Team leads should not have to rely solely on outside experience or innate abilities to be successful as leaders but rather should receive support and guidance from their schools. Currently, schools look for teachers who know how to lead but often do little to develop teacher leaders other than put them in situations where they must sink or swim (Blair, 2020). This situation may lead to frustration or a lack of confidence and does little to empower leaders with the skills they need to meet team needs. School systems regularly ask teachers to step

up and lead; the same systems should provide those leaders with the tools they need to succeed.

For team leadership to be sustainable over time, distributed leadership models must be used to ensure that team leaders and team members share the load. Not only does this help with the pressures of leading, but this model ensures that teams can draw on the skills of all the team members. When teams utilize all the team members' talents, students also gain access to the talents of multiple teachers. This research created an innovation to help teacher leaders identify leadership tools and strategies to lessen their load as leaders and build cohesive and collaborative interdisciplinary teams.

As noted above, my problem of practice is team leads need training and support to lead interdisciplinary teams of teachers. I focused on the following research questions:

RQ1: How do team leads collaboratively develop skills to guide peer teachers?

RQ2: How do team leads generate better relationships between teachers and other leaders?

RQ 3: How do team leads develop their own voice and advocate for change?

Conclusion

In Chapter 1, I began to describe my case as I presented the contexts and personal experiences that shaped my inquiry. In Chapter 2, I describe related literature that supports my problem of practice and research questions. Communities of practice theory forms the foundation of my study, and I provide connections to my research design and innovation. Additionally, two related frameworks were used for my study, distributed leadership and situational leadership. In the next chapter, I

relate how these theories and frameworks, along with my previous cycles of research, guided my innovation design and dissertation study.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES AND RESEARCH GUIDING THE STUDY

The team meeting went pretty well, and we talked about the various plans we have coming up for the rest of the quarter. I feel like as the team lead I'm taking on most of the team tasks, but I'm not sure how to ask other team members to step into some of the roles we need to fill. Would one of them be ok with me asking them to lead our student celebration plans? Or maybe work on team schedules? I'm not comfortable asking other teachers to take on responsibilities. And it seems like they think that I should be the one leading everything but I still need to teach my classes. How do I ask other teachers to lead?

(Composite Vignette of Team Lead Experiences)

In the previous chapter, I discussed the need for further training and support for teacher leaders heading up interdisciplinary teams and began to describe my case for this study. In this chapter, I review theoretical frameworks and my previous cycles of action research. Communities of practice is the main theoretical lens that I used to design my innovation and research, and I outline this theory and apply it to educational settings and to my innovation. I also present an overview of the related frameworks that guided my innovation design for supporting team leaders: distributed leadership and situational leadership theory. To contextualize my research trajectory and innovation design, I report my previous cycles of action research. I used the theoretical frameworks and data from the previous cycles of research to develop an innovation that encouraged teacher voice and reflection, developed group interactions, and considered the situation in determining actions. I conclude the chapter with a summary of how I used theoretical perspectives to design my Team Lead Community of Practice innovation.

Theoretical Framework

This section details the theory I relied upon to develop my innovation and this action research study. As part of the research design process, qualitative researchers need to identify the theories that will become the foundation of their research (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Grant & Osanloo, 2014). Here I examine communities of practice and describe how I applied this theory to my innovation design.

Communities of Practice

The term "community of practice" (CoP) was coined by Etienne Wenger and Jean Lave in 1991; however, the concept of social structures centered around a common knowledge base can be seen in human systems throughout history (Snyder & Wenger, 2010; Wenger et al., 2002; Wenger, 1998). Whether around professions, hobbies, or ideas, practice-based communities have served as a common method for the social sharing of knowledge (Wenger et al., 2002). The concept of communities of practice is based on a social learning theory that proposes learning takes place through participation, engagement, and interaction (Polin, 2010; Wenger, 1998). As defined by Wegner (1998), communities of practice are groups of people who regularly come together to share knowledge and expertise around an idea, passion, or set of problems (Wenger et al., 2002). Participation in a CoP provides opportunities to learn from others' experiences and provides insight to other CoP members, developing individual practice (Polin, 2010). This exchange of learning provides a "process of alignment and realignment between competence and personal experience," in which all members of a CoP are both teachers and learners (Wenger-Trayner et al., 2014, p. 14).

At first glance, communities of practice sound much like other social learning situations in which knowledge is shared; however, one critical and distinguishing aspect of a CoP is that they are based on peer relationships and not hierarchical

structures (Wenger-Trayner et al., 2014). Leaders may provide opportunities for learning or dissemination of information; however, CoPs meet another need: they provide a low-risk, collegial, and innovative environment where peers can problem-solve and build competence. Members of a CoP may rely on one another for support and knowledge, and the CoP acts as a place to try new ideas with trusted colleagues. CoPs are a way for members to share ideas, problem solve, give advice, build relationships, discuss aspirations, and develop tools needed for their work (Wenger et al., 2002).

The basic structure of a CoP involves three elements: domain, community, and practice (Wenger et al., 2002). *Domain* refers to the area of knowledge; it creates the common identity and values shared by the group (Wenger et al., 2002). *Community* describes the people who are interested in the domain and who build the relationships and trust needed to share ideas and take intellectual risks (Polin, 2010; Wenger et al., 2002). *Practice* refers to the action(s) the community shares as they develop competence in their domain (Wenger et al., 2002). Actions may lead to developing resources, tools, frameworks, ideas, or information that form the foundation for the community's practices. For my intervention, the domain was the knowledge surrounding leading teams, the community consisted of team leads who participated in the intervention, and the practice connected the strategies and actions team leads developed to build competence as effective team leaders.

Communities of practice can be spontaneous or intentional; however, they must provide opportunities for participating in group discussions and engaging in new ideas (Wenger et al., 2002). Wenger et al. (2002, Chapter 3, para. 1) suggest that communities of practice can be intentionally designed for "aliveness," which they describe as having energy and relevance that engages the members. The authors explain how to develop a CoP with intent and outline seven principles that

guide building a CoP in an organization. Due to the short timeframe of the innovation and to keep the innovation manageable, I chose to focus on four of the principles in my innovation design: (1) design for evolution, (2) open a dialogue, (3) focus on value, and (4) create a rhythm for the community. In designing for evolution, a CoP can be built on pre-existing networks to develop a group over time that is focused on long-term learning (Wenger et al., 2002). The collective experiences of the CoP members shape the open dialogue of the group and help members see the possibilities, while insider or expert perspectives guide discovery (Wenger et al., 2002). To help the CoP succeed, the group should focus on identifying the potential value and purpose of the CoP and find ways to help the CoP develop and grow (Wenger et al., 2002). The tempo or rhythm of a CoP drives the group's momentum (Wenger et al., 2002). Communities of practice should bring out the community's internal direction and character and be flexible and responsive to the group's needs (Wenger et al., 2002).

A CoP functions best when there is a community coordinator who leads the CoP practice, helps to keep the focus on the domain, and helps to maintain relationships (Wenger et al., 2002). Others in the group can take on leadership roles and keep the momentum going for the learning agenda of the group (Wenger et al., 2002). Some CoP members may be core participants, while others may participate more peripherally (Wenger et al., 2002). While the intention of a CoP is to flatten hierarchical structures, members can step into coordinating, core, or peripheral roles and change roles as interest and need fluctuate (Wenger et al., 2002). Successful communities of practice are flexible and allow members to adjust their actions to their own needs and the group's needs while still feeling connected (Wenger et al., 2002).

As noted in Chapter 1, my school uses Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) as a way to form groups of teachers who are working on collaborative projects that lead to better learning for students. I considered PLCs as a theoretical framework but decided to use CoP for two reasons. First, I wanted to set the innovation apart from the PLC groups that were already happening at the site. Using the term "CoP" meant that I could define the innovation group from the ground up instead of risking team leads would confuse the innovation with existing collaborative structures. Second, PLCs have an emphasis on student outcomes (DuFour et al., 2010), and in this case, I was focused on outcomes for the team leads. Certainly, the intent of the research was for team leads to get support so they could better support students, but I was not measuring student outcomes for this action research, which is typical in the inquiry cycle for PLCs (Dufour et al., 2010). The CoP structure focuses on the community of learners that share a common domain rather than the people outside the community (Wenger et al., 2002) and the focus of the study was on supporting team leads. Ultimately, I decided COP was the best fit for the trajectory of my project.

Applying CoP in an Education Setting

A CoP can be a powerful way to implement change (Wenger et al., 2002). One researcher implemented a CoP-based intervention to address the challenge of developing, supporting, and retaining elementary school principals in their community (Pombo, 2023). The study focused on how participation in a CoP influenced leaders' perceptions of data-informed decision-making, how the intervention supported the principals in their leadership roles, and how the CoP experience influenced the leaders' implementation of team-based decision-making. The action research study centered on a CoP to develop collaborative relationships to improve leadership practices and included one-on-one coaching by the participant

researcher. The mixed-methods study collected data through a pre-intervention survey and post-intervention interviews. The researcher-practitioner found that professional development offered through a CoP structure combined with coaching strengthened the understanding and skills of the leaders who participated in the intervention. Further, the principal participants valued the team-based approach to data-informed decision-making as they learned from each other and were able to share experiences, knowledge, and challenges. The CoP intervention helped the participants to develop trust and relationships by having a safe place to ask questions and provide help.

In a study including special education teachers who supervised paraeducators, Ledbetter (2016) developed a Team Leadership Community of Practice to support the teachers in leadership skills related to working with their special education team. The innovation focused on a CoP of 7 participants, including the researcher, who met in six sessions to create a collaborative and connected community to discuss the domain of learning skills necessary for leading special education teams. The mixed-methods action research study collected data through pre- and post-surveys, pre- and post-interviews, a focus group, and transcriptions of CoP sessions. The findings indicated that the CoP framework helped the special education team leaders to build collaborative partnerships with paraeducators rather than engaging in purely supervisory roles. As a result of the innovation, the team leaders gained and implemented new leadership skills, and reported increased efficacy on their teams.

Also worth noting is the application of communities of practice in a higher education setting to help one university design a hybrid in-person and online graduate education program that allowed the sharing and development of ideas for better learning outcomes (Polin, 2010). Using online learning platforms, virtual chat,

and asynchronous threaded discussions, the courses included ongoing dialogue between students and faculty and occasionally guest researchers and authors (Polin, 2010). This enabled participants to engage in discussion on a level not usually experienced in an in-person lecture format and helped students to talk about practice within the experience of practice instead of theorizing about it (Polin, 2010). This was a powerful learning experience for students, born of a CoP structure.

More recently, a course in my own doctoral program had a CoP design embedded in the class structure. Some of my most valuable learning took place through a CoP dialogue in video conferencing, virtual chat, and projects as my doctoral colleagues and I made sense of our learning together. As we collaborated on our assignments, we developed a community that encouraged and problem-solved so we could put leadership skills into practice. A small group of us from the larger cohort began to meet online, outside of the assigned coursework requirements and developed a CoP that endured through the remainder of our doctoral journey. We even met in person for some weekend writing sessions to connect and support each other in our dissertation writing. In this way, we connected CoP theory to our own practice as educators and doctoral students.

Summary of CoP and Application to My Innovation

I used Communities of Practice theory to develop the Team Lead Community of Practice (TL CoP) innovation to support team leads at my school. I designed the TL CoP for evolution and built the innovation to move away from meetings that discussed logistics to sessions that incorporated actions and reflection centered on a domain: developing leadership skills. Following the values of CoP, I included flexibility and adaptability in my design to allow for shifts in the domain and practice in response to participants' needs and ideas.

As part of my innovation design, I planned to use open dialogue, meaning my goal as the TL CoP facilitator would be to start conversations about the possibilities for team leadership skill building. Often, adult students find their own lived experiences and personal knowledge excluded in formal education settings (Polin, 2010). In my innovation, I left room for the experiences of team leaders to serve as the voice of the CoP and to shape the dialogue.

I also designed the TL CoP in ways that would help the group focus on the value of the CoP. I developed the innovation to start with learning about the community members' current needs and then mindfully looking for ways to help the team leads grow. With those immediate needs in mind, I designed the TL CoP innovation to focus on the challenges of being a team leader, including opportunities for reflection as the innovation played out.

To create a rhythm for the TL CoP, I scheduled bi-weekly sessions and designed opportunities for reflection at the end of each session. This made room to discuss the tempo and adjust it as needed. Options for increasing or decreasing the tempo of the CoP were an intentional part of the innovation design.

Because a CoP needs a community coordinator, I designed my role to facilitate the TL CoP and provide expertise while gathering data for this study. My role at the school during study implementation was, and still is, assistant principal. However, prior to study implementation, I spent three years as a team leader and, before that, one year as a team member. This experience with teaming at the school allowed me to participate as an expert community member in the innovation. Critical to the design of the TL CoP was that it could evolve and be flexible. I designed the TL CoP with the hope that it would not only continue but that a new facilitator could emerge to continue the TL CoP after the conclusion of the innovation.

I designed the TL CoP innovation to be learner-driven to allow teacher leaders to make choices about what they felt they needed for themselves and their team. Additionally, the design included opportunities for the group to develop its own culture and route, independent of what I, as the facilitator, might have initially envisioned. I designed it for evolution and for the rhythm of the CoP to adjust as needed. CoP theory was the foundation for the innovation design, however, it was also influenced by other related frameworks to inform the actions of the group.

Related Frameworks

My innovation involved developing a CoP to support team leads in my setting. The content and structure of the TL CoP innovation were influenced by distributed leadership and situational leadership theory.

Distributed Leadership

The term "distributed leadership" was first coined by psychologist Cecil A. Gibb (1954), who argued that leadership functions were carried out by the group, not an individual. While leadership actions are typically attributed to one person, they can also be distributed amongst "influential persons" (Gibb, 1954). Rather than leader behavior being attributed to one person at the top of a hierarchy, distributed leadership is characterized by leader behaviors that are shifted to and dispersed across all those who participate in the leadership actions. Contemporary distributed leadership theory proposes that multiple people in the same context can take on leadership activities to accomplish a shared goal (Gronn, 2003; Spillane, 2006). A distributed perspective on leadership shifts the focus of leadership from formal leaders to include the leadership actions of both leaders and followers (Spillane, 2006).

The idea of distributed leadership as it applies to education leadership was introduced in the early 2000s by Gronn (2003) and Spillane (2006) and has become

an influential leadership model (Harris, 2013). In a school setting, distributed leadership moves leadership actions from a purely administrative role to engaging the non-administrative staff in leadership practices (Spillane, 2006). Yet distributed leadership is not merely a shared leadership model in which tasks are shared (Spillane, 2006). In distributed leadership models, group members perform actions that typically would have been considered the leader's responsibility, such as heading up group projects or guiding problem-solving discussions. Understanding how the situation and the practice of leadership affect the leaders and followers—and ultimately the teaching and learning at the school—is the goal of distributed leadership (Spillane, 2006).

Distributed leadership theory recognizes that while there may be many people in an organization who can exercise leadership, the success of the leadership depends on how leadership is orchestrated and supported (Harris, 2004). Criticism of distributed leadership points out that when leadership tasks that were the domain of administration are passed along to teachers, the bureaucratic management structures merely shift from the top to the middle (Fitzgerald, 2009). It can also be difficult when teacher leaders who have informal authority are not respected by other teachers (Timperley, 2005). Further problems may arise in choosing teacher leaders; they may be assigned based on existing respect and perceived leadership qualities rather than criteria that lead to effective leadership (Timperley, 2005).

Uses of Distributed Leadership

Mayrowetz (2008) states that distributed leadership has been defined in various ways but breaks the uses of distributed practices into four categories: (1) use as a theoretical lens, (2) use for democratic leadership structures, (3) use for efficiency and effectiveness, and (4) use as a means to building human capacity. These uses can be applied to education leadership in a school setting.

In order to enact change in a school setting, it is important for leaders to have a shared framework to focus on and guide the work of implementing change (Spillane & Coldren, 2011). Additionally, for change to happen in schools, it is imperative that educators understand how leadership works in schools (Spillane, 2006). While leadership might work differently depending on the school's needs, distributed leadership is a framework that can help schools engage in change initiatives as it provides a model for how change can be distributed across formal and informal leaders (Spillane & Coldren, 2011).

Distributed leadership can also lead to more democratic leadership structures (Mayrowetz, 2008). Distributed leadership posits that in any organization, there are multiple sources of influence (Spillane, 2006). Within education, formal leadership can identify and enable teachers who have influence and expertise and provide them with leadership opportunities (Supovitz et al., 2019). As teachers become more influential as leaders in schools, this adjustment of power may need to be addressed. Novice teachers may challenge the ideas of veteran teachers, or teachers from one discipline may not appreciate leadership from another department (Supovitz et al., 2019). In looking at distributed leadership as a model, questions of influence and power should be mindfully addressed, and formal leaders may need to adjust to shared decision-making systems in their school sites.

For educational reform to be manageable, distributed leadership provides a key, as tasks for school initiatives can be shared amongst the formal and informal leaders of the school for better efficiency and effectiveness (Supovitz et al., 2019; Meyrowetz, 2008). As discussed previously in Chapter 1, formal school leaders often find the bulk of their time is spent on maintaining the school organization and reacting to immediate concerns (Supovitz et al., 2019). This can leave little time for school improvement efforts that lead to meaningful and sustainable change. While

often leadership responsibility in an innovation is distributed through default or crisis, distributing by design identifies leadership functions that meet the needs of the setting and staff, including formal and informal leadership options (Spillane & Coldren, 2011). In a study of the impact of leadership on student outcomes, researchers found that a key factor in school improvement was the distribution of responsibility that directly helped build leadership capacity (Day et al., 2016). Distributed leadership is an effective method for organizing human capital to achieve school improvement, and distributed leadership can help support change initiatives in schools by providing opportunities for teachers to learn from teacher leaders (Camburn & Han, 2009; Supovitz et al., 2019).

By using a distributed leadership model, a school is able to increase the collective capacity of the school and develop teacher expertise (Day et al., 2016; Harris, 2004). This leads to a staff that works on collective goals, with a reliance on expertise rather than formal authority (Copland, 2003, as cited in Mayrowetz, 2008). In the distributed leadership model, the formal leader steps into the role of a facilitator and supports individuals who then take on informal leadership roles (Mayrowetz, 2008). A school principal shares leadership tasks and allows teachers to flex their leadership skills and develop as teachers. Distributed leadership is not just about creating more leaders but rather is a way to increase leadership capability as a means to build professional knowledge (Harris, 2013).

The interactions of leaders and followers are a focus of distributed leadership (Spillane, 2006) and as such provide an opportunity for formal and informal leaders to learn from one another. Distributed leadership can provide opportunities for teachers to learn from teacher leaders. One study found that teachers using a newly implemented literacy program were more likely to access instructional teacher leaders and, therefore, develop their skills as a teacher when there was a distributed

leadership design model in place (Camburn & Han, 2009). A critique of this model for leadership is that distributed leadership can be used as a way to encourage teachers to do more work with little reward (Harris, 2013). To that end, outcomes for teacher leaders will vary based on implementation, but formal leaders can provide authentic opportunities that help teachers realize their full leadership potential (Harris, 2013). How to develop this leadership expertise is the focus of this dissertation.

Applying Distributed Leadership in an Education Setting

Distributed leadership can provide a framework for examining leadership in an educational setting. One researcher used distributed leadership to look at teacher leadership functions in her rural Washington state school district (Ashlock, 2016). She used this framework to investigate the perceptions of administrators and teachers on teacher leadership roles, characteristics, and skills. The study identified common characteristics of teacher leadership as perceived by the staff, which included taking on leadership roles that needed to be filled, as well as creating leadership roles as needed for the school community. The study also found that some teachers take on informal leadership roles based on the needs of the school and the needs of the rural community, which sometimes lacked funds and personnel support. The study supports the idea that distributed leadership is a method for ensuring that various needed roles are filled, whether they are formal or informal, and that this system benefits the students and the community. The researcher also noted because of financial difficulties and isolation from other resources, the teachers in the setting are often "forced to wear many hats" (Ashlock, 2016). This means teachers often take on roles and tasks that administrators might otherwise fill. While distributed leadership shows promise as a system for implementing change, the risk is teachers who are already burdened with increasing expectations may become overwhelmed when taking on leadership roles at their school.

Another researcher used distributed leadership to develop a model for a coaching framework for leaders to become change agents in their schools (Baldwin, 2022). The researcher developed an innovation that included coaching sessions for school site leaders to support a district change for ELD instruction, with distributed leadership as one model for planning actionable change at their site. The mixed-methods study looked at how distributed leadership and other leadership theories affected the attitudes and practices of the school leaders and whether this affected teacher voice and shared vision. The study found that distributed leadership contributed to internal accountability for success with the changes in ELD instruction. The researcher also concluded distributed leadership practices expanded for the sites with participating administration. Lastly, the study evidenced distributed leadership contributed to increased teacher voice as the leaders engaged in actions that encouraged teachers to contribute to the change. Distributed leadership can be a model for increasing the efficacy of change and internal accountability when change is taking place while encouraging teachers to have a say in change actions that affect them.

Situational Leadership

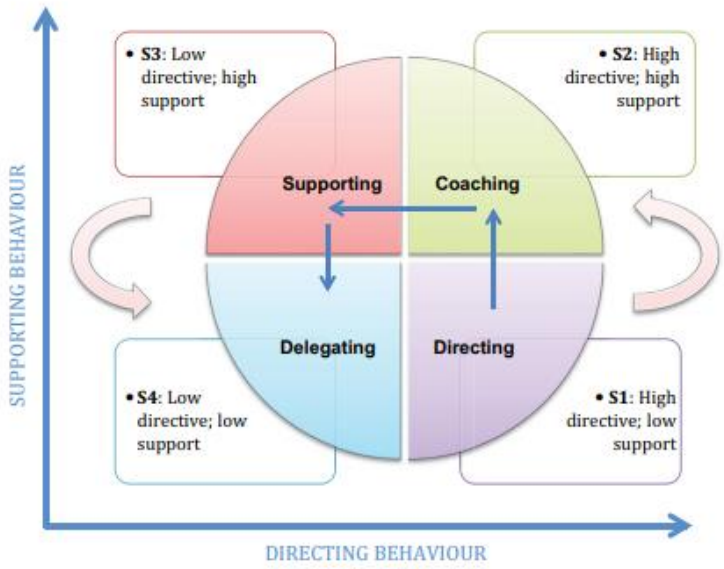
Situational leadership theory provides another dimension to the development of my innovation for training and supporting team leads. The theory was first developed as a "contingency" theory of leadership in 1967 by Fiedler, who described leadership as more effective when specific leadership types are used in relevant situations (Kelly, 2021; Sims et al., 2009). Fiedler believed that leadership effectiveness was based on the situation and the leader's natural leadership style, which should be matched to the circumstances, and introduced the idea of "task-oriented" versus "relationship-oriented" leadership actions (Kelly, 2021). His idea, that leadership styles are fixed, focused on how leaders could be matched to

situations and did not acknowledge an individual leader could adapt their leadership style to a situation or learn new ways to lead (Kelly, 2021).

Contingency leadership theory was further developed by Hersey and Blanchard in the 1980s as the Situational Theory of Leadership (Sims et al., 2009), with Blanchard going on to use aspects of the theory in his popular One Minute Manager series of leadership books. The theory proposes that effective leaders must adapt their style to whatever the circumstances demand (Kelly, 2021; Northouse & Lee, 2018). It is a prescriptive approach in which the leader must determine if the situation demands directive leadership actions or supportive leadership styles (Northouse & Lee, 2018). Further, leaders assess followers' skills and motivation, or "maturity" in the situation, and adapt the degree to which they employ directive or supportive actions to meet the needs of the followers (Kelly, 2021; Northouse & Lee, 2018). This model takes into account both the circumstances of the situation, the needs of the followers, and the leadership styles that the leader employs, thus providing a flexible method to adapt leadership actions to the demands of the setting. The theory, as outlined by Hersey, Blanchard, and Natemeyer (1979), proposed that there are four styles of leadership—telling, selling, participating, and delegating—and that leaders can move through the styles as the followers mature and as the circumstances of the tasks and needs of the group change. These styles have been more recently described as directing, coaching, supporting, and delegating (Kelly, 2021; Rabarison et al., 2013). Figure 1 illustrates the four styles and related actions. Leaders can choose their actions as they determine how much direction and support the followers need, based on the followers' skill level and willingness to engage in the group tasks. Hersey and Blanchard both produced many books and training on leadership that expressed that they believed that leadership was not a fixed skill but that it could be learned and developed over time.

Figure 1

The Four Styles of Situational Leadership



Note: Kelly, A. (2021). *Dynamic managements and leadership in education: High reliability techniques for schools and universities.* Routledge. P. 68

Situational leadership has been used to develop related theories. Another researcher in the field of situational leadership is John Adair, who in the 1960s developed a theory that focuses on the function of leadership (Adair, 2005). This theory proposes that a leader's main job is to see what the followers need and ensure that the group is cohesive and effective (Hackman & Walton, 1986, as cited in Kelly, 2021). Adair believed that leadership was not something enacted by one person but rather a set of behaviors across the group and that any group member could participate in these leadership functions (Kelly, 2021). This interpretation of situational leadership focuses on how a group is led rather than who is in the formal leadership role (Kelly, 2021). According to this viewpoint, leadership skills are a learned trait and can be developed over time (Channell, 2021). Adair proposed that there are specific leadership functions that are necessary for the efficacy of the

group, such as planning, communicating, and motivating (Kelly, 2021). These functions are illustrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2

The Functions of Leadership in Situational Leadership

Note: Channell, M. (2021). *John Adair's action centered leadership: Learn how to be a leader.* TSW Training.

The functions of leadership in this model provide opportunities for the formal leader and the followers to identify what leadership tasks need to be undertaken and distribute those tasks throughout the group, much like what distributed leadership theory proposes. However, critics have noted a focus on the functions of leadership can lead to an authoritarian or hierarchical leadership structure, even when distributed, and the needs of modern leadership, such as fostering innovation or driving change, may not be amply addressed (Kelly, 2021).

Applying Situational Leadership in Practice

Rabarison et al. (2013) used a situational leadership approach when looking at the accreditation process for the Public Health Accreditation Board. They adopted this model to ensure that there was a flexible leadership style that would best fit the needs of the followers, in this case, the directors of health agencies in the study (2013). The authors of the study were able to track the leadership actions of the directors through the various stages of situational leadership and identify how they fit the needs of the accreditation process at that point and time. For example, they noted that when one agency was ready to submit accreditation documents, the personnel were confident enough to transition from the need for a "directing" leadership style to a "coaching" style as they had a better understanding of the process. Further actions in the process showed the agency leaders and followers progressed through the various styles of leadership as the members of the group gained more experience and knowledge (2013). This study showed using situational leadership mindfully to identify what the followers needed and adapting leadership actions accordingly was an effective method for ensuring that leaders guided the agency through the process.

Researchers Hayes, Flowers, and Williams (2021) conducted a study that used situational leadership, which they also call meta-leadership, as a framework. The researchers measured rural principals' responses to the COVID-19 pandemic by analyzing their leadership practices in the initial months of the crisis. Hayes et al. (2021) interviewed 10 principals to look at leadership experiences before the crisis and how their leadership decisions changed during the pandemic. The researchers found principals exhibited caretaker leadership practices during the pandemic, as they provided social-emotional support for teachers, students, and families. Principals also showed self-reliance and resiliency as they navigated uncharted

waters to guide their schools. The researchers concluded the principals exhibited situational leadership by adapting their leadership actions as they assessed and responded to the needs of the stakeholders. They also concluded this flexible response was typical for rural administrators as they adjusted practices to meet the distinct needs of rural schools due to geographical isolation and lack of resources.

Summary of Theoretical Frameworks and Application to Innovation

The structure of a CoP involves community, domain, and practice (Wenger et al., 2002). I used this basic structure to develop the TL CoP innovation for this study and create a collaborative community that engaged with a domain that was chosen by the group. The structure provided opportunities for practice as the team leads engaged with the innovation actions. The TL CoP was designed to be adaptable to the needs of the group and the rhythm of the community and to focus on establishing value for its members. Through open dialogue, the group had the opportunity to work together on practice that was meaningful to them. The innovation was designed so that the participants could step up as leaders within the group and as facilitators of their teams.

Distributed leadership also informed the study as the innovation encouraged the team leads to develop ways to share the load and build trust and leadership within their own teams. Distributed leadership creates a culture within the group that honors both formal and informal leaders and allows the group to determine which leadership actions best support the group (Spillane, 2006). With my problem of practice, distributed leadership provided a foundation for helping teams develop leadership skills that are adaptable to various teaming makeups and needs.

Situational leadership theory was included to support the needs of team leads as they adjust and adapt to the changing needs of their interdisciplinary teams. Northouse and Lee (2018) explain effective leaders are able to diagnose followers'

needs and select the leadership style that is most appropriate to the situation. Team leads may find themselves working with teachers who are new to teaching and may need more directive approaches. Teams may also include seasoned teachers who may know their own content but who lack understanding of other strategies. This could necessitate a low directive but highly supportive type of management style as the teacher-leader works more as a supportive peer than a manager. As will be discussed later in the dissertation, situational leadership also became a practice for me as I worked with the team leads in the innovation.

I used CoP, distributed leadership, and situational leadership to create an innovation that focused on social community learning and was adaptive to the needs of the group. Communities of practice informed the study by lending a structure to the group sessions, with an emphasis on community building and establishing a domain for the group to practice. The innovation was also designed with distributed leadership practices as an intended domain of the CoP, but also so that the CoP itself could engage in distributed leadership practices through the sessions. Situational leadership informed the study by focusing on using a flexible leadership style to determine the needs of the followers. Situational leadership could be applied to leading teams, however it also influenced my leadership actions when facilitating the TL CoP innovation.

Previous Cycles of Research

When we start research, we are looking for answers; however, answers are rarely complete by the end of the study, and the research process becomes a systematic questioning and knowledge-building exercise (Butin, 2010). The action research process leans into this knowledge-building model; it involves questioning, acting, reflecting, and adjusting to circle back to further action (Mertler, 2020). I

engaged in three previous research cycles, each informing this dissertation research.

Cycle 1

At the start of my doctoral program, my ideas for research were centered on special education teachers' perceptions of working on interdisciplinary teams and how teaming affected their morale and their connections to other staff. As noted in Chapter One, my site utilizes a collaborative interdisciplinary teaming approach, and early on in my doctoral studies, I wished to explore how working on interdisciplinary teams affected special education teachers at our school. To this end, I interviewed one administrator and two special education teachers at my site using open-ended questioning techniques. I then transcribed and analyzed the interview data and identified three themes: connection, isolation, and teacher leadership.

My initial findings brought to light that, generally, teaming was perceived positively and that participants felt it increased connection, lessened isolation, and provided opportunities for teacher leadership. While teaming was not perfect, it did provide opportunities for special education teachers on campus that did not necessarily exist at other sites. Interestingly, the administrator I interviewed recognized many leadership activities for the special education teachers, such as training other teachers and providing expertise on teaching strategies on teams. However, the special education teachers did not consider these actions "leadership." As a researcher, this led me to question if and how special education teachers view themselves as leaders and what we could do to develop them into leaders on our campus.

Cycle 2

In my next cycle of research, I wanted to build on what I learned from the interviews in Cycle 1 and set out to design, implement, and study a mini innovation

centered on how special education teachers perceived themselves as leaders, what leadership skills they needed to be able to work with general education teachers, and how leadership practices could generate better relationships between special education and general education teachers. To explore these ideas, I created an innovation that explored the influence of special education teachers as leaders in determining special education support within the general education classroom.

Yin (2018) explains that developing propositions to guide the research helps refine the research questions and the study design itself. I built the Cycle 2 research design on the proposition that leadership skills help special education teachers build better relationships with general education teachers. With this in mind, I recruited two special education teachers and did preliminary interviews about their perceptions of leadership. I used the interview data to refine an Innovation Configuration Map that I utilized to guide a coaching innovation. I then coached and provided strategies to one special education teacher in building trust with general education teachers through developing a shared vision, identifying and celebrating short-term goals, and clarifying expectations.

To put these skills into practice, the special education teacher developed a list of statements and questions she then used to guide a discussion with a general education teacher, with the goal of providing feedback and identifying shared goals and strategies with the other teacher. I observed this discussion using a behavioral observation checklist based on Flanders' interaction categories (Sapsford, 2007, p. 124). The behavioral observation checklist was used to quantify the number of times specific actions occurred and to identify which leadership skills were employed by the special education teacher in interactions with the general education teacher.

Data analysis of the interviews revealed special education teachers recognized general education teachers rely on their expertise in developing instructional

strategies for special education students. The behavioral observation checklist showed there were frequent exchanges of this information during the discussion. Effective communication on teams was a key element of the dissemination of this information, and the general education teacher sought clarification to make sure she was meeting the needs of her students. Trust was another item that came up during the interviews and was observed during the discussion. Additionally, team dynamics played a part in building trust through high levels of communication throughout the day through Google chat, email, and in-person exchanges. Similar to my first cycle, the special education teachers I interviewed, again, did not consider themselves leaders, nor did they recognize the leadership actions they took on their teams.

This cycle showed me coaching did help the special education teacher to understand what she needed to do to communicate and lead general education teachers. After coaching, she was able to generate information to share with the general education teacher and lead the discussion in developing strategies and plans. The checklist worked well for observing interactions in the discussion, however, I felt my innovation was vague. The coaching sessions were useful in guiding the teacher but were not structured in a way I would be able to recreate or that another practitioner could reproduce. I concluded that my next cycle would need a clearly designed innovation so it could be understood and followed by other researchers.

At the end of Cycle 2, I was appointed to an interim assistant principal job at my school, which I then interviewed for and was offered as a permanent position. While considering my next steps for supporting special education teachers as leaders, I circled back to my observations about the team leaders at my school and their need for support and training. While I felt that training for special education teachers as leaders on teams was needed, implementing this training beyond my school site was not in my scope of influence, while working with team leaders at my

school was. Further, I considered that as our district created more teaming models, the need for training for team leaders would increase. I decided that a focus on general education teacher-leaders could address my school's current need and give me further insight into how to develop a coaching innovation for special education teachers in the future. This led me to further mini-cycles of research to gather information about team leadership and informed my action research for this dissertation.

Cycle 3

To gather more information about team leadership and the need for training, I conducted four open-ended interviews with current and former administration and team leaders. I transcribed the interviews, coded them, and looked for themes. In this cycle, I identified teacher leaders and administrators felt that team leaders needed support and training in soft skills of leadership, such as interpersonal relationship building and conflict resolution. The soft skills mentioned varied, but all noted while organization and logistics are important, it is the soft skills of managing and working with adults that become trickier over time. I was able to identify a number of skills participants suggested would be important to learn, but this also varied according to experience and expertise. The data supported the idea that soft skills are needed and that allowing participants to have choice and voice in the innovation would ensure that teacher leaders could focus on what they needed professionally and what was needed for their team.

Summary and Implications

When designing an innovation for an action research dissertation, it is important to consider multiple perspectives and theories to develop the innovation and the research of the innovation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In my research, communities of practice theory came to the forefront as a way to support adult

learners in having a voice, making collaborative decisions, and ensuring that learning was relevant to their own needs. The reflective focus of CoP lends itself to supporting team leads as they decide what is important to them and their context and also encourages discussion and dissemination of knowledge. Distributed leadership provides a framework for systemic change that includes giving voice and choice to teachers as they engage in leadership, as well as creating opportunities for teachers to learn from one another. Situational leadership recognizes the need for adjusting leadership actions for each context and provides a way to reflect on what is happening in the group and determine what should happen next. By looking at my previous research cycles through this lens, I developed an innovation that honored voice and reflection, helped develop group interactions, and took each situation into account in determining actions.

Conclusion

In Chapter 2, I summarized the theoretical and related frameworks that form the foundation of this study and provided details of how my previous research affected the trajectory of my research design. These frameworks and early research cycles helped to develop my innovation and informed my research design. In Chapter Three, I provide details of the methodology that underpins this qualitative action-research case study and describe my innovation design and data collection methods.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

I have been struggling to get teachers to follow the team behavior plan we agreed upon at the beginning of the year and it seems like there is little buy-in. At the time, few of the teachers gave any input, which is understandable because two of the five teachers were new and probably weren't comfortable giving their opinions. And one of the veteran teachers had a lot of opinions. Maybe they just agreed to go along with the plan because she was being vocal. I'm hoping that we can revisit the plan and I can get others to voice their suggestions . I want to include everyone's perspectives, but it's hard when people are not ready to share.

(Composite Vignette of Team Lead Experiences)

In Chapter 2, I described the theoretical frameworks that guide my study design. In Chapter 3, I describe my research methods and connect the theoretical frameworks to my innovation design, data collection and data analysis. To begin these connections, I explain my epistemological perspective and how communities of practice (CoP) work to build the foundation of my study. I also present the characteristics of qualitative research, action research, and case study research design to show how they frame the study. I further illustrate my setting, the participants, and my role as a researcher as I continue to describe my case, followed by a discussion of the innovation plan, including details of the learning sessions and materials. I present my data collection methods and the tools I used during the innovation and outline my data analysis process and timeline. Lastly, I discuss ethical considerations and methods I used to ensure the research was trustworthy.

Epistemology and Research Methodology

Researchers bring their perspectives, experiences, and beliefs to their work (Koro-Ljungberg et al., 2009). In this section, I articulate my epistemological perspective and connect it to my theoretical frameworks and research questions. Next, I discuss action research, its connections to my views about knowledge, and how it drives the design of this work. Lastly, I describe the qualitative case study research methods I used to study my Team Lead Community of Practice (TL CoP) innovation and address my research questions.

Epistemological Perspective

Epistemological awareness, or articulation of the foundations of a researcher's beliefs about knowledge itself, is part of the transparent research process (Koro-Ljungberg et al., 2009). I believe knowledge is best acquired as learners use their perspectives and context to make meaning. Constructivism purports that individuals make sense of the world by identifying and describing their own experiences, which informs how they identify their values and beliefs (Koro-Ljungberg et al., 2009). A constructivist approach underpinned my research design, and as such, I provided multiple opportunities for participants to reflect on their own experiences, guide discussions, and choose actions in the learning process.

Additionally, I believe learners should be able to take ownership of their learning instead of relying on others to tell them what and how they should learn. The Communities of Practice theory emphasizes the value of peers learning from each other and provides a way for members to take control of their learning (Wenger-Trayner et al., 2014; Wenger et al., 2002). Using this aspect of communities of practice, coupled with my epistemological beliefs, I built the TL CoP innovation on the understanding that teacher leaders in my context learn best as they consider their own perspectives and experiences and when they can work as

peer learners with each other and with leaders and facilitators. I also designed the innovation to encourage two forms of interaction: (1) peer interaction between team leads and (2) team leads having a voice in choosing innovation actions.

My epistemological stance is connected to communities of practice and was central to the development of my action-research framework. The TL CoP innovation I constructed to allowed learners to make sense of their perspective and context and provided space for team leads to have a voice in the innovation trajectory. As teachers collaborate and develop their communities of practice, individuals can step into roles of influence and address the need for all community members to express their viewpoints (Wenger et al., 2002). My research questions also addressed voice and advocacy within the community of practice.

Research Methodology

The purpose of this qualitative, case study, action research dissertation was to create an innovation to support and develop teacher-leaders in my local context. The research questions guiding this study were:

RQ1: How do team leads collaboratively develop skills to guide peer teachers?

RQ2: How do team leads generate better relationships between teachers and other leaders?

RQ 3: How do team leads develop their own voice and advocate for change?

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research methods provide researchers with insight into participants' views and allow them to develop themes surrounding a problem of practice (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Plano Clark & Creswell, 2015). This type of research method supports a constructivist epistemological perspective in that the research is designed to observe the socially constructed realities of the participants.

Qualitative methods recognize the importance of social and contextual factors and allow room for participants' perspectives to be included and valued in the research process (Mertens, 2015). Because the innovation design for my research sought to construct meaning through the social context and perspectives of the participants, I used qualitative methods for data collection and data analysis. More details about my data collection and analysis methods are provided later in this chapter.

Action Research

Action research is the process through which teachers can improve education by working with others in their local context and reflecting on their practice (Mertler, 2020; Mills, 2018, as cited in Creswell & Gutterman, 2019;). It is a critical process that involves planning, acting, developing, and analyzing to improve schools and incorporate change (Mertler, 2020). Regularly considering one's actions and motives is vital to the action research process and allows researchers to reflect on what is and is not working and what to do next. In contrast to other types of education research, action research entails the researcher engaging in actions in their context rather than solely acting as an observer, reflecting on actions, and adjusting practices that affect the context and the learners directly (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019).

Action research should involve the perspectives of the people involved or affected by the research (Kemmis, 2008). By providing participants opportunities to reflect on their experiences and share these with the researcher, the study can be guided by perspectives other than that of the researcher. In my study, the team leads provided feedback to me as the innovation unfolded through participant reflection journals and group discussions. I made changes to the innovation trajectory as a result of their feedback, which promoted the relevance of the research to the setting and participants. As I adjusted the innovation based on

participant perspectives, the research project became tailored to what the team leads needed for change.

Including the perspectives of participants in action research can also entail employing open-ended interviews that invite participants to describe their own experiences and allow the researcher to follow the thread of ideas that are being shared. This process also encourages interviewees to provide forthright responses that reflect the participants' perceptions (Budd, 2008). Further, it allows participants to examine their perceptions and make meaning of their own ideas (Budd, 2008; Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). Ultimately, the meaning of the participants' perceptions can only be understood when researchers ask the individuals involved to explain them (Budd, 2008).

Action research provides a flexible model for research, which is recursive and cyclical (Mertler, 2020). Following this flexible model, my research process included previous cycles of research, which led to a refined version of my current inquiry. My research design was informed by these previous research cycles, as well as the theoretical frameworks presented in Chapter 2. As I considered the connections between all of these elements, I identified actions that allowed me to explore how to provide support for teacher leaders on interdisciplinary teams in my context.

By engaging in action research, I sought to implement change through my innovation. Action research allows the researcher to develop a study that can influence the participants or setting and thereby analyze and form conclusions about the process and outcomes. Unlike other types of research, action research does not seek to merely measure the situation but is designed to act upon the attitudes or behaviors of a group of stakeholders (Swanborn, 2010). Action research is only possible in the specific system the researcher intends to change, which points to the

option of using a case study as a research methodology for developing the research design, data collection, and analysis (Swanborn, 2010).

Case Study

I have chosen case study methodology to design and conduct research on my innovation and to explore its impact on my problem of practice. Case study methodology has varied definitions and often differs across disciplines and fields of study (Schwandt & Gates, 2017). For this study, I rely on case study characteristics that typify many qualitative case studies, such as determining case boundaries and providing case descriptions. I provide researched explanations for characteristics that may be less common in the literature but nevertheless are integral to my study.

Case study is often defined as an empirical method that investigates a phenomenon in a real-life context (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Simons, 2009; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2018). Further, it can be described as a design frame that could employ any number of methods but focuses on the choice of what is to be studied (Thomas, 2011; Stake, 2005). While case studies can involve one case or multiple cases, I chose a single-case research methodology in which I studied the case of team leads at my school site. Case study types can be *intrinsic*, a unique case, or can be *instrumental*, wherein the case study is designed to understand a specific problem (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Thomas, 2011; Stake, 2005). I used an instrumental case study to understand my problem of practice, that team leaders need training and support to lead interdisciplinary teams of teachers.

When determining a case and developing the ensuing study, a researcher must ask themselves the question, "What is this a case *of*?" (Schwandt & Gates, 2017; Thomas, 2011). Thomas (2011) further explains the distinction between the case and what he calls the analytical frame, which is what the case is said to be 'of'. My case, or what Thomas (2011) would call the subject of the study, consists of

team leads at my school. The analytical frame, or the object of the study, is how teacher leaders can get training and support in leading interdisciplinary teams. This description helps to clarify the case and the phenomenon through which I view my case: the team leads in my study are a case of teacher leaders getting training and support in leading interdisciplinary teams through participation in a CoP innovation. I use this analytical frame to discuss my findings in Chapters 4 and 5.

Case study design must include three components: (1) the theoretical lens through which the case is analyzed, (2) detailed descriptions that help the reader understand the case, and (3) the themes or assertions the researcher has proposed (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Chapter 2 outlined the theoretical lenses that informed this study. This chapter includes a summary of the study's setting, participants, and time boundaries which determined the scope of data collection in the study design (Yin, 2018). In Chapter 1, I provide descriptions of the case, and in Chapter 4, I further clarify the boundaries of the case to set the stage for presenting the themes and assertions that form my research findings. I use this format to ensure the case and the data are connected, changes within the case or innovation are clear, and findings and assertions are articulated (Yin, 2018). In Chapter 5, I go into further detail about case connections to the research questions and theoretical lenses, followed by a discussion of what I have learned as a case study researcher.

Summary

I used qualitative action research methods coupled with case study methodology to understand my problem of practice better, provide room for participant perspectives to guide the study, and collect data about the innovation. The goal of the research was to use these perspectives to investigate the case of team leads in a CoP at my school site. By focusing on the perspectives of team leads

in my local context, I was able to gain information about a specific problem of practice experienced by the team leads in my setting.

Setting and Participants

In the literature, there are some commonalities regarding case study characteristics, which I have used to inform my study design and methods. Case studies focus on a bounded system, with such boundaries including time, place, organization, or other factors (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Stake, 2005; Thomas, 2011; Yin, 2018). In my study, the case is bound by the people (team leads), place (my school site), and time (7 weeks of the innovation). While often cases are chosen by identifying which case out of possible cases would contribute to knowledge of a phenomenon, sometimes cases are chosen because the researcher is familiar with or has access to the case (Hyett et al., 2014; Thomas, 2011). Thomas (2011) names this method a "local knowledge case" and explains this method is relevant for participant-researchers, such as myself. Engaging in action research at my site made this choice for my case practical and convenient. However, identifying my problem of practice came about because I initially saw a need for support for team leaders in my setting. The selection of this case made sense as a way to investigate the object of my case, namely how to support and train teacher leaders, and to affect change in my school directly.

Setting

The setting for this study was my school site, a junior high school in a large urban school district in the Southwestern United States. At the time of the innovation, the school served approximately 650 students, with 72% receiving free/reduced lunch services. Demographic information revealed that 60% of students were Hispanic, 8% were Black, 20% were White Non-Hispanic, 7% were American

Indian/Alaska Native, 2% identified with two or more races, and 3% were Asian/Pacific Islander.

As noted in Chapter 1, the school operated using a teaming approach, with teachers grouped on interdisciplinary teams that share the same students. I chose to conduct my study with the team leaders of the interdisciplinary teams. The school had four interdisciplinary teams, each comprising a content area teacher in English, math, science, and social studies, as well as one elective teacher and one special education resource teacher. During the innovation, two of the interdisciplinary teams also had an embedded English Language Development teacher. Each interdisciplinary team shared a group of around 170 students, and the teams' classrooms were in the same hallway to facilitate team activities and communication. The setting was unique in this aspect but also was part of a larger district-wide innovation to implement teaming.

As one of the first schools to implement teaming, the setting allowed the opportunity to examine leadership on teams that have matured and are no longer grappling with implementation issues. The school was my own school, where I was a team leader for three years and am now the assistant principal. The school principal expected team leads to participate in various leadership activities on campus, including leadership meetings, facilitating interdisciplinary team meetings, weekly PLCs organized around content areas, and bi-weekly meetings for team leads to meet as a group. When the innovation took place, the 2022/2023 school year, team leads received a stipend from the school district as compensation for these extra responsibilities.

Participants

Four teacher-leaders, called team leads, headed up the four interdisciplinary teams on the campus and were invited to participate in the study. Team leads had

varied levels of education experience, but all had been teaching for at least five years, and they each headed up a team while also teaching a full load of classes in their content areas. Team leads applied for the position and were selected through an interview process. Other teams on the campus also had leaders; however, the interdisciplinary team leaders in this research study were in unique positions of daily responsibility for team facilitation. The staff often described interdisciplinary teams as a "school within a school," and the team leads in this study had a great deal of autonomy with decision-making for their teams.

To build leadership skills, the principal required the interdisciplinary team leads to participate in my dissertation innovation activities as part of their job duties, with the activities taking place during some of the already scheduled team-lead meetings. While all four team leads participated in the innovation as part of their work as leaders on campus, their participation in the innovation research was voluntary. While participants could opt out of the interviews and could decline to share their reflection journals with me as the researcher while still participating in the innovation activities, all four team leads agreed to participate in the research.

Role of the Researcher

A researcher who steps into a participant role is an active member of the research setting (Mertler, 2020). This position enables the researcher to gain information that can only be acquired by participating in the innovation (Mertler, 2020). In this study, I took a participant-researcher role; I participated in the innovation while simultaneously researching it. I facilitated the innovation as I developed agendas, guided the CoP discussion, and provided materials for engaging with the team leads CoP content. As the researcher, I also collected and analyzed data, including researcher memos, reflection journals, and interviews.

While I facilitated the innovation, I aimed to do so in a way that allowed the team leaders to have a role in developing the community and selecting the course of the innovation. I designed the research to allow for flexibility within the innovation so that the group could engage in the innovation activities with my guidance but also have some autonomy to follow the learning paths they chose. I conducted the research transparently so the participants could use the innovation actions to grow as leaders without being hindered by my role as facilitator. To that end, we discussed my role and data collection openly in the first session. I designed the innovation to empower teacher leaders so they could determine their learning pathways and were not entirely dependent on a facilitator or leader to teach them the skills they needed.

In action research, it is important to build trust so that the participants will share their opinions and perceptions as the work proceeds (Mertler, 2020). In the participant-researcher role, I acted as a facilitator yet was also the assistant principal. It was, therefore, vital that I established an atmosphere of reciprocal trust as I worked with the team leads, not only for this research but in my professional role as an administrator and support for teachers and teams. In the first session, I acknowledged my perceived position of power to build a foundation of trust. Across the innovation, I chose to be vulnerable in sharing my personal experiences as a former team lead in discussions. Additionally, I did not participate in the professional evaluation of the team leads during the study timeframe to maintain trust and help remove barriers to developing community within the TL CoP. As noted in my situational context, I worked as a team leader and assistant principal to develop a trusting and supportive environment for the teachers I worked with, and as a participant-researcher, I continued along this path as I sought ways to contribute to the trusting and collaborative culture at our school.

Innovation

A characteristic of a robust case study is the presence of theory development to guide the design, data collection, and analysis (Yin, 2018). As described in Chapter 2 of this dissertation, theory to inform the study design is vital to qualitative and case study research. The theoretical framework of CoP works with case study design to suggest a way to examine and explain the case. Thomas (2011) describes this as "theory testing," or using the theory to design the study and develop a framework for determining the dynamic between the subject and the object of the case study. Using CoP as a framework, I designed the TL CoP to allow me to study how team leads engage in support and training to lead interdisciplinary teams. I return to these theories, CoP, distributed leadership, and situational leadership, to guide my discussion of study findings in Chapters 4 and 5.

To engage team leaders in new ideas and content, I developed an innovation that supported their efforts in distributing leadership on their interdisciplinary teams. The flexible innovation allowed participants to choose the topic they would study and how. I included teacher choice as a large component of the innovation to support the varied experiences and needs of the participants. I designed the innovation around sessions, which I constructed to facilitate individual engagement with the topic, CoP discussion, practice, and reflection. CoPs are structured around three elements: domain, community, and practice (Wenger et al., 2002). I utilized these elements in the innovation design.

The **domain** for this CoP was leadership skills and practices that supported teacher leaders on interdisciplinary teams, and the CoP chose a topic related to this domain. In the first session, team leaders took the Teacher Leadership Self-Assessment (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009) (Appendix A), which formed the basis for choosing the topic for the CoP. Through group discussion of the self-assessment, the

CoP identified a focus topic: to develop clearer roles and responsibilities for members of interdisciplinary teams at our site. This was a shift from the intended domain of leadership strategies and skills, and I discuss this pivot further in Chapters 4 and 5. Before each session, I identified materials and activities to guide the CoP discussion. I chose the topic for the first session to set the stage for expectations and norms and provided a model for subsequent CoP session expectations and outcomes.

During the innovation timeframe, team leaders and I met approximately bi-weekly as a CoP to build a **community** of interdisciplinary team leads who supported one another and shared expertise. I designed the sessions to allow team leads time together to develop trust and create an environment in which they were willing to share their perceptions as team leads. In the agenda for the sessions, I included time for short community-building activities at the beginning of each session and group reflection at the end. I also designed the first session to include time to acknowledge my place in the CoP as a participant-researcher and to acknowledge the potential effect of my roles as administrator and facilitator on the CoP community. This design formed a foundation for our TL CoP, helped to determine norms, and provided the CoP members with opportunities to connect with other team leads.

At the onset of designing this innovation, **practice** was intended to take place during the implementation of goal-based actions team leaders would choose. However, once the team leaders landed on developing clear roles and responsibilities as the goal for the CoP, practice focused on developing that clarity and less on leadership strategies. I provided reflection journals that allowed team leaders to make connections between the TL CoP discussion and their own daily practice. While the innovation pivoted to focus on developing roles and responsibilities, the team leads still made connections to leadership practice which I report in Chapter 4.

Teacher Choice

For meaningful change to occur, teachers must be part of planning strategies to address challenges (Supovitz et al., 2019). Teachers and learners should become jointly responsible for the process in which both teachers and learners grow (Friere, 2011). Following this line of thinking, I built choice into the innovation. As was indicated earlier, the innovation began with team leads taking the Teacher Leadership Self-Assessment to reflect on their practices and make choices on what they wanted to learn. These were the domain and practice tools for the innovation. The process included the team leads and I individually taking and scoring the self-assessment, then each person choosing their top three areas of need. We shared our top three needs with the group, compared them to find commonalities, then discussed common areas. This discussion led the group to decide on a domain for the innovation. The innovation design also provided reflection opportunities within discussions during the sessions and in the participant reflection journals, which gave team leads a chance to give suggestions for what they wanted to see in the innovation. The CoP environment was designed to be community-based so team leads would feel comfortable sharing their ideas and expressing what they wanted out of the sessions. The innovation design included flexibility so that as the situation changed, I could adjust the TL CoP to ensure it addressed the needs of the group.

Learning Sessions

The creation of meaning is a critical aspect of CoP development and provides a foundation for discussing the domain as it relates to practice (Wenger, 1998). TL CoP Sessions were developed to ensure the group could focus on creating meaning that was relevant to the team leads. First, I developed an agenda for each TL CoP session so we could make sure we understood what we would discuss. I shared the agenda with the team leads prior to the meeting (Appendix B). The sessions included

a connection activity, a review of prior learning or a discussion of new content, time to make meaning of the content or to work on creating something, and time for team leads to reflect in the participant reflection journal. There were also a few minutes at the end of the session to reflect as a group and discuss next steps. The sessions were scheduled bi-weekly and facilitated by me as the participant-researcher.

Resources for the TL CoP sessions were stored in Google folders for each of the participants. Resources included the agenda, participant reflection journals, and the Teacher Leadership Self-Assessment. Articles related to leading teams, the district Lead Teacher job description, and documents created through the discussion of the CoP focus on interdisciplinary team roles and responsibilities were added as the innovation progressed.

Participant Reflection Journals

Asking critical questions and journaling can impact how one sees the world and responds to the people around them (CampbellJones et al., 2020). The TL CoP participants were asked to reflect through an online participant journal (Appendix C), which included engagement with the topic, reflection on CoP discussion, and observations about the innovation. Each participant had their own electronic copy of the participant journal, which was stored in a Google folder shared only between the participant and me. Participants wrote in the journal at the end of each TL CoP session.

As the team leads engaged in the learning sessions and reflected on the discussion, the group began to pivot on the intended domain of the TL CoP. As noted above, team leads wanted to clarify the roles and responsibilities for team leads and their teams, so the innovation timeline changed as we adapted to this shift. The intended actions and the actual actions can be seen in the innovation timeline in Table 1.

Table 1

Innovation Timeline

Phase	Time Frame	Intended Action	Actual Action
Preparation	Jan 2023	• Prepare first session content	• Prepare first session content
Implementation	Feb 2023	• Team leads: Review session 1 online materials (Feb 1 - Feb 10) • TL CoP Session 1A (Feb 10) ○ Agree on dates/times for TL CoP Sessions ○ Set Norms ○ Administer Self-Assessment ○ Discuss session materials ○ Create personal goals ○ Work on goals (Feb 10 - Feb 17) ○ Write in Participant Reflection Journals • TL CoP Session 1B (Feb 17) ○ Complete goal reflection ○ Review prior learning/goals ○ Determine next topic as a TL CoP ○ Write in Participant Reflection Journals ○ Continue work on goals (Feb 17-Mar 3)	• Team leads: Reviewed session 1 online materials (Feb 1 - Feb 10) • TL CoP Session 1 (Feb 10) ○ Agreed on dates/times for TL CoP Sessions ○ Set Norms ○ Administered Self-Assessment ○ Wrote in Participant Reflection Journal • Faciliator - Prep Session 2 materials (Feb 10-Feb16) • TL CoP Session 2 (Feb 17) ○ Reviewed prior learning ○ Discussed possible topic for TL CoP ○ Chose topic ○ Wrote in Participant Reflection Journal

Mar 2023	• Facilitator: Prep Session 2 materials (Feb 17 - Feb 24)
	
	• Team leads: Review Session 2 online materials (Feb 24 - Mar 3)
	
	• TL CoP Session 2A (Mar 3)
	  ○ Discuss session materials
	  ○ Create personal goals
	  ○ Write in Participant Reflection Journals
	  ○ Work on goals (Mar 3 - Mar 10)
	
	• TL CoP Session 2B (Mar 10)
	  ○ Complete goal reflection
	  ○ Review prior learning/goals
	  ○ Determine next topic as a TL CoP
	  ○ Write in Participant Reflection Journals
	  ○ Continue work on goals (Mar 10- Mar 31)
	
	• Facilitator: Prep Session 3 materials (Mar 3 - Mar 10)
	
	• Team leads: Review Session 3 online materials (Mar 10 - Mar 31)
		• Facilitator: Prep Session 3 materials (Feb 17 - Mar 2)
		
		• TL CoP Session 3 (Mar 3)
		  ○ Reviewed articles re topic
		  ○ Discussed articles and topic
		  ○ Refined topic: develop school document
		  ○ Wrote in Participant Reflection Journals
		
		• Facilitator: Prep Session 4 materials (Mar 3 - Mar 9)
		
		• TL CoP Session 4 (Mar 10)
		  ○ Reviewed prior learning
		  ○ Worked in pairs on possible document outline
		  ○ Shared / discussed with group
		  ○ Made decisions on next steps
		  ○ Wrote in Participant Reflection Journals
		
		• Facilitator: Prep Session 5 materials (Mar 10 - Mar 31)
		
		• TL CoP Session 5 (Mar 31)
		  ○ Reviewed session 4 work
		  ○ Determined roles and responsibilities categories
		  ○ Worked in pairs on assigned categories
		  ○ Planned next steps
		  ○ Wrote in Participant Reflection Journals

		• TL CoP Session 3A (Mar 31) ○ Discuss session materials ○ Create personal goals ○ Write in Participant Reflection Journals ○ Work on goals (Mar 31-Apr 21)	
	Apr 2023	• TL CoP Session 3B (Apr 21) ○ Complete goal reflection ○ Review prior learning/goals ○ Write in Participant Reflection Journals ○ Continue work on goals (Apr 21 - Apr 28) • TL CoP Session 4 (Apr 28) ○ Discuss goals overall ○ Discuss future steps	• Facilitator: Prep Session 6 materials (Mar 31 - Apr 21) • TL CoP Session 5 (Apr 21) ○ Reviewed session 5 work ○ Worked in pairs on assigned categories ○ Discussed as a group ○ Planned next steps ○ Wrote in Participant Reflection Journals • Facilitator: Prep Session 7 materials (Apr 21 - Apr 28) • TL CoP Session 7 (Apr 28) ○ Reviewed session 5 work ○ Worked as a group to finish Team Roles and Responsibilities (TRR) document ○ Planned next steps ○ Wrote in Participant Reflection Journals
Post Innovation	May 2023		TL CoP Session 8 (May 5) ○ Teacher Focus group reviewed TRR document • TL CoP Session 9 (May 12) ○ TLs shared TRR document for feedback

Data Collection and Tools

Data collection for qualitative research should aim to gather information that answers emerging research questions and is purposeful to the goals of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In conducting this qualitative research, I used artifact collection, facilitator memos, and interviews as my data collection methods. These tools documented how the action research unfolded and provided participants with ways to actively engage with and affect the topic explored in the innovation. I used multiple types of data to get feedback at various points in the innovation so I could adjust the research as it progressed and build a foundation for data analysis.

When focusing only on a single case such as in my study, it is particularly important to include multiple sources of evidence in the research to ensure that a full picture of the case can be understood (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Hyett et al., 2014; Swanborn, 2010; Yin, 2018). This helps the researcher present an in-depth understanding of the case and ensures that triangulation of the data can occur (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018). Yin (2018) states there are six primary sources of data that can commonly be found in case study research: documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observations, participant observation, and physical artifacts. For the purposes of this case study, I used documentation in the form of agendas from the TL CoP and participant reflection journals, interviews with the team leads, and participant observations noted through my own researcher memos. These four data points allowed me to provide a deeper explanation of the case and the subsequent findings.

Artifact Collection

Solicited participant diaries or journals provide an opportunity for participants to reflect on their own actions and experiences as well as provide valuable information on the meaning that they attach to actions in the study (Bartlett &

Milligan, 2021). I provided team leaders with a participant reflection journal, in which they documented their own perspectives and observations about the topic and the innovation process. The reflection journal consisted of information about the focus, observations on the progress of the innovation and views about next steps and provided opportunities for participants to reflect on their development as a leader. By collecting participants' reflection journals, I was able to collect the team leads' views of what they were learning and connect it to the purpose of the research. Additionally, this tool showed how participants engaged with the innovation content and with each other, which helped me to analyze their individual engagement with the innovation and led to observations about their collaborative engagement with other members of the TL CoP. These group discussions provided a perspective on team leader needs and allowed me to determine the next steps in the innovation. Participant journals were collected in one document, and team leads could view and edit them as needed, which ensured participants could edit or change their ideas as the innovation progressed. Agendas were also developed for each of the sessions, and notes were taken by me or by one of the team leads. The agendas provided a structure for the sessions and helped the participants to know what we had done and where we were going. They also provided a way to collect information on the session discussions and actions and enabled me to plan the next session. The agendas also provided data that led to some changes in the innovation design, as I will describe later in the dissertation. Agendas and notes were shared with all of the team leads and were viewable throughout the innovation to ensure they could be checked for accuracy by the innovation participants.

Facilitator Memos

In qualitative research, memos are used by researchers to elaborate on ideas about the data, explore which ideas to develop further, and provide evidence for

coding the data (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). I used facilitator memos to reflect on the ongoing study actions, wrote observations of in-person TL CoP interactions, and used these memos to discern if I needed to adjust any aspects of the study. This iterative approach ensured the innovation met the emerging needs of the team leaders. The memos also became artifacts of my own thinking at the time and helped me capture my observations of the innovation process, including the TL CoP sessions and the participant reflection journals. Facilitator memos were key in helping me reflect on the outcomes of the sessions to build session agendas and, ultimately, to support the team leads as they advocated to change the trajectory of the innovation, as will be seen in Chapter 4.

Interviews

Interviews are professional conversations where knowledge is constructed through the interaction and interchange of information between two people (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). Open-ended questions help research practitioners document participants' experiences and illustrate issues related to the research questions (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Qualitative data, in the form of open-ended, one-on-one interviews, provided in-depth information regarding perceptions of team leads about the TL CoP innovation sessions, their leadership roles, and leadership actions on interdisciplinary teams. I conducted post-intervention interviews with each participant either online or in person and recorded the interviews for transcription purposes. Questions included queries into the domain of the project, the TL CoP experience, and the effect of the innovation on the team leads' leadership (Appendix D). I shared interview transcripts with the team lead participants for member checking to ensure their responses reflected their intended ideas.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is the process researchers use to characterize the data (Merriam, 1998). In qualitative studies, researchers may use an inductive approach for analysis, in which they begin with observations and allow the categories of analysis to emerge from the patterns of collected data (Bhattacharya, 2017; Mertens, 2015). In case study research, there are various traditions of data analysis that are framed by a researcher's perspective on the definition and characteristics of a 'case study' (Swanborn, 2010). For my case study, I have chosen to employ explanation-building case study analysis, as suggested by Yin (2018), combined with empirical qualitative analysis to develop categories and themes from the data.

Explanation building as an analysis method is a way to use patterns to build an explanation about a case (Yin, 2018). As I developed my research questions, I focused on how support and training can be provided for the team leaders in my setting as I sought to explain this process and its effect. Yin (2018) states explanations for case studies help the researcher to understand complex and difficult-to-measure phenomena and often occur in a narrative form. He describes explanation building as a series of iterations: making tentative initial theoretical and explanatory propositions, comparing the data to these propositions, revising the propositions, and comparing other case details to the revision (Yin, 2018). In my case study, I leaned into theoretical frameworks to provide a foundation for the research, with CoP and distributed leadership providing a possible trajectory for supporting the team leaders in my setting. After making these tentative theoretical propositions, I compared data against my research questions and propositions, made revisions, and compared other details of the case against the revision to continue to build an explanation of my case.

I approached data analysis as an iterative and ongoing process paralleled with data collection. I analyzed my facilitator memos throughout the process to ensure the innovation continued to address the problem of practice and research questions and allowed for flexibility and personalization of the TL CoP. During data collection, I analyzed the data to determine whether innovation actions needed to be adjusted or changed. With the team leads, I analyzed the initial leadership self-assessment data to determine the direction and scope of the innovation. I used reflection journals and observations to collect participant perceptions, as well as to identify further steps to refine or adjust the innovation. Throughout, I kept facilitator memos to gather observations and make sense of the data.

After all data was collected and the innovation was over, I analyzed all data. Coding, or assigning values or attributes to various pieces of data, is one method for making sense of the data. Saldaña (2021) explains while coding is not the only method for analyzing qualitative data, it is an effective way to work through and understand data so that the researcher can identify patterns in the data for further analysis. I used grounded theory initial coding methods to dig into the data, define meanings, and make comparisons in the data (Charmaz, 2014). Grounded theory is an effective method for making sense of the data in case study methodology (Swanborn, 2010). Various characteristics of grounded theory lend themselves to case study analysis: data is simultaneously collected and analyzed; emphasis on looking for a few central concepts that come out of the data; a bottom-up form of analysis is used to uncover the findings (Swanborn, 2010)

While I started my research with the idea that CoP could be a way to support team leads at my school, I wanted to be flexible and open to what the data revealed so that I could ensure that my explanations were considered in light of the perceptions of the participants, which may be different from my own understandings

or assumptions about the case. To accomplish this, I used grounded coding methods, starting with initial coding to begin to understand the data, then eventually moved to axial coding to bring order to the ideas in the codes and develop assertions about the data (Charmaz, 2014; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Saldaña, 2021). Grounded coding and analysis methods provided me with a way to enhance the narrative leanings of explanatory analysis for my case, which provided a way to make sense of the data while ensuring I looked for information I might not have predicted (Charmaz, 2014).

For the coding cycle, I first used initial or open coding, focusing on process coding. I decided to use initial coding so I could start to understand the data I had with an open mind and to find themes, as opposed to developing my codes beforehand. It helped me to get a start with the coding and to see "what rises to the surface" (Saldaña, 2021, p. 28). I used process coding within my initial coding to focus on what actually happened or was being communicated rather than using noun-based, or descriptive, coding. Saldaña (2021) noted that descriptive coding can be a problem for one-on-one interviews or single case studies because the noun-based descriptions do not give much insight into the participants' thinking and suggests process coding as one option to make sure the interview data is effective and reflects the minds of the participants.

Once I had my initial codes, I looked for obvious repetitions and fixed them. Then I used a coding chart for my transition activity, in which I summarized the perceptions of each of the participants and noted the most common codes for each of them. This helped me to get an idea of the overall ideas coming up in the codes and prepare to develop themes.

I next used focused coding and went through my codes and the excerpts as I worked to find the most frequent or significant codes and started to combine them into categories and subcodes. I also continued to clean the codes for redundancies as

I found them. After this process, I used axial coding to continue to analyze my codes and determine which were the most dominant. From this, I formed some assertions that could be derived from the dominant codes. I used this process because I was interested in first narrowing down some categories, as in focused coding, but ultimately I wanted to be able to make assertions that would answer my "how" research questions. Axial coding helps to form relationships between categories and subcategories and leads to analysis of the consequences of a process (Saldaña, 2021), which is one of the focuses of my case study. Throughout the coding process, I noted my thoughts in my analytic journal and recorded what data pieces I was working on so I could keep track of what I had accomplished.

After I completed the coding cycles, I used the categories and assertions to build narrative explanations of my findings. During the writing process, I reviewed codes and categories, as well as re-read in-vivo participant statements, in order to create a clear picture of the boundaries of the case as I articulated my findings. This explanatory process provided a means to play with the data further and develop a narrative that illustrated the iterative process of planning, acting, analyzing, and adjusting throughout the innovation and data collection process. It allowed me to look at my "how" questions and to lay out the causal sequences that led to the innovation outcomes (Yin, 2018). Combining explanatory narrative and grounded coding methods allowed me to tell the story of the case while keeping my eyes open for new or unexpected findings.

Table 2

Data Collection and Analysis Timeline

Phase	Time Frame	Action
Preparation	Nov 2022	• Prepared consent for IRB approval materials • Provided details to site principal • Prepared materials for district permission
	Dec 2023	• Submitted consent for IRB approval • Submitted materials for district permission • Presented information to team leaders outlining overview of aims of study and requirements for participation • Emailed potential participants, provided consent forms
Implementation Of Innovation	Feb - May 2023	• Conducted innovation activities as outlined in table above
Data Collection and Iterative Data Analysis During the Innovation	Feb - May 2023	• Administered Teacher-Leader Self-Reflection • Collected participant reflection journals at the end of each session • Wrote facilitator memos after each session • Reviewed reflection journals for feedback for adjusting innovation progress and content • Reviewed facilitator memos for items that suggested need for adjusting innovation activities • Adjusted innovation activities as needed • Member checking of agenda and participant reflection journals
	May 2023	• Conducted one-on-one semi-structured interviews • Member checking of interview responses

Post Innovation Data Analysis	Jun 2023	• Kept analysis journal throughout process • Conducted initial coding of data for categories and subcategories • Conducted member checks
	Jul - Aug 2023	• Conducted focused and axial coding to identify themes and assertions • Continued data analysis through writing • Prepared findings

Ethical Considerations

In any action-research project within education, the researcher should be cognizant of ethical considerations that could affect the participants and the school site (Mertler, 2020). As a school leader during this innovation, I was keenly aware of my position and the potential for participants to feel coerced into participating. At my school, team leads participate in site team leader meetings as part of their duties, and they were compensated with a stipend that reflected the higher responsibilities and frequency of meetings. This study was part of those site responsibilities and the principal required that team leads attend the TL CoP meetings. However, team leads could choose whether or not they wanted to participate in gathering data for this innovation. Although all team leads decided to participate, any who did not wish to participate in the research of this innovation still would have had access to all the session and CoP materials. If they had declined to participate in the research, I would not have collected their participant reflection journals, nor would I have interviewed them, and any observations made by me, in the course of the TL CoP sessions with them, would not be included in the data.

Confidentiality is another key issue in conducting research at a school site (Mertler, 2020). To promote confidentiality in this study, I did not include identifiable participant information in the presentation of the findings. I provided team leads with details of the study, how they would be included, and data collection methods. They

signed a consent form, and I obtained consent from my site lead and my school district before engaging in research activities. The IRB application included these details, and the IRB approval and district approval are included in Appendices E and F. The name of the school is not included in the dissertation materials.

It is vital to be honest with participants in action research so that they know the purpose of the study (Mertler, 2020). I shared the purpose of the study and its potential benefits and harm and did so in person and in writing. Participants were informed which aspects of the study were used for data collection and what the data was used for. They also had information about why I conducted the study and the potential value of developing team lead leadership.

Trustworthiness and Validity

In conducting a qualitative action-research study, it is essential to make sure the data collected is trustworthy and of high quality (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2015). To ensure that qualitative data is trustworthy, it should clearly measure what the researcher is proposing to study (Mertens, 2015; Mills, 2011, as cited in Mertler, 2020). Mertler (2020) explains there are four criteria for trustworthy action research: credibility, transferability, confirmability, and dependability.

Credibility is established when the researcher shows the study is believable from the perspective of the participants (Mertler, 2020). This can involve various methods to ensure the study is not merely a reflection of the researcher's viewpoint (Stringer, 2008). Triangulation is the method of using multiple data sources to find evidence to support a theme and to develop an accurate report of findings (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). To ensure credibility, I used four data points that were compared for consistent themes, and which provided multiple viewpoints of the participants of the study. Member checking ensures that participants can review the data to ensure it reflects their perspective (Stringer, 2008). I used member checking

to ensure that the research is an accurate representation of the team leads' perspectives.

Unlike quantitative research, which aims for generalizability of the data to other settings, qualitative research data applies directly to the context in which the study was conducted (Mertler, 2020; Stringer, 2008). Transferability refers to providing descriptions and contextualized data that enable other people to see how the findings might apply to their own settings (Mertler, 2020; Stringer, 2008). I designed this qualitative action research study for transferability as I provide detailed descriptions of the case and discuss how the case and the data intersect. These detailed descriptions contribute to the trustworthiness of the study by helping readers understand the nature and the context of the study (Stringer, 2008). I provide details on how I designed and conducted my study and conducted so it is transparent to participants and researchers.

Confirmability enables the audience to confirm the research accurately presents the perspectives of the participants (Stringer, 2008). Confirmability was established through member checking to get feedback from participants to ensure their perceptions were represented accurately. Participants were able to view interview transcripts, agendas, and participant journals. Additionally, as I analyzed the data, I made comparisons between various data artifacts and participant responses, which helped ensure the categories and themes I identified were consistent and accurate across the data.

Research design should also account for any changes in the setting and how they affect the study (Mertler, 2020). This shows the research is dependable and the data will be stable over time (Mertler, 2020). The research design should detail the research procedures, including identification of the problem, data collection and analysis, and how the findings were developed, which contributes to the

dependability of the study (Stringer, 2008). For this study, I provide detailed accounts of the research development and processes so readers can ascertain that my procedures are adequate for the study (Stringer, 2008). My research design included the factors and contextual changes that influenced the research actions, emphasizing the dependability of the project design and data analysis.

Case study research, like other social science methods, has specific tests to ensure that the study is valid. Yin (2018) explains four tests should be used to identify quality case-study design: construct validity, internal validity, external validity, and reliability. To ensure construct validity, I used multiple sources of evidence and gave participants an opportunity to review their responses in the participant journals and interviews. For internal validity, I used pattern matching in data analysis and explanation building to develop the ideas in my report. I also address rival explanations to consider any alternatives to my findings. To ensure that this case study is externally valid, I used theories to inform my case study design and provide a framework for my analysis. While my findings are specifically about my case, they are designed to be transferable to similar research and educational settings in which team leads are working on interdisciplinary teams. Lastly, to ensure my study and findings are reliable, I developed a database for my codes and maintained a clear chain of evidence from my analysis of the data to my findings.

As discussed above, I chose to use a local knowledge case for my research, however, there are some limitations to using this type of case. I did not vet the case to determine if it was representative or typical of my problem of practice (Thomas, 2011). Nor did I identify if it could be a key case that illuminates knowledge by virtue of having distinctive characteristics useful for the study (Thomas, 2011). I do, however, as a researcher practitioner, have an intimate understanding of the participants, the site, and the site history of teaming and team leadership, and I

personally participated in team leadership through leading site interdisciplinary teams. This is the case best suited for me to understand my problem of practice through my own experiences, knowledge, and relationships with the team leads, and ultimately so that I can explore how to support this group of teacher leaders. My analysis will take into consideration the boundaries of this particular case in exploring my problem of practice.

Conclusion

In Chapter 3, I presented the methods that guided my qualitative action-research case study. I explained the theoretical alignments of this study, including my epistemological stance and rationale for engaging in qualitative action research. My setting, participants, and role as a researcher were described, and detailed information about my innovation and data collection methods and analysis was provided. In Chapter 4, I present more detailed information about my data analysis process. I also present the findings from the study, in the form of categories and themes that led to assertions. I also include two further case descriptions to show how the case and the data from the TL CoP innovation connect to the data at those points in the innovation.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

I like being a team lead, but sometimes it's frustrating. Today, I had a colleague who was struggling with how to support a special education student with their behavior, and in our team meeting, I could tell that he was not happy with our discussion. I sent a message to the assistant principal and asked her to join the meeting. I'm never totally sure if I should handle those conversations myself or if I should ask for administration support. I'm glad she came over, though, because it helped to have someone there to guide the conversation and come up with solutions, and hopefully, the teacher will take the suggestions seriously. It's hard to be a peer teacher and team leader at the same time.

(Composite Vignette of Team Lead Experiences)

"I've been on a team for a very long time. I've been a team lead for three years and I've never had anyone sit down and just say this is what we're responsible for."

(Team Lead)

This qualitative action research case study explored the implementation of the Team Leader Community of Practice (TL CoP) innovation as a means of offering leadership training and support to a group of team leads at a junior high school site. I originally designed the innovation to provide an opportunity for team leads to gain experience in leadership strategies so they could level up their leadership practice. But, as shown in the following section, it soon became clear that this group of leaders wanted more clarity on the boundaries of their roles and responsibilities and, as a result, were not sure which leadership skills they wanted to investigate. As necessary in case study research, readers need to have a deep contextual understanding of the case in order to situate the findings within the case (Creswell &

Poth, 2018; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2018). Therefore, below, I present descriptions of the case before and at the start of the innovation and later at the point the innovation changed. The case descriptions are presented along with my findings to provide a rich description of both the case experiences and the case study findings.

To understand the views and experiences of the team leads across the TL CoP and to generate the case descriptions, I collected and analyzed each participant's written reflection journals, which were completed after each of the seven TL CoP sessions, and the one-on-one semi-structured interview transcripts, which were completed in-person or remotely via Zoom at the end of the innovation. I also collected and analyzed the CoP agenda notes and my researcher memos. The chapter includes my data analysis process, descriptions of the case, and the findings.

Data Analysis

Data analysis allows the researcher to make sense of the data by developing meaning from pieces of data and abstract concepts and moving toward interpretation (Merriam, 1998). The meanings and interpretations that come from this process constitute the findings of the study (Merriam, 1998). Findings can be organized in various ways, such as through descriptive accounts, models, themes, or categories, and help the researcher communicate her understanding of the results (Merriam, 1998). As I will describe in more detail in this section, I analyzed my data holistically to develop themes and contextual information about the case (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Grounded theory analysis provides a systemic but flexible method for developing theories from the data (Charmaz, 2014). I used initial grounded analysis to see what the data uncovered rather than starting with developed themes. Through collecting and analyzing data, I developed detailed case descriptions that included the history of the case and the chronology of events to present the trajectory of the

TL CoP (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Stake, 1995). This led to assertions about the case and further case descriptions to understand the findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Stake, 1995). I reflected on my data as I developed categories and themes found through the initial grounded analysis methods and connected the data to descriptions of the case (Yin, 2018). Data analysis in this case study was iterative; I reviewed the data during and after the innovation, circled back to adjust my innovation design, and developed case descriptions throughout the process (Charmaz, 2014; Yin, 2018).

In the first phase of data analysis, I reviewed the incoming data during the data collection process. Immediately after each TL CoP session, I wrote down my observations and reflected on what the information might mean for the innovation. Additionally, one of the team leads and I took notes in the TL CoP agendas with details about the CoP discussion, and participants wrote their thoughts about each CoP in their participant reflection journals. Across the study, as I reflected on the memos, notes, and weekly participant reflection journals, I used the information to develop the next week's agenda, including the focus of the discussion. Although the initial plan for the early TL CoP meetings was to determine a leadership skill as a focus topic, the data from these meetings helped me see that the innovation trajectory needed to change. This iterative data collection and analysis process led the team leads and me to change the focus of the TL CoP (Charmaz, 2014; Yin, 2018).

Once the TL CoP innovation was over and I completed the interviews with team leads, I began my second phase of data analysis: post-study analysis. I started this next data analysis phase by re-reading and re-familiarizing myself with the data and making some general notes and analytic memos as I read (Saldaña, 2021). This allowed me to begin to "play" with the data as I searched for how to prioritize my

analytical processes (Yin, 2018). At this stage, I suspected that my findings would include the need for team leads to have a better understanding of the roles and responsibilities of teams, but I anticipated that other findings would emerge as I dug into the data. My analytical memos gave me the overall sense that the TL CoP innovation had a number of characteristics that benefited the team leads, such as time to collaborate and problem-solve, however, I wanted to remain open to other findings as I embarked on the coding process.

I conducted the coding process with cycles of coding using Dedoose, an online data analysis application, plus handwritten models and notes to organize my thinking and further develop the codes. For the first coding cycle, I explored the data through a grounded theory approach to understand the data with a mind open to what I might uncover (Charmaz, 2014). As a participant-researcher embedded in the case, I wanted to remember that the data might lead in directions that I did not anticipate, and I wanted to make sure my analysis methods left room for this possibility (Charmaz, 2014). In this first cycle, I used initial coding, sometimes called "open coding," which is a method for developing codes out of the data, as opposed to starting with predetermined codes (Saldaña, 2021). This type of coding helps the researcher begin to interact with the data and reflect on the content while keeping an open mind to what the data might reveal (Charmaz, 2014; Saldaña, 2021). Saldaña (2021) describes this step as beginning to "take ownership" of the data. Within initial coding, I used process coding, or coding using the gerund form of words such as "communicating needs" or "asking for support" to look for action (Saldaña, 2021). This helped me to avoid codes that merely described the events and gave a better insight into what the participants were thinking (Saldaña, 2021).

Once I had my initial codes, I looked for obvious repetitions and combined them. Then I used a coding chart for a transition activity between my first and

second coding cycles in which I summarized the perceptions of each of the participants and noted the most common codes for each individual team lead and compared them (Saldaña, 2021). This helped me to get an idea of the overall ideas coming up in the codes, with an eye toward developing themes.

In the second coding cycle, I used focused coding, which is a method to sort and synthesize the most frequent or significant codes (Saldaña, 2021; Charmaz, 2014). I started to combine the codes into categories and subcategories, such as the category of "connecting with peers," which had subcategories of "facing similar issues," "feeling isolated," and "insight into how others lead." Focused coding helped me to further refine my initial codes as I identified possible categories and determined which codes made the most analytic sense for connecting to my research questions (Saldaña, 2021; Charmaz, 2014). During this second cycle, I also cleaned and re-coded the data for redundancies as I found them (Saldaña, 2021).

For a third coding cycle, I used axial coding to continue to analyze my codes by developing categories and themes to describe the data further. Axial coding is a method to explore how the categories and subcategories relate to one another, with each category being an "axis" linked to subcategories (Saldaña, 2021). This allows the researcher to make sense of the category's properties and dimensions, such as the consequences of a process (Saldaña, 2021; Charmaz, 2014). Connecting to the example above, to describe one consequence of the TL CoP process, I created the category "Feeling Heard" from the subcategories of "connection with peers," "connection with administration," and "participant voice in the CoP design." As I worked with the data, I identified categories that were main themes and re-labeled their accompanying subcategories as categories. From this part of the process, I also formed assertions derived from the dominant codes, which would answer my "how" case study research questions (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018). For the above

theme and categories, I created the assertion, "Team leads need opportunities to feel heard by peer leaders and administration." I used the axial coding process to develop two other themes with accompanying categories and assertions.

A strategy that I used across all of my analysis was analytic memoing. Beginning with my work to familiarize myself with the data and across the coding cycles, I employed analytic memos to capture my thinking as I went through the data. Analytic memos are similar to researcher memos or journals in that they are a place to record thoughts during the process, however, analytic memos focus on the thinking during the data analysis process (Saldaña, 2021). I created a document that included possible memo topics such as "personal connection to study" or "rationalize code" and then organized my writing by these topics so I could easily search for the topics at a later time. After coding the four data points and taking notes in the analytic memos, I loosely coded the analytic memos as I looked back for patterns and ideas that stood out as distinct from or connected to my other analytical thoughts through coding. After analyzing all of the data, I created five categories, which I used to develop three distinct themes with accompanying assertions. I present each assertion in the table below, with its accompanying themes and categories.

Table 3

Themes and Categories Based on Axial Codes and Assertions

Themes	Categories	Assertions
Theme One *Clarity*	1. Need for clarity	Team leads need clarity of roles and responsibilities to effectively engage in leadership actions with their teams.
Theme Two *Learning*	1. How team leads learned 2. What team leads learned	Team leads learn leadership skills through structured interactions with peer team leads.
Theme Three *Feeling Heard*	1. Connection with peers 2. Connection with administration	Team leads need opportunities to feel heard by peer leaders and administration.

After coding was completed, I entered the third and final phase of data analysis: analysis through writing. Writing the report of the findings is a reflective process and helps the researcher continue analyzing the data after coding is completed (Charmaz, 2014; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Saldaña, 2021). I began writing my findings to give voice to my thinking and continued to organize and analyze as I went. I wrote about each theme with categories and supporting evidence and then reflected on how these findings connected and intersected (Saldaña, 2021). I continued refining my categories and assertions as I wrote and rewrote to arrive at meaning that represented my case and connected to my research questions and theoretical frameworks (Saldaña, 2021).

For case studies, data analysis must include detailed case descriptions so the researcher can connect the findings to the experiences of the case (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this way, case descriptions become an analytic tool for the researcher. When I started developing my research design, I wrote case study descriptions as I described my local context. Then, after I collected data and as part of the analytic

process, I wrote additional case descriptions to situate the case in the findings and to explain the changes that occurred in the TL CoP innovation. The written report of the findings should also include detailed descriptions of the case (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018), which helps the reader to understand the connection between the case and findings. I include my case descriptions in this chapter's findings section to articulate to the reader the connection between the case and the findings. The case descriptions, findings, and supporting evidence are interwoven in the following sections.

Case Descriptions and Findings

To explore my problem of practice and research questions, I focused on a local knowledge single-case study. I used qualitative action research and case study methods to understand how implementing a TL CoP innovation supported team leads in developing the skills and strategies necessary for leading interdisciplinary teams. In case study methodology, case descriptions enhance the findings by providing context and illuminating the connections between the facts of the case and the outcomes of data analysis (Yin, 2018; Stake, 1995). In this section, I first describe the case and boundaries at the beginning of the innovation, followed by the findings relating to the initial version of the innovation. Next, I provide a second description of the case after I made adjustments to the innovation, which were based on the needs of the team leads as indicated by the data. This second description is followed by the findings from the data related to that part of the innovation.

Case Description: Starting the Innovation

When designing case study research and reporting on case study findings, it is essential to clarify case boundaries to have a tight connection between the case and the research questions (Yin, 2018). Defining the boundaries of a case also shows how the researcher distinguishes internal data, or the phenomenon of the case, from

external data or the context (Yin, 2018). For my study, the TL CoP innovation was placed in the context of my school setting and participants. In this section, I include a description of the boundaries of the setting of the case, of the participants in the case, and of time to place the innovation in its context and set the stage for my correlating interpretations of the data.

Setting Boundaries: School and Teaming Culture

The TL CoP innovation took place in a junior high, my place of work, located in a large urban school district in the American Southwest. The school's architecture lends itself to the interdisciplinary teaming model implemented seven years ago. Each team was housed in classrooms located in the same pod, except for science teachers who had labs in a different part of the school. For the four interdisciplinary teams on campus, this created the feeling of each team being a "school within a school". Enhancing this perception, each team was responsible for building many procedures and schedules as they worked together to support the students. While the setting encouraged intra-team collaboration, for much of the school day and year, teams had little contact with other teams in the school.

The teaming culture permeated the school, as there were multiple types of teams, such as content teams and committees, for various instructional and procedural needs. However, when teachers at the school spoke of "teams," they were referring to the interdisciplinary teams that were at the heart of the school. The team became the home base for the students and included an advisory teacher and the core teachers on the team. This structure helped to create a feeling that the students were not on a huge campus but had a smaller group of fellow students who shared the same teachers. The smaller environment also helped students to transition from elementary to the larger secondary setting. Each team had four core content teachers (an ELA, math, science, and social studies teacher), a special

education resource teacher, and sometimes an ESL or electives teacher, which varied year by year, depending on enrollment. One of the teachers on each team served as the team lead. A great deal of autonomy was given to the team as they determined how they wanted to meet the students' academic and social/emotional needs.

In 2017, the early days of teaming at the school, teams built systems to make the teams function and had the encouragement to problem-solve and make decisions within teams. This innovative and autonomous teacher leadership culture still permeated the school at the time of the innovation, as teams had permission to develop different systems based on their needs. The resulting culture was one in which team leads were very much at the center of each team, and team members often looked to the team lead to make final decisions about team issues, such as team events and logistics. It meant that teams could quickly pivot when someone had an idea, but it put a lot of pressure on the team leads to be in the middle of the action.

Participant Boundaries: Team Leads in Context

For this study, all four interdisciplinary team leaders on the campus participated in the innovation. Two of the team leads were for 7th-grade teams and two for 8th. At the time of the innovation, one team lead had been in the role for 2.5 years, one for 1.5 years, and the other two were in their first year as a team lead. Two were male, and two were female. Across the seven years the school had been in the teaming model, there had been a total of ten team leads. Team leads typically were in the role for 1-3 years, with some moving on to other jobs in the school district as teachers or administrators. When team leads moved on and new team leads took their place, the new team leads typically reached out to other team leads to get guidance on the roles and responsibilities of the position. While I had been a team leader in the past, that was not the case for any of the other team leads that I

worked with during my time as a team lead. Two of the team leads in the study had recently earned a master's degree in education leadership; however, my own experience in such a program showed that the coursework was focused on administrative leadership and not on teacher leadership.

As noted in Chapter 1, the needs of teacher leaders are not always the same as those of administrative leaders. For example, in the district where the study occurred, team leads were still classroom teachers and received no extra time or reduced teaching load while in the team lead role. The year I implemented the TL CoP innovation was the first year that team leads received a stipend, which the district funded through a grant. Team leads had no official evaluation authority over the teachers they led, but they were tasked with leading their team in instructional improvement.

Over the years, each team lead developed their own leadership style, ranging from very hands-on and making all the team decisions to shared decision-making and distributed leadership models. As a team lead for three years at the site, I was one of the latter and worked with my team to identify which tasks were needed for a successful team. There is, of course, much room for varied leadership styles. However, I often thought about how I modeled my leadership on the distributed leadership style of the school administration, which was very open and participatory and encouraged teacher leadership, while some teams operated in top-down leadership structures that, given our innovative school culture, seemed to be what we were trying to get away from.

In the original innovation design, I had intended to gradually release the leadership tasks in the TL CoP to follow the distributed leadership model that I had used with my own team as a team lead. To get the TL CoP up and running I designed the first two sessions to be facilitated by me, with the idea that for the TL CoP to be

sustainable, it would need to include shared leadership so I would eventually step out of the role. However, as will be discussed later in the findings, my role as facilitator became the default throughout the TL CoP timeframe.

Time Boundaries: The Time of the Innovation

For the first four years of the teaming model at the school, team leads did not meet as a group, and interactions between team leads were through impromptu interactions or in meetings with the school's Guiding Coalition, the bi-weekly leadership meeting where school decisions took place. I became a team leader after the second year of implementation, and for two years, I participated in this type of team lead interaction. At the beginning of the fifth year of teaming, our principal instructed team leads to meet for an hour approximately every other week and assigned one of the team leads as the facilitator for the meetings. As a team lead, I participated in this new approach to team lead collaboration. The meetings predominantly focused on the team leads discussing logistics for running a team, sharing what their teams were doing for events, and problem-solving about schedules and other daily tasks. However, what was not included in these meetings were discussions related to leadership development or strategies.

The following year, the 6th year of teaming at the campus and the year the innovation took place, there were many personnel changes, including a new principal. I moved out of the team lead role and into the assistant principal position, and two new team leads replaced me and another team lead who took a district job. With these changes, the team lead meetings did not begin at the start of the year but picked up after the first quarter when the principal asked the team leads to start meeting again to collaborate. This directive was partly in anticipation of my planned TL CoP innovation, which I would implement during the spring semester of that same academic year.

The principal instructed the team leads to meet together during the school day for one hour every other week. Team leads informed me that this time was not always honored because some team leads did not want to take the time from their busy days. Sometimes only two or three team leads met. While all of the team leads had contracted student teachers who were allowed to teach in the classroom in the lead teacher's absence, team needs, such as student behaviors or teachers reaching out through chat about an issue, often superseded team leads' participation in the meetings. Team leads also explained that no one was appointed by administration to lead the meetings and the team leads did not choose to have a designated leader or facilitator for the meetings. The team leads did not create agendas for these meetings, and no topics for discussion were determined prior to the meetings. So, while the principal expected the team leads to meet weekly, what they did with this time was left up to them.

Outside of scheduled meetings, some of the team leads connected to talk. Two of the team leads regularly sought each other out to vent or problem-solve; however, one of the team leads reported that they never interacted with the other team leads outside of the team lead meetings. Time was also affected by the needs of the teachers on the team. Teachers on the teams had come to rely on the team leads to be readily available for questions or concerns. The team leads were a classroom or two away from most of the team members, and electronic chat was heavily used for team communication, so the culture at the school was that team leads were on call to deal with issues that arose in real time. With the teaming culture established at the school, teachers typically reached out to team leads first instead of going to the administration for concerns.

For this case, the innovation spanned seven CoP sessions, which were approximately one hour each and spaced every two or three weeks over February,

March, and April of 2023. Time constraints were a factor, and it was often difficult to hold to the CoP session timeframe as the team leads and I had many people and situations demanding our attention. There were a few instances in which a team lead could not attend or was late for the TL CoP session due to the needs of their team or students.

Finding: Need for Clarity

For the first TL CoP session, the group took and scored the Teacher Leadership Self-Assessment to identify areas of need. In the second session, we shared and discussed our results, focusing on each person's top three areas of need. As we talked, we realized that the team leads had a common concern about how to lead teachers who were not motivated to change. This conversation led to further discussion about who was responsible for addressing this need, and the team leads expressed that they were unsure about when they should intervene or when they should pass issues along to administration. This overriding concern ultimately led to choosing the domain for the group. Further data from these first three sessions is detailed in the theme "clarity." As the work of the TL CoP rolled out, the data revealed the team leads needed clarity of roles and responsibilities, which was necessary before they could engage with other leadership strategies. This aspect of leading was not addressed in the Teacher Leadership Self-Assessment, however by discussing the assessment, the team leads came upon this idea on their own. The data will show the more pressing need for clarity beyond the leadership strategies contained in the self-assessment and set the stage for the next phase of the innovation, which will be discussed further as I present the second and third themes that I identified from the data.

Theme One: Clarity

Team leads need clarity of roles and responsibilities to effectively engage in leadership actions with their teams. This theme comprised one category that led to this assertion: 1. Need for clarity.

Without a shared working definition of leadership it is difficult to improve school leadership (Spillane & Coldren, 2011). In this study, the initial data showed that team leads were grappling with defining their leadership roles within the interdisciplinary teams. For teams to be effective, there need to be clear boundaries for the team, and they need guidance on what they need to do (Burkus, 2023; Hackman, 2002). Therefore, I pivoted the innovation to meet team leads where they were, redesigning the TL CoP to create an opportunity for team leads to discuss their views and create a shared vision for teaming roles and responsibilities. Team Lead Participant Reflection Journals, researcher memos, TL CoP agendas, and interviews contained evidence of the trajectory of the first three TL CoP sessions and the subsequent pivot of the activity. The following section illuminates the need for clarity as expressed by the CoP.

I initially designed the innovation to provide opportunities for team leads to engage in activities that would support their understanding and development of specific leadership skills and strategies. At the beginning of the innovation, the team leads took the Teacher Leadership Self-Assessment to identify the leadership areas that team leads wanted to learn about across the TL CoP sessions. The plan was to use the data from the self-assessment to identify the needs of the group and to use that information to choose a topic for exploration as a CoP. As the team leads discussed their individual results, the group decided that the common thread was that all the team leads found it difficult to communicate expectations to the teachers on their teams, specifically when team members lacked motivation or did not want to

change to improve practice. The discussion focused heavily on how team leads struggle with influencing teachers who are not engaged or interested in change and moved to a discussion about what the team leads' roles were regarding this issue. One team lead wondered, "Is it our job to fix teachers?" The team leads discussed whether they should be communicating with team members about the roles and responsibilities that exist on a team and, if so, how they should do this.

During the beginning of the innovation, it was clear that team leads lacked confidence in what they should be doing as team leads, not because they were unsure of themselves as leaders, but because they were unclear on the boundaries of their responsibilities. Team leads expressed that they were unsure which leadership skills they wanted to focus on in the TL CoP because they lacked clarity on the roles and responsibilities of the team members, including team leads. Instead of inquiring about, "What leadership skills should I further develop and why?" the team leads were instead asking, "What should I actually be doing as a lead?" This question became the focus of our initial sessions.

As the team leads discussed this idea, they realized that they were all experiencing the same struggle in determining what they should be doing. From the team leads' perspective, the current teaming model on our campus did not include clear ideas concerning the boundaries that distinguished the roles and responsibilities of team leads, administration, and team members. This lack of clarity around who should be doing what dampened team leads' confidence as leaders. One team lead explained, "And so it's kind of like something that we've been expected to just… if you have the capacity to take this on, do it." Another team lead expressed, "I think about how we handle students, like we are so clear with those expectations, and we keep reminding everyone of the expectations. But with adults, we don't do that." One team lead noted that when they were new to the role, "every [experienced]

team lead gave me a different answer regarding what the responsibilities were of a team lead…and so it was just like, well, I don't know, what actually is my job then?" Another team lead noted, "Even amongst experienced team leads there's a variety of interpretations and expectations about the R&R of our own jobs, let alone administration and team members." Team leads were getting varied input about what actions they should be taking as team leads, and they needed clarity before they could commit time and energy to their development as leaders.

Team leads were cognizant they were often seen as the person who was responsible for all of the team's actions, yet they pushed back on this top-down approach. One team lead described how they viewed the role in the following comment, "Just because the title says Team Lead, I think the word "lead" gets used often, and that term puts a lot on our plates when really our job is to facilitate and maintain, not create everything from scratch." Team leads did not feel that they should ultimately be responsible for everything a team needed to do and wanted a more distributed approach to team tasks and responsibilities. The team leads agreed that "clarity in the roles that team members, leads, and admin have will be a huge weight off of everyone's collective shoulders." Throughout the discussions, team leads expressed that having clarity would make the team lead role more manageable.

During our early TL CoP sessions, team members also discussed the overlap of team lead and team member roles. As one team lead noted, "The [TL CoP] group all agrees that a lot of the difficulty with being a team lead lies in the understanding of our responsibilities, not just for us, but [understanding] for the team." Team leads felt that the teachers' confusion about roles and responsibilities led to some negative outcomes for team leads and the team. A team lead posited that "perhaps many 'conflicts' throughout the year were the variety of interpretations by team members

and 'assumptions' being made about what the expectations were." The team leads noted several difficulties that arose on their teams due to a lack of clarity regarding team member roles and responsibilities. One team lead put it this way:

> With certain members on my team, if it is not clearly stated at the beginning or they have their own preconceived notions of what they should be doing and what I should be doing, what admin should be doing, they get resentful, and it brings a level of negativity to the team.

Throughout the TL COP, the team leads expressed team members were also confused by the lack of clarity of roles and responsibilities in the teaming model.

Additionally, team leads wanted clarity on when administrators should step in to support their team actions and when team leads should handle things themselves. They were confident about many of the tasks and responsibilities that fell on the team, such as creating schedules and events for the team, but were unsure about who was responsible when team systems broke down. For example, team leads questioned who should talk to staff when teachers on their teams did not agree to take on team responsibilities or did not complete team tasks that they had agreed to do. One team lead articulated this confusion when they shared their reaction to a conversation with a site administrator: "Do I do it? Do you do it? Does no one do it?" In the initial sessions, the CoP discussion often focused on whether there were expectations from administrators that the team leads handle situations that they were not prepared to address.

Through analysis of initial TL CoP data, the group identified clarity for the roles and responsibilities of team leads, team members, and administration as a need. In the next section, I provide a further case description to narrate the path of the CoP as we began to gather data, assess and adjust, and ultimately choose a new direction for the remainder of the TL CoP innovation.

Case Description: Pivoting the Innovation

During the first three TL CoP sessions, I collected and analyzed data from agendas, researcher memos, and reflection journals and discussed the need for clarity with the team leads. At the end of session three, the team leads and I decided to drop the idea of finding a common leadership topic to explore and instead identify how we could work together to define roles and responsibilities for team leads, team members, and administration. Even though some of this information had been communicated one-on-one or to other team leads over the years, the current team leads needed specific and clear information they could refer to and share with their teams. It was time for the school to articulate these practices and ensure they were transparent to team leads, teachers, and administration. This section describes the case and the TL CoP actions at this pivot point in the innovation.

Once the team leads identified that they wanted clarity on roles and responsibilities for teaming, we began the work by reviewing the district Lead Teacher job description, which was developed by the school district and Mary Lou Fulton Teacher College Next Education Workforce. As the team leads reviewed the document, they felt it was valuable as a starting point but not useful as a tool for our school because it did not address where the team leads' roles stopped, and administration's or team members' roles picked up. The team leads also felt that the district job description did not reflect all of the day-to-day actions of teams in our teaming model. As a result, the team leads felt that a document specific to our school site was needed. One team lead described that a new document could "decrease unrealistic expectations on team leads and visually able [sic] to see what teachers should be doing in their own roles." Another team lead said they hoped that a site-specific document would become a "set of expectations for teachers, team leads, and administrators clearly defining roles and responsibilities." As one team

lead explained, the hope was that this would "help reduce the lack of clarity that staff members at all level [sic] have in a teaming environment." The team leads felt that this would help make leadership actions more transparent for all staff.

To develop the document, the group referred back to the district Lead Teacher Job Description as a starting point and pulled some of the ideas from this document that would be useful at our school site. Over sessions four through seven, the group developed a matrix that included descriptions of the roles and responsibilities of administration, team leads, and team members. The document also created categories for various types of team tasks: Culture, Crucial Conversations, Logistics, Communication, Student Behaviors, and Instruction. Over the remaining sessions of the TL CoP, the group worked on identifying common team tasks and placing them on the matrix according to who was responsible for overseeing or completing the task. Actions teams typically need to function effectively were listed, such as "represent and actively participate in the positive team culture of the team and campus" or "advocate for yourself with team and/or team lead when you need support." Team lead responsibilities in each of the categories typically used verbs such as "support," "model," "facilitate," or "organize." Administrative responsibilities were generally to oversee whole-school initiatives and to be mindful of the larger picture while communicating with team leads and the whole school in ways that supported the teaming culture. Further details of the team responsibilities for all three roles can be seen in the Teaming Roles and Responsibilities (TRR) document in Appendix H.

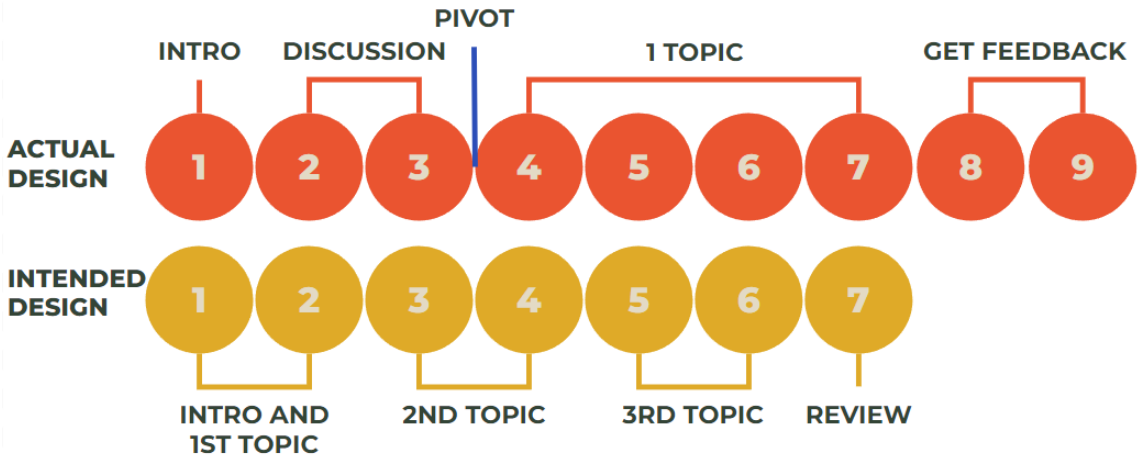
As the innovation focus shifted, so did some of the innovation design. For example, the plans for team leads to pick a leadership topic evaporated, as did the idea of having the team leads set goals connected to the topic they would choose. Instead, we focused on developing the TRR document. This necessitated changes to

the materials I needed to gather and to the writing prompts in the participant reflection journals. Another significant change was that I had initially envisioned a CoP in which I started as the facilitator, but I eventually would release this role to other CoP members. Team leads expressed in our second session that they wanted me to continue to facilitate and bring materials to support our work because they did not have time to identify and gather the needed articles or plan the TL CoP agenda. I agreed to continue in the facilitator role. Throughout the rest of the TL CoP innovation, I organized the session agendas and materials and acted as the timekeeper and discussion facilitator.

At the end of the seven sessions, the team leads asked if we could have two more sessions: one to ask for feedback from a small group of teachers on the TRR document and one to present the work to the principal for input. These extra sessions enabled the group to fine-tune the document with the suggestions of other stakeholders. The team leads expressed they wanted buy-in from other groups and thought this input would help provide needed perspectives on a document intended for all of the education staff. Figure 3 illustrates the intended innovation design compared to the actual trajectory of the innovation after the change in domain for the TL CoP.

Figure 3

Intended Innovation Trajectory and Actual Innovation Trajectory



After the shift in the innovation focus, further data led to significant findings in the study. The following section illustrates the data that connected with the later part of the innovation, which, like the first theme, was gleaned from agendas, participant journals, researcher memos, and interviews.

Findings: Learning and Feeling Heard

Once the TL CoP decided to pivot the domain of the CoP, the group began to work on developing the TRR document, which was the focus of the remaining TL CoP sessions. The following themes reflect the findings that came out of these remaining sessions.

Theme Two: Learning

Team leads learn leadership skills through structured conversations with peer team leads. This theme comprised two categories that led to this assertion: 1. How team leads learned, and 2. What team leads learned. The following section describes these categories in further detail.

How Team Leads Learned. Through participating in the innovation, team leads had opportunities to learn leadership skills through structured peer conversations, collaborative problem-solving, and developing the TRR document.

Structured Peer Conversations. In interviews, team leads reported that interacting with their peers enabled them to develop and grow as leaders but that for peer time to be effective, it needed to be structured. When I asked team leads to compare their experiences within and before the TL CoP, they expressed that the TL CoP experience provided beneficial support while the previous models had not provided the learning opportunities they wanted. The team leads felt that the CoP structure provided a better collaborative experience, enabling them to benefit from the time spent with the group. One team lead explained that they had discussed with others that they wanted to meet regularly for structured conversations but that "without a formal way of doing that", some of the group did not want to meet. At the start of this academic year, and before the TL CoP, the team leads were frustrated that no one was facilitating the group and were often unsure if they should step in and lead the discussion. One team lead said that they often tried to guide the discussion to what they wanted to talk about since there was no agreed-upon topic. Another team lead described that before the TL CoP, the group often just vented, which this team lead felt was not a good use of time. For some of the team leads, this led to frustration with how to spend the meeting time, and the result was that some team leads stopped attending the meetings or only attended the meetings sporadically.

Team leads overwhelmingly agreed that the TL CoP structure helped the group to focus on topics of interest to them. One team lead described that the experience before and after was "night and day" and that they wanted to attend because they felt that the time together benefitted them as a leader. With a clear

plan and facilitation of the meetings, team leads felt that as a group, they got a lot done. At the end of the innovation, all of the team leads expressed appreciation for the work accomplished in developing the TRR document. Team leads wanted a structure that led to an actionable outcome, not merely to vent or discuss school events, and the TL CoP structure enabled this type of positive and meaningful interaction. One team lead noted that having a facilitator helped maintain the meeting structure, stating, "There just has to be someone that's in charge." Another team lead expressed, "Having you in the room helped make sure that everyone[`s]...voices were heard". So, while previous interactions amongst the team leads did provide some collaborative opportunities, it made a difference that there was a facilitator, that we mindfully structured our time together, and that we chose actionable outcomes for the group.

Collaborative Problem-solving. The TL CoP provided opportunities for the team leads to work together to problem-solve about issues that came up on their teams. While the discussion often focused on developing the TRR document, there were times when the team leads engaged in problem-solving dialogue. One team lead described this problem-solving collaboration as "you can workshop solutions, you can bring up scenarios." Another team lead viewed the CoP as a "workshopping style of relationship" where they could "bounce ideas off each other" and felt that hearing how others managed their teams and team issues gave them ideas to implement with their own teams. The team leads appreciated that they could problem-solve in a confidential environment with the other team leads. One team lead noted that there were situations in which "you can't tell any team members," but in problem-solving discussions with team leads, they could see "how other team leads would feel with [a solution]." These confidential opportunities allowed team leads to see how others lead as they were making their own leadership decisions.

Team leads appreciated that they could hear the experiences of other team leads. They gained insight into how other team leads lead their teams and described this process as one in which they could see "different points of view on different topics and issues." A team lead described the process:

> Now that you've had time to vent and I validate how you're feeling, now put your leadership hat on. How could you fix this? And there are my two little tips that you could do. And I'm like, okay, nice, now we go do it.

While all the team leads acknowledged that they did not always see eye-to-eye, they agreed that they benefited from hearing from other team leads and that they could use this information to reflect on their own team issues and potential solutions.

The TL CoP peer conversations helped team leads hear about how others were solving problems and gave them a broader perspective on their own teaming experiences. A team lead reported that these discussions helped "see where we all draw the lines." One team lead felt that it permitted them to be frustrated with their own team situations, as previously, they had not had a gauge for whether they were being "petty" or "overreacting" about some of the situations on their team. Hearing frustrations from other team leads helped the group put their own experiences and responses in perspective to judge if they were off-base or on track. When team leads opened up conversations about their own team struggles or triumphs, it helped them to step back and analyze their situation from a new lens. It was also comforting for them to know that other teams were experiencing some of the same issues and trying many of the same solutions. Listening, discussing, and reflecting on others' experiences were positive experiences for the TL CoP group. It provided a platform for learning about leadership and a better understanding of themselves as leaders.

Discussion of Roles and Responsibilities. The team leads in the CoP reported that they learned about leadership through CoP discussion while developing

the TRR document. For example, one team lead observed that the group "had to come to a consensus on some of the ideas or values we had about each category and what their [administration, team leads, and teachers] jobs would be." Discussion about these roles allowed team leads to reflect on how responsibilities were playing out on their teams so they could adjust what they were doing. For example, one team lead noted that because of these discussions, they became more assertive in delegating responsibilities to team members. Team leads learned to set boundaries on their teams as they discussed the boundaries of the roles and responsibilities.

Through discussion of team roles and responsibilities, the team leads also became more comfortable with asking administration to help with tasks that fit into the administrative role. One team lead described a situation in which she reached out to me as an administrator when, in a team meeting, a teacher was pushing back on what the team had agreed upon. The TRR document states that administrators have the role of "intervening in cases where team teachers are not adhering in a positive manner to the responsibilities and expectations distributed to them by their lead teachers." This team lead chatted me during the meeting and asked me to come help facilitate the discussion. The team lead noted that before the TL CoP innovation, they would not have asked for help as they did not know if it was their responsibility to intervene. Even though the TRR document was not finished when this incident occurred, the discussion of these boundaries helped this team lead to learn when it was appropriate to work with administration to solve a team problem. The TL CoP experience encouraged team leads to practice some of the leadership that we discussed while developing the TRR document, and it helped them to identify the next steps for their interdisciplinary teams.

What Team Leads Learned. Even after moving away from a direct focus on developing leadership skills and strategies, as the team leads worked to create,

share out, and fine-tune the TRR document, they engaged in leadership strategies and learned skills. They gained confidence as leaders through employing distributed leadership practices and facilitating communication with their team and with other team leads.

***Confidence*.** Team leads gained confidence as leaders as they engaged with CoP conversations and activities and through analyzing and establishing roles and responsibilities for interdisciplinary teams. They had less confusion and doubt about where their actions landed in the scope of responsibilities and were more confident in making decisions and passing the baton to someone else when appropriate. Through the innovation activities, team leads recognized when their own practices were on track and knew where and how to act next. A team lead observed:

> I think that helps when you're confident in what you're supposed to be doing…I was constantly questioning myself before, like, should I do this? Is it outside of my realm?

Another team lead noted that after the innovation, they felt more confident in their decisions. They stated that they benefited from the reading materials we used to support the work regarding roles and responsibilities and that they came to the realization that "there are some things … that I'm already doing that I can also improve on in my leadership experiences." Developing a common understanding of the roles and responsibilities for teaming at the school gave team leads more confidence to engage in various leadership roles and actions because they now understood what they needed to do.

Distributed Leadership. After working on clarifying roles and responsibilities and hearing the experiences of other team leads, there was an increased focus on distributing leadership within their interdisciplinary teams. One team lead noted, "I've started… asking for more delegation to be happening." The

team leads were gaining clarity on who should be doing what and felt empowered to talk with their teams about team responsibilities. Another team lead explained, "I think it has made me more assertive, where I'll [say] alright, guys, we've got to work together, because we need a solution, and this has to be done." Team leads also were more willing to articulate to their team what they as leaders needed from the team. One team lead said to their interdisciplinary team, "I would appreciate it if I didn't have to do it because I'm already taking on a little bit more than I can handle." There was a renewed emphasis on distributing expertise and labor throughout the teams and guiding the teachers to understand that they needed to work together to accomplish the goals of the team. Another team lead noted, "I started leaning into different things instead of me putting all the responsibility on me." Team leads found that the innovation affected their leadership style in that it encouraged them to look for ways to distribute leadership within the team instead of feeling that they had to take on the responsibility for every team task.

Team leads also saw the benefit of working with the CoP to distribute team leadership tasks amongst the group. As TL CoP innovation was coming to a close, team leads wanted to keep meeting as a CoP and work collaboratively on other projects or tasks, using a distributed expertise model to take advantage of the skills and experience represented across the group members. The participants felt that if the CoP were to think of themselves as another team, they could distribute expertise within that team. One noted, "Why don't we leverage each other's strengths when … it's related to creating documents or logistics, like 'I got you.'" Another explained that often they "reinvent" as a team lead instead of looking to other leaders for guidance and help. Working together, they felt they could be more productive and learn from one another. One team lead pointed out that some team leads have specific skills in creating culture on teams or developing team schedules and that

sharing how they do this could benefit the other teams on campus. The team leads felt that continuing to meet and develop as a team of leaders would allow the opportunity to continue to support each other. Ultimately, defining the roles and responsibilities of teams was the team leads' early attempt at making sense of distributing leadership in their teams.

Facilitation of Communication. Team leads noted they had opportunities to improve communication with their teams during the innovation. One noted that engaging with the TL COP "impacted my interactions with them, and maybe my tone." The team lead explained that they communicated more calmly with their team because they were clear on the boundaries of the roles and responsibilities, which helped them feel less uncertain when addressing team needs. Some team leads noted that they were more willing to engage in crucial conversations with teachers on their teams by providing constructive feedback or redirection with teachers. Prior to the innovation, one team lead felt that those conversations were "the principal's job, I'm just here as a cheerleader," but after discussing the roles and responsibilities, they felt more confident in having these types of conversations with their team members. Another team lead noted that because of the innovation, they took an opportunity to go over team expectations again, even though it was the middle of the school year. This team lead explained that because of the innovation, they could discuss with their team that "we're all adults, and I'm trusting that we can all do our parts." It is clear that team leads' communication with interdisciplinary teams was impacted by participation in the TL CoP as they engaged in novel actions and adjusted their communication practices.

The TL CoP innovation also influenced communication among the group. Team leads did not always see eye-to-eye, and one felt they were "very different on a personal level, which makes it more challenging." Another team lead noted that

there was not always immediate agreement on the items they were discussing but rationalized that having these "difficult conversations" was a positive of the CoP because "it sets a good example and tone for future meetings." Another noticed that "if somebody [in the CoP] thought something else, we didn't argue," instead, the group talked and came to a consensus. Team leads benefited from talking through difficult topics. During the TL CoP innovation, they could discuss some sticky issues with their peer leaders, which had not been the case in previous iterations of team lead meetings.

Theme Three: Feeling Heard

Team leads need opportunities to feel heard by peer leaders and administration. This theme comprised two categories that led to this assertion: 1. Connection with peers, and 2. Connection with administration. The following section describes these categories in further detail.

Connection with Peers. As I developed the innovation, I relied on the CoP model to create a collaborative and peer-driven experience for the participants. As noted in previous sections, team leads felt that meetings prior to the TL CoP were, at best, focused on logistics or, at worst, not focused at all. They reported that they did not feel the meetings were worth their time, with some team leads opting out of attending. With the initiation of the TL CoP and innovation structures, they felt that the time together was meaningful and productive. As a result, they were more committed to attending and engaging in the meetings. The time together enabled the team leads to discuss and learn and provided a means for connecting with other peer leaders. Data both during the innovation and after its completion show that the team leads' peer relationships were enhanced by engaging in the TL CoP innovation.

The TL CoP innovation provided opportunities for team leads to talk with each other and feel understood. While team leads are technically peers with the other

teachers on their team, in the team lead role, it can be difficult to navigate the "leader" responsibilities without other peer leaders with whom they can discuss issues. Prior to the innovation, team leads felt disconnected from the other leads. After the innovation, they shared it was "a relief" to meet regularly with the other team leads so that they did not "feel alone and isolated." The opportunity to talk confidentially about sensitive topics with a peer experiencing similar issues was a benefit of the regular TL CoP sessions. While some team leads explained that they sometimes talked one-on-one with another team lead, providing a structured environment for these conversations helped to build relationships with peers, especially those with whom they did not have regular contact. One team lead noted that "coming together…actually helped us grow as a [team lead] team." Throughout the TL CoP meetings, the team leads began to form relationships with each other and expressed how they were becoming their own 'team' on campus. Another explained further: "This is a safe space, and we're here to support each other." Team leads did indeed support each other in the TL CoP and felt they could be heard in a confidential environment that allowed risk-taking and opportunities to speak freely.

Connection with Administration. In the TL CoP innovation, I participated as a participant-researcher, and my unique position affected the TL CoP. Team leads noted my role as an administrator in the room as a benefit to our sessions, as they appreciated that I was there for the CoP discussions. I facilitated the discussions as I restated opinions, articulated the session goal, and kept the group discussion on track. However, the team leads also noted that they appreciated having an administrator there to hear about their daily leadership struggles and concerns. They wanted administration to understand their needs and felt that the TL CoP innovation provided a platform for getting their concerns in front of administration in a

consistent and structured way. Knowing that an administrator was there for each session meant they knew they did not have to go out of their way to communicate.

They also felt that having an administrator present to talk about the "big picture" was important. One team lead said they liked having an administrator in the meetings because I could give them feedback on how they were solving team problems and share my insight as an experienced leader. Another noted that having me at the meetings meant they could communicate to administration what issues they were concerned about so that I was aware of what was happening with their teams. They felt that having an administrator hear their perspectives got issues on the table without having to schedule a time to meet with me, which felt more natural and comfortable to them.

The TL CoP discussion notes showed that the team leads wanted support in the form of perspective from my own experiences. The team leads benefited from hearing about my own experiences as a leader, and they expressed appreciation that I talked about leadership and specific examples as a former team lead. They also asked for my perspective on what the administrator role consisted of in the teaming model as we developed the TRR document and felt that this clarified the boundaries between the team leads and administration. Discussions that included my experiences as a former team lead and as a current administrator helped the team leads to learn how to connect with administration and to feel supported in the process.

The team leads also noted they were more willing to go to me as an administrator for difficult staff situations. During the innovation process, one team lead reached out to me for help with a problematic situation in a team meeting and, in the interview, noted that they would not have been as willing to ask for that help if

we had not already talked about similar issues. The team lead described the experience this way:

> "You're like the fixer, like you can give us all the knowledge that we need to fix it or you can take over and fix it, but it just helps everyone to feel like, okay, we're supported. It's not just us [team leads] in charge of everything. We're all a team and we're all at the table. So it's going to be okay."

This team lead felt that I was well-versed in their team issues because of our discussions in the TL CoP and could support them as a leader on the ground when needed. The TRR document included multiple references to the responsibilities of both team leads and administration in communicating with each other.

Conclusion

Analysis of the data and development of case descriptions led to three significant themes: Clarity, Learning, and Feeling Heard. When the innovation changed to fit the needs of the team leads, the pivot led to opportunities for the team leads to learn and to be heard by peers and site leaders. In Chapter 5, I discuss my findings further to develop answers to my research questions and connect them to the theoretical frameworks that guided my study. I also further clarify the study's boundaries, present implications for practice and future research, and explore lessons learned for my roles as a researcher, site leader, and educator.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

As I walked into our team wing after our morning staff meeting, I noticed that the math and science teachers were talking, but when they saw me, they stopped. 'Oh, hey, I was going to talk to you about how I'm supposed to work on a schedule for our assembly day next week. I've got a lot going on. I'm not going to be able to work on that. Could someone else do it?' This was not the first time this teacher had bailed on his team responsibility, but kids would be coming into the building soon, and I needed to take a look at my plans. 'Uh yeah, sure, I can do it this time, but maybe you could work on the other extra schedules so we have them ready to go?'. 'Oh, yeah, sure, no problem'. He went into his classroom, and I wondered if this would ever get done. Should I find someone else to do it? Or was it just easier for me to do it and move on? I'd have to think about all of that later. My students needed me to be ready for the day.

(Composite Vignette of Team Lead Experiences)

This study aimed to create, implement, and research a Team Lead Community of Practice (TL CoP) innovation to support and develop teacher-leaders in my local context. The goal was to better understand how team leads in my context could work together to grow as leaders and to explore the perceptions of team leads as they went through this process. To accomplish this, I used a single-case, qualitative, action research methodology to gather data related to the TL CoP process, identify practices that supported team leads, and articulate the lessons I learned during the research process.

In this chapter, I discuss the findings related to my research questions and how the findings connect back to the theories I began with. I present the boundaries of the study and discuss implications for future practice and future research. I

conclude the chapter by discussing the personal lessons I learned as a researcher, leader, and educator.

Answering the Research Questions

I use my findings from Chapter 4 to answer the research questions that drove the study and connect my findings back to the theories that guided this study: community of practice (CoP), distributed leadership, and situational leadership. As presented in Chapter 2, a CoP is a practice-based community that shares knowledge through participation, engagement, and interaction (Polin, 2010; Wenger et al., 2002). In a CoP, the community comes together to share knowledge and practice around a particular idea or set of problems, which is called the domain (Wenger et al., 2002). Distributed leadership posits that actions can be distributed among the influential people in an organization (Gibb, 1954). A distributed leadership approach shifts the focus of leadership from a hierarchical model to one in which the followers are also engaged in leadership actions (Spillane, 2006). Situational leadership focuses on leaders adapting their leadership style to what the situation demands (Kelly, 2021; Northouse & Lee, 2018). In this theory, leadership styles are described as either directive or supportive, with categories of directing, coaching, supporting, and delegating (Kelly, 2021; Rabarison et al., 2013).

Research Question 1

The first research question was, *How do team leaders collaboratively develop skills to guide peer teachers?* After conducting this study and generating themes through my analysis, I can say team leads collaboratively developed skills when there was structure to support their learning, when the development process included opportunities to problem-solve, when they had a common goal, and when they had choice in their learning. I pull from my themes of "clarity" and "learning"

and integrate ideas from communities of practice and situational leadership theory to answer this question.

The team leads were able to develop skills together because there was structure to the TL CoP sessions that supported their learning. Different from typical hierarchical systems, the structure of a CoP is based on social community (Wenger et al., 2002; Wenger-Trayner et al., 2014). The learning in the TL CoP innovation was possible because of the collaborative community we built in the TL CoP. The collaborative structure made room for open dialogue, which helped the team leads learn from one another as they discussed the roles and responsibilities topic. Before the innovation, they had had casual peer interaction for years, but this depended on personalities, friendships, time, and space. The rhythm of the community also contributed to the structure of the TL CoP and drive the group's momentum (Wenger et al., 2002). In the TL CoP bi-weekly meetings, I made an effort to pace the discussion to fit the needs of the domain, which led to a tempo that supported the team leads' learning. Structure within the meetings also led to more focused and faster learning, and the team leads said this had been the best leadership learning they had experienced.

In a CoP, group members can take on limited leadership roles (Wenger et al., 2002). While I initially planned the TL CoP structure to include opportunities for to distribute the leadership, and have different team leads facilitate the sessions, data collected early in the innovation indicated this was not what they needed. So, I adjusted the structure of the TL CoP and continued to lead the meetings myself. In doing so, I adopted a supportive situational leadership style to provide a low level of direction for the group while supporting the team leads where they needed help (Kelly, 2021; Rabarison et al., 2013). For teams to be highly functioning, they need direction and clarity from someone in authority (Burkus, 2023; Hackman, 2002)

which is what I discovered as the innovation rolled out. I had envisioned a self-managed team in which community members shared and made decisions on their own and I would ultimately back out of the innovation as they continued with their work. The team leads in this group could take on limited leadership roles, as described by Wenger et al. (2002), but they still wanted direction from school leaders to ensure the TL CoP had clarity of purpose.

In a CoP, the community learns by engaging with a domain, or an area of knowledge that is shared by the group (Wenger et al., 2002; Wenger-Trayner et al., 2014). As noted in the theme "learning," in the TL CoP there was a clear structure of community and domain, which the team leads said helped them acquire knowledge about leading a team. Having an articulated domain was essential to the structure of the TL CoP as it defined the group's focus. Even when the group got off task, it was easy to return to the common goal because we had agreed on the domain as a group. The design of the TL CoP innovation was intentional. The community would decide on a relevant domain and this shared decision-making would encourage engagement with the topic (Wenger et al., 2002).

Time to problem-solve also helped the team leads to learn from one another, as I related in the theme of "learning." As we developed the Teaming Roles and Responsibilities (TRR) document, the team leads often talked about specific issues that arose on their teams related to the categories on the document. Problem-solving became a way to talk through their worries and get feedback from other group members. The domain for the team leads was often their shared knowledge about problem-solving and solutions for leading teams. The TL CoP environment was low-risk and collegial so leader peers could build confidence as they problem-solved together.

As the team leads discussed their responsibilities, as well as those of administrators and team members, they problem–solved together to identify what actions they should engage in to guide peer teachers and what they should be taking on for themselves as leaders. This step was essential before they could move on to developing skills to guide peer teachers, and led to the finding that team leads learned better communication and gained confidence in guiding their peers once they had clarity on roles and responsibilities in our teaming model. The learning that took place in the CoP model became the content they could use to help team members learn how to distribute the various tasks and leadership actions needed by the team.

Team leads also collaboratively developed skills through having a common goal. The group members centered their interactions around a specific CoP domain (Wenger et al., 2002), which was to find clarity in their roles. In the theme "clarity," I discussed the team leads needed to know what their role should look like, and this need prompted the pivot of the innovation to the team lead-generated goal of identifying the roles and responsibilities for teaming. Talking about the domain of a CoP leads to practice for the group (Wenger et al., 2002). The group used the domain of clarifying roles and responsibilities to develop the goal of creating a document to support this need. In the theme "learning," the team leads noted they appreciated having a concrete focus with a goal in mind. Even though this was not the original intent of my innovation design, discussion about roles and responsibilities for teaming led the team leads to initiate new practices in their leadership, such as adjusting how they talked to teams or leaning into distributed practices in the team structure. A focus on a common goal helped them to identify the value and purpose of the CoP and resulted in the practice of leadership strategies.

Lastly, the team leads learned how to lead because they had some agency in their learning. Since the initial structure of the TL CoP allowed them to make choices in the domain of the sessions, there was room for them to articulate what they needed. Even though the Teacher Leadership Self-Assessment did not include clarifying roles and responsibilities as a leadership need, the TL CoP design encouraged agency, so the team leads were able to express a need that I had not envisioned. As we discussed the need for clarity, we were able to determine how to make that happen and adjusted the innovation to focus on that need. If I had continued with what I thought the team leads needed instead of listening to what they said they needed, we would not have experienced the authentic and relevant learning that took place.

Research Question 2

The second research question was, *How do team leaders generate better relationships between teachers and with other leaders?* After conducting this study and generating themes through my analysis, I can say team leads generated better relationships through developing as a leader community, listening and feeling heard in a safe environment, and having time with administration. I draw on ideas from the theme "feeling heard" and the theoretical framework of CoP and situational leadership to answer this question.

The team leads built relationships as they developed as a community. One of the ways to develop a CoP is to ensure that there is a focus on the value of the community (Wenger et al., 2002). Before the TL CoP innovation, the team leads were less committed to meeting, primarily because they did not see the value of the time together, but once the TL CoP was underway, and they had chosen a domain, they had buy-in and were dedicated to the work we were doing. This meant they were more willing to attend the sessions and engage in conversations with their

peers. As noted in the theme "feeling heard," the TL CoP included time to talk about their concerns in a constructive, goal-oriented way. This allowed the team leads to connect with their peers over common concerns and feel like they were developing into a team of leaders. They no longer felt isolated because they had a community of leaders to talk to.

Teams that create an environment of psychological safety through trust and respect allow group members to express opinions and learn from one another (Burkus, 2023). In a CoP, the environment should build community through open dialogue (Wenger et al., 2002). In the TL CoP sessions, I created space for the team leads to talk, listen, and support each other, which helped them to grow as a community and contributed to better relationships as a group and between pairs of team leads. In the theme "feeling heard," I noted team leads felt they could speak freely in a way they could not with other teachers on their teams. The safe, confidential environment in the TL CoP encouraged them to talk about their leadership and contributed to each listening to other team leads. This helped them to feel heard by their peers.

The team leads also built better relationships with administration as I participated with them in the innovation. In the theme "feeling heard," I found my presence in the TL CoP provided additional opportunities for the team leads to share their daily leadership concerns with administration. They said this was beneficial for them because I heard what they needed in a natural and comfortable way. As I facilitated the sessions, I adapted my leadership style to what the team leads needed, using a more relationship-oriented style of leading (Kelly, 2021; Northouse & Lee, 2018). Trust amongst team members is crucial for ensuring psychological safety for the group (Burkus, 2023). As an administrator in the group, I was mindful that I did not want to become the "coach" of the group and stifle participant voice in

the innovation and the TL CoP domain, so I consciously took a supportive leadership style in which I gave few directions but high levels of support. I listened and summarized the discussion, repeated proposals, and checked for agreement. I made sure that we stayed focused on problem-solving by encouraging discussion and gently keeping it on track. Team leads responded to this leadership style and felt the TL CoP environment helped build their relationships with me, and with their peers.

Research Question 3

The third research question was, *How do team leads develop their own voice and advocate for change?* After conducting this study and generating themes through my analysis, I can say team leads were able to develop their own voice and advocate for change through a CoP structure that encouraged agency, built their confidence as leaders, and helped them connect with administration. This research question was answered through the themes of "learning" and "feeling heard" and connects with the theoretical frameworks of communities of practice, distributed leadership, and situational leadership.

I used CoP theory to design an innovation that encouraged an open dialogue for the participants (Wenger et al., 2002). This design allowed the team leads to articulate what they needed, and ultimately, the space for their voices led to changes in the innovation. In the innovation, the team leads felt comfortable expressing they wanted to change the domain of the TL CoP and advocated that we turn our focus to gaining clarity of roles and responsibilities. As we went deeper into the innovation, the team leads communicated they preferred I continue to facilitate and, shared that due to their busy schedules, they did not have time to do the behind-the-scenes work it took to prepare for each session. Situational leadership explains that sometimes we must step back and look at the demands of the circumstances and

consider the followers' skills and needs (Kelly, 2021; Northouse & Lee, 2018). Thus, I adjusted my leadership style from what I had anticipated as a low directive and low support style to one that was low directive and high support. I developed an open dialogue with the team leads to start conversations about the possibilities for team leadership and helped members understand what the CoP could achieve, which was evident in the theme "feeling heard."

As noted in the theme "learning," the team leads worked on clarifying the roles and responsibilities for our teaming model, which helped the team leads gain more confidence in how to distribute leadership on their teams. They reported this led to them being more willing to advocate for what they needed as leaders. One team lead noted they explicitly told their team they needed their help; they could not do it all on their own. This action came from a better understanding of how to distribute team tasks. As team leads had a better understanding of the domain of the TL CoP, they gained the confidence they needed to advocate within the CoP and within their interdisciplinary teams. Because of this level of trust, the team leads were confident in advocating not only for a shift in the community domain but also for the changes they felt were needed to move forward as leaders on our campus.

The team leads also advocated through their connection with me as an administrator. Because I adopted a supporting style (Northouse & Lee, 2018), the team leads felt comfortable asking me to continue facilitating the sessions. They also advocated for changing the domain of the CoP to center on clarifying roles and responsibilities on teams. In the CoP model, it is important to develop trust within the community (Polin, 2010; Wenger et al., 2002). As described in the theme "feeling heard," in the TL CoP, the team leads felt heard as leaders and could express their needs.

Boundaries and Limitations of the Study

When designing and conducting any research study, there is no perfect design, and no perfect way to conduct the research (Mertens, 2015). Each research project has limitations characterized by factors outside of the researcher's control that limit the scope of the study (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). A research study also has delimitations, which are the factors based on intentional choices for the boundaries of the project (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). Qualitative research inherently has boundaries and does not aim to develop generalizations that can be applied directly to other situations; rather it seeks to draw conclusions from the data to inform similar education or research settings (Holley & Harris, 2019).

As I share insights that could inform practitioners or researchers engaging with a similar problem of practice as the one in this study, articulating the boundaries of this study helps readers to identify with the case and suggests transferability to other contexts. In the following section, I describe the role of the researcher and the ways the case boundaries framed the findings of this study.

Researcher Role

Mindful consideration of the role of the researcher is vital in any action research project (Mertler, 2020). In action research, the problem of practice is based on a local issue; thus, the researcher is part of the setting (Mertler, 2020). While this may be viewed as limiting for some types of research, for action research, the participant researcher is not only part of the study design but can be seen as a benefit to the study design (Mertler, 2020). Before the innovation, I participated in the teaming model first as a teacher on a team, then a team lead, then, at the time of the innovation, as was a site administrator supporting the teaming culture on our campus. My insider knowledge benefited the study as I already had observations about the experiences of team leads and was able to hone in on possible issues team

leads face, rather than begin to identify a problem of practice from the outside. I was already embedded in the context of supporting team leads at my school, which allowed me to determine a need and quickly understand and adjust when we needed to pivot the innovation. This role as a researcher was a natural fit and led to outcomes that enhanced my role as a professional at the school. It also allowed me to ensure the TL CoP innovation was relevant to the team leads and helped to build community as we grappled with the domain of the TL CoP.

Participant researchers can lose objectivity as they participate in the research; however, they also can learn firsthand what is happening in the setting (Mertler, 2020). In my case, I was able to observe and take notes while also facilitating and sharing within the TL CoP. As a member of my school community, being part of the innovation was an important part of the study design as it allowed me to interact with the team leads while I collected data. I could watch firsthand as the team leads made decisions on how they needed to grow as leaders and could ask questions on the ground to ensure I understood their perspectives. However, I acknowledge if another researcher had taken on this study, the outcomes could have been different.

As noted previously, my role at the school at the time of the study was as an administrator. To ensure I acknowledged my positionality in the innovation and data collection process, I began the innovation by talking with the team leads about my role as both a researcher and an administrator at the school. My participation in the TL CoP no doubt affected the interactions of the team leads and what they were willing to share; however, I tried to build community and trust through transparent communication and team-building actions within the TL CoP. I mindfully put myself in a facilitator role that allowed me to interact with the team leads as they grappled with what they wanted to do with our time. I tried to avoid putting myself in a

coaching role, which would have affected the collaborative CoP environment I wanted to create. I also kept a facilitator memos to reflect on my actions as a practitioner researcher and ensure I adjusted my actions accordingly. It is possible my role as an administrator influenced the actions of the TL CoP, but I took great care to address this by asking questions and explicitly stating I wanted to follow their lead on what they needed. In this way, I mitigated some of the potential for the team leads to cede all decision-making to me and thus affect the collaborative intentions of the innovation design.

Case Boundaries

As described in Chapters 3 and 4, I conducted this research as a local-knowledge case study with boundaries of setting, participants, and time. In my case study, these boundaries framed the innovation and data analysis by outlining the nature and context of the study. Research design, including case descriptions and contextualized data, helps frame the transferability of the findings to other possible settings (Mertler, 2020; Stringer, 2008). The innovation and conclusions viewed within these boundaries provide a way to look at this particular case and provide a lens through which to view similar teacher leadership inquiries regarding teachers leading interdisciplinary teams. I used case descriptions as part of the research design so the reader could verify the design was trustworthy and determine factors that might be applicable to future studies and settings.

Setting

A local knowledge case study can provide an understanding of the researcher's context (Thomas, 2011). My problem of practice was connected to my local setting, and I chose my research questions because they directly addressed the leadership needs of my school site. This made sense as an action researcher and allowed me to focus on implementing change in my own context. While I chose my

problem of practice and developed my innovation due to its importance to my setting, it also meant I did not gather data that might have led to other insights had I gone outside those boundaries. For example, the teaming culture in my setting has been established for many years, so it may be schools new to teaming have other needs not addressed in my research. Our school also has multiple teams in addition to interdisciplinary teams, so it is possible team leads look to additional teacher leaders to learn leadership from outside of the interdisciplinary team lead group. Studies conducted in an elementary or high school setting might also lead to different data or outcomes as teacher leaders in those settings may have different needs than the junior high teachers who participated in this study.

Participants

Case study design involves choosing the participants that best represent the intent of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018). The four participants in this study were chosen directly from my local context because they were the team leads at the time of the innovation. Additionally, the participants in my setting have been in a teaming model for multiple years, so my study did not include leaders new to teaming. My choice of participants was one factor that bound the study. If I had included team leads who were new to the teaming model, I may have had different findings. I designed the study as a single-case study, so it is possible that if I had included multiple cases with more participants—for example, other schools in my district that were engaging in teaming practices—I might have had different findings and conclusions. While I did interview past team leads in one of my research cycles, I did not include the perspectives of former team leads in the TL CoP innovation, which could have provided yet another viewpoint in the data.

Time

Specific time choices also provide the boundaries for a case study (Yin, 2018). I conducted my study over nine sessions during the spring semester of the 2022-2023 school year. This timeframe affected my study in several ways. For example, I would have liked to begin the innovation in the fall so team leads had more time to engage in actions across with the innovation. However, this was not possible due to timing with IRB and district approval. During the fall, while I was preparing for the innovation, the team leads met on their own as directed by the site principal. These earlier meetings, prior to the TL CoP, and the interactions that occurred during those sessions, may have affected how well or quickly the TL CoP innovation was able to roll out, as the team leads already had some preconceived notions about how they would spend time together when they met. Because the innovation could only take place over nine sessions, it limited the time we had for inquiry and meant when we pivoted the innovation we pushed back investigating leadership strategies. After the study concluded in the spring of 2023, the team leads decided they wanted to continue meeting as a TL CoP. At the time of writing this dissertation, the team leads were focusing their community practice on the domain of crucial conversations and were doing a book study to drive learning in this area. Had we had more time for this trajectory during the innovation timeframe, I would have different data to include related to my problem of practice.

Implications for Practice

The first implication is formal leaders need to dedicate time for team leads to meet. They need time to connect, share experiences and problems, and learn leadership skills from one another as they engage in leadership practices. For my district and others that are working in teaming models, leaders should consider what time can be carved out for team leads to get the support they need. The structure of

these opportunities should allow team leads to connect with other leaders to dialogue and pursue learning that promotes the implementation of leadership strategies. The team leads in my study expressed a need for a space to learn that made sense for them and their setting. If administrators do not prioritize this time, team leads will continue grappling with leadership issues and struggle to feel confident as leaders. Team leads want to grow but need site leaders to ensure these opportunities exist within the other demands of leading interdisciplinary teams.

The second implication is, providing structure is necessary for meaningful and authentic learning for the team leads. When a group's goals are vague or have not been identified, participants lose interest or are not committed to the discussion. Teams need clarity of purpose, and need site leaders can help to provide this (Barkus, 2023; Hackman, 2002). The team leads in the study expressed the structure of the CoP took the guesswork out of what should be happening and allowed them to engage with the task at hand. At the time of this writing, the TL CoP at my school continued to function under the same structures established in this innovation/study. I encourage leaders at schools engaged in teaming to be actively engaged in helping the team lead community develop as a cohesive and goal-oriented group.

The third implication is a CoP can be used to provide a chance for team leads to connect with their counterparts in a meaningful way. I am committed to ensuring the TL CoP continues to be a supportive environment with connections to peer leaders. As the team leads learned from each other, they built trust, which enabled them to make natural connections with one another both in and out of the CoP sessions. This trusting environment is necessary for teams to build psychological safety in an environment that fosters risk-taking (Barkus, 2023). The TL CoP team was no exception, and they needed the opportunity to build trust with one another

before they could engage in shared learning related leadership. If this innovation had merely been a professional development, a lecture, or another top-down training session, the team leads likely would not have had as much engagement with the learning and would not have developed into a team of leaders. Leaders engaged in training team leads should consider using a CoP framework, so teacher leaders can build a trusting and learning-focused community with their peers.

A fourth implication is that in order for team leaders to develop as leaders, they need time with formal school leaders. Team leads need time with peers to make connections and build community, but this study showed the team leads also needed time to connect with site leadership to talk, problem-solve, and share perspectives. Over the nine sessions, we developed as a community of leaders, and the trust we developed in the TL CoP group led to an open and safe space for learning, which is essential to any teaming situation (Barkus, 2023). Since the TL CoP, I have noticed better relationships with the team leads I work with and that they are more likely to come to talk with me and problem-solve. The experience has enhanced my relationships with the team leads and led to opportunities to work together to support students through our teaming culture. On campuses with teaming, leaders should create time to connect with team leads as peer leaders.

The last implication is team leads benefit from having some choice in how and what they learn. When leadership development facilitators make presumptions about what needs to be learned, adult learners become frustrated the content is not what they need or is something they have already mastered. In the case of this TL CoP, the team leads wanted to back up the CoP domain to clarify what they should be doing before they talked about how they should do it. This pivot was possible because I included choice in the design of the innovation. For me as a leader, it was humbling to remember I do not have all the answers and I may not have accurately

assessed what staff need, but I was encouraged that my flexible design allowed me to change my own thinking. Team leads who are not presented with options in their learning will be less engaged and committed to growing their skill base. Schools and districts employing teaming practices should consider how they can incorporate choice into the learning opportunities for team leads.

Implications from this study fall on site and school district administrators to provide time and support for team leads who are learning how to lead. While there may be situations in which the team leads themselves have some sway, ultimately, school and district-level administrators will need to mindfully consider how team leads can be supported in leadership development and provide the time and space to do so. As a leader at my site, I am committed to continuing these practices and applying them to future situations where I can influence leadership growth.

Implications for Future Practice and Research

The first implication for future research is the study design could include more feedback from team teachers. Leadership is not just delegated tasks and should incorporate the work and vision of all stakeholders (Spillane, 2006). While my problem of practice focused on what team leads needed, it is possible if I had interviewed or gathered data from team teachers, I would have noticed leadership needs that might not have been addressed in the study. In future research, I could identify which stakeholders are affected by the problem of practice outside of the core group and consider if other perspectives would be beneficial.

The second implication for future research is to consider a longer time frame for a TL CoP. I initially wanted to have the innovation span a good part of the school year, and if this had been possible, I believe the team leads and I could have moved into further leadership learning. In fact, at the time of the writing of this dissertation, the TL CoP was still taking place, and team leads had chosen some leadership inquiry

topics. Now that the TL CoP is established and being sustained on my campus, there is an opportunity to continue to study the community of team leads and their practices as they focus on the domain of leadership skills.

Third, it is essential to consider how asking teachers to become leaders is impacting teaching and school systems as a whole. There are many positive effects of giving teachers more agency and opportunities to grow as teacher-leaders. However, there is more to discover about what this added responsibility does to teachers, teaming, and the teaching profession. As we work toward a more democratic and shared system, it is essential to look at whether teaming empowers teachers or if we are merely passing tasks down the line. Are we just pushing management tasks from administration to teachers and calling it "leadership"? Where do we draw the line on what team leads should take on? How well are teams distributing leadership and expertise amongst the team? How do we ensure that the teaming model is sustainable? Who gets to lead a team and why? Why do team leads leave the lead role and when they do, what do they do next? These are the next-step questions I am asking after engaging in this research, and other researchers of teaming models could consider them in their inquiries.

Lessons Learned

With my action research focusing on roles and responsibilities for interdisciplinary teams, I am very aware of my various roles throughout this process. As a researcher, I developed and facilitated the innovation to bring out positive outcomes for the team leads on my campus. As a site administrator and leader, I feel it is my responsibility to listen to and respond to the needs of the staff at my school. As an educator, I always seek ways to support learning for students and staff. From conducting this research and understating the findings from this study, I

have extracted lessons which I will apply to enhance the varied roles in my professional life.

Researcher Role

Action research is a systematic inquiry process conducted by practitioners for themselves and their communities (Mertler, 2020). This is my second time through an action research process (the first being action research experiences in my master's program), and I am again reminded of the importance of engaging in well-planned action research to answer my questions as a practitioner. In the future, I see myself engaging in personal and informal action research projects wherein I design, conduct, and analyze research in my setting to answer questions of practice I continue to have. I could also lead teachers in a collaborative or participatory action research project as a way to encourage professional growth centered on shared problems or opportunities in our local context (Mertler, 2020). As I engaged in the literature surrounding action research, it was clear to me leading teachers in the action research process could produce educators who ask questions and look for solutions (Mertler, 2020; Stringer, 2008), and I would like to guide a group of educators through this process as a way to affect change and find solutions to the tricky problems teachers encounter in their work.

When starting an action research project, the researcher is looking at what has happened and what they hope to happen, but as much as we look at theories, think about design, and plan for the project, the humans in the project have their own ideas which affect the trajectory of the research. Because I designed my action research to include participant agency, I listened to the team leads to find out what they truly needed instead of going with my preconceived notions of how to support and guide them as leaders. I am grateful to my past researcher self that I had the foresight to keep that door open a crack, and I would say to my future researcher

self that I should always try to have this in mind as I develop and plan for further inquiry. My study was much more meaningful because I centered my research practices on listening and learning from others, which I believe is the first step in action research and definitely the first step in effective leadership.

Site Leader Role

In an innovative environment, people still need feedback and guidance to know if they are on track and where to go next (Sutton & Rao, 2016). The team leads in the study wanted to use distributed leadership with their teams but also needed some help on what this should look like and how to have conversations about it. From discussions in the TL CoP session and interviews, the team leads indicated they often took on team tasks but wanted to change this dynamic. For teams to be effective, team leads and team members need consistent support and feedback from administrators; otherwise, we risk teaming becoming another top-down model. As a leader, I need to be mindful of how to help staff on our campus understand what distributed leadership looks like so everyone, adults and students in our school community, can experience the benefits of teaming.

As a site leader in this innovation, it was clear the team leads wanted to have my ear so they were understood as leaders, and so I knew what was happening on their teams. They appreciated I was listening and often acted on items we discussed in the TL CoP. It was clear to me that while team leads do need time together, they also need time with administrators to talk through what is worrying them or to problem-solve with a peer. Through the trusting environment we built in the TL CoP, team leads were able to bring honest feedback and questions to me that they might otherwise not have articulated. With everyone's busy schedules, knowing there was a dedicated time in which I would listen to their concerns provided another type of support they appreciated. Whether it is through a CoP or through other means, I

need to make sure I take the time and space to connect with leaders on campus so they feel supported and get the feedback they need.

For teams to self-manage, they need leaders to set the direction of the team's work (Backman, 2002). The team leads in this study wanted administration to set the stage in talking to staff about what teaming looks like. Many times in conversations about roles and responsibilities, we discussed what we wanted teaming to look like, and then it was followed with a request that administration communicate this with the teams. Team leads asked for administration to take the lead in building the teaming culture at the school and felt that if it did not come from the top, teams would not understand the importance of the roles and responsibilities we outlined. This idea initially seemed to counter my vision of more distributed and flat leadership, but I realized team leads needed someone in authority to set the stage, so to speak, and then they felt empowered to move forward with clarity of purpose. As a leader on my campus, I must find ways to establish and clarify the teaming culture, including facilitating conversations about teaming, distributed leadership, and expectations in the teaming model. To move away from top-down structures, I need to work alongside the team leads to develop ways that they can talk with teams in a collaborative and supportive way that leads to action. Team leads need continued support with the backing of clear direction that is communicated by school leaders.

The last lesson I learned for my site leader role is sometimes it is beneficial for leaders to let someone else lead. I initially thought I would let the team leads facilitate the TL CoP, but they just needed a break. One team lead expressed it was a relief just to be there and have me take care of the background preparation for the TL CoP work. Although I was thinking about sustainability for the TL CoP innovation

and planned to step away eventually, I realized my participation and facilitation outweighed the benefits of walking away.

My takeaway from this aspect of the innovation is site leaders need to be actively involved in meeting with team leads so they feel supported. Just providing time for them to meet was not enough, and I intend to continue meeting with the TL CoP to provide any support and opportunities for collaborative learning they need. In the future, it may be I can pass the facilitation role to the team leads, but at the time of this writing, it makes sense for me to continue to schedule, organize, and facilitate the TL CoP sessions.

Educator Role

As a learner of leadership, I appreciated the opportunity to use inquiry-based learning in the TL CoP instead of the facilitator telling the group what they should be learning. As I consider how I want to participate in educating new leaders and a new generation of educators, I need to be mindful of how learning is developed. Adults want both choices and structure in their learning. The team leads wanted someone to facilitate while they used their own experiences to guide the learning process. As leaders, we have agendas of what we think staff need to know, and we need time for that, but we also need to find time to help professionals identify what it is they believe they need. As I think about how I will engage in training other leaders and teachers, I will consider ways I can incorporate agency into the learning of the adults I work with.

In spite of my efforts to design an innovation that left room for participant agency, I still made assumptions about what the team leads would need to learn to grow as leaders. Fortunately, my innovation design left room for me to listen, but I am very aware of the moment I had to decide: Do I listen to what they are saying and store it away for a future project? Or do I change direction and meet the team

leads' needs as they are expressing them in real-time? I remember feeling some discomfort in that TL CoP session as I began to make some calculations on how I could change the direction of our CoP domain. Fortunately, I quickly caught onto the passion for clarity the team leads were expressing and, by the end of the session, proposed that we pivot our learning. This led to a much more authentic action research project than if I had just persevered and collected data based on my assumptions about what the team leads needed. If I had not listened, I would have missed the opportunity to meet the team leads where they were. I believe this kind of flexibility is the true strength of action research and of being a leader.

I could not have accomplished this research alone, and I benefited from the support of my own communities of practice, my assigned Leader-Scholar Community, and the "Tumbleweed CoP," which formed naturally from the collaborative work we did together. Thankfully, this was part of the course design of the ASU Education Leadership and Innovation program and led to many insightful and supportive conversations, as well as critique and explicit teaching when I could not figure it out on my own. My research is much, much better because of the input of my own communities of practice, and this process has become a model for me as a researcher, leader, and educator.

Teacher leadership is needed for sustainable change. As we move past outdated structures in education, teacher leadership is vital to helping teachers grow professionally, develop sustainable systemic change, and support team efforts for significant student growth (Berry et al., 2013). Effective teaming cultures and practices support team members, but the purpose of teams is ultimately to provide groups of people with tools to implement change and innovate in their organization (Burkus, 2023; Edmonson & Harvey, 2017; Hackman, 2002). While my study supported the growth of teacher leaders of interdisciplinary teams, my ultimate goal

is to help teachers on teams become better at their craft and provide each student with access to the strengths and expertise of multiple high-quality educators. This is not possible without effective teams. The benefits of teaming for teachers, such as professional support, opportunities for growth, and better job satisfaction, are meaningless if students are not benefiting from teaming. So, while I focus on teacher outcomes for this study, in the end, it is the students that I hope will be on the receiving end of the effects brought about by successful teaming practices.

Conclusion

When I began this journey, I was a team lead, and now, at the end, I am an administrator. I have waited a long time to step into formal administration, because I wanted to have a broad and deep teaching experience to form the foundation of my leadership practice. Now, as a school administrator, I cannot help but wonder if I am being true to my educator roots. Am I retaining my teacher persona as I teach adults to grow and learn? Or am I getting caught in the management weeds at the expense of nurturing new teachers and leaders? These are questions I will continue to ask as I look at ways to support the staff around me, listen to what they need, and find ways to walk along the path to expertise together.

As I think about the learning that happened in the TL CoP I would like to share a final quote from a team lead that was sent to me just as I prepared to defend this dissertation:

> Our meetings as a CoP are some of the most beneficial meetings I have. You have created a safe space for us to talk through issues and grow as leaders. That is something you should be incredibly proud of! Imagine if your system had been in place back when [we] started! You are setting us all up for success. Thank you! (Team Lead, 2023)

I continue to support the growth of the leaders at my school, and I hope I can remember to listen, provide clarity, and create safe spaces for inquiry as I lead now and in the future.

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APPENDIX A

TEACHER LEADERSHIP SELF ASSESSMENT

Teacher Leadership Self-Assessment

Please respond in terms of how frequently each statement is descriptive of your professional behavior.	Never	Rarely	Some-times	Often	Always
1. I reflect on what I do well and also how I can improve as a classroom teacher.					
2. I understand how my strengths and needs for development will impact my new role as a leader in my school.					
3. I am clear about what I believe about teaching and learning.					
4. I act in ways that are congruent with my values and philosophy when dealing with students and colleagues.					
5. I seek feedback on how I might improve in my work setting.					
6. At work I behave in ways that are ethical and meet expectations for a high level of professional performance.					
ter the total of items 1-6 in the space to the right	Total Items 1-6 _____				
7. I invite colleagues to work toward accomplishment of the vision and mission of the school.					
8. I lead others in accomplishing tasks.					
9. I involve colleagues when planning for change.					
10. I understand the importance of school and district culture to improving student outcomes					
11. I work toward improving the culture of the school.					

12. I am willing to spend time and effort building a team to improve my school.					
ter the total of items 7-12 in the space to the right	Total Items 7-12 _____				
13. I listen carefully to others.					
14. I adjust my presentations to my audience.					
15. I seek perspectives of others and can reflect others' thoughts and feelings with accuracy.					
16. When facilitating small groups I keep the group members on-task and on-time.					

Please respond in terms of how frequently each statement is descriptive of your professional behavior.	Never	Rarely	Some-times	Often	Always
17. When leading meetings I am able to get almost everyone to participate.					
18. I use electronic technology effectively to communicate with individuals and groups.					
ter the total of items 13-18 in the space to the right	Total Items 13-18 _____				
19. I understand that different points of view may be based on an individual's culture, religion, race or socioeconomic status.					
20. I respect values and beliefs that may be different from mine.					
21. I enjoy working with diverse groups of colleagues at school.					

22. I work effectively with non-educators and persons with special interests.					
23. I make special efforts to understand the beliefs and values of others.					
24. I am willing to share my beliefs even when they are different from the beliefs of others.					
ter the total of items 19-24 in the space to the right	Total Items 19-24 _____				
25. I promote a positive environment in the classroom.					
26. I use research-based instructional practices.					
27. I persist to assure the success of all students.					
28. I have a reputation for being competent in the classroom.					
29. I am approachable and open to sharing with colleagues.					
30. I act with integrity and fairness when working with students or adults.					
ter the total of items 25-30 in the space to the right	Total Items 25-30 _____				
31. I seek out all pertinent information from many sources before making a decision or taking action.					
32. I set goals and monitor progress towards meeting them.					

Please respond in terms of how frequently each statement is descriptive of your professional behavior.	Never	Rarely	Some-times	Often	Always

33. I analyze and use assessment information when planning.					
34. I participate in professional development and learning.					
35. I am proactive in identifying problems and working to solve them.					
36. I work side-by-side with colleagues, parents and / or others to make improvements in the school or district.					
ter the total of items 31-36 in the space to the right	Total Items 31-36 _____				
37. I plan and schedule thoroughly so that I can accomplish tasks and goals.					
38. I exhibit self-confidence when under stress or in difficult situations.					
39. I work effectively as a team member.					
40. I show initiative and exhibit the energy needed to follow through to get desired results.					
41. I prioritize so that I can assure there is time for important tasks.					
42. I create a satisfactory balance between professional and personal aspects of my life.					
ter the total of items 37-42 in the space to the right	Total Items 37-42 _____				

Teacher Leadership Self-Assessment
Scale Descriptions and Scoring Protocol

Scales of the Teacher Leadership Self-Assessment
Self-Awareness: Teacher has an accurate picture of self in terms of strengths, values, philosophy and behaviors. **Leading Change:** Teacher uses effective strategies to facilitate positive change. **Communication:** Teacher exhibits effective listening, oral communication, presentation skills and expression in written communication. **Diversity:** Teacher demonstrates respect for and responds to differences in perspectives. **Instructional proficiency and Leadership:** Teacher possesses and uses professional knowledge and skills in providing the most effective learning opportunities for students and adults. **Continuous Improvement:** Teacher demonstrates commitment to reaching higher standards and readiness to take action to improve. **Self-Organization:** Teacher establishes course of action and implements plans to accomplish results.

Self-Scoring Procedure

Self-Awareness: Enter Total of Items 1-6		Diversity: Enter Total of Items 19-24	
Leading Change: Enter Total of Items 7-12		Instructional Proficiency: Enter Total of Items 25-30	
Communication: Enter Total of Items 13-18		Continuous Improvement: Enter Total of Items 31-36	
		Self-Organization: Enter Total of Items 37-42	

(Katzenmeyer & Katzenmeyer, 2004, as cited in Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009)

APPENDIX B

SAMPLE TL COP AGENDA

TL CoP Meeting 1 - Jan 27

Intended Outcomes *Community members will*

- Establish a community with other team leaders
- Identify expectations for the TL CoP
- Reflect on our own leadership practices
- Choose a focus for the TL CoP

Roles: Facilitation - Lee; Preparation - Lee ; Coordination: Lee
Norms:

Time	What	Why	How
(5 min)	**(Before the meeting)** • Review materials for TL CoP Session	To familiarize ourselves with the tools of the TL CoP	Individual review • Google folder • Agenda
10 min	Connection Activity • How am I feeling?	To transition into the TL CoP and build community	Facilitator sharing Group question and answer • Core emotions list (p. 244)
Notes	•		
10 min	TL CoP Logistics • CoP Agreements • Roles and Responsibilities	To identify community expectations	Whole-group discussion • CoP Agenda • TL CoP session roles
Notes	•		
20 min	Make meaning and create something - Leadership Self Assessment	To reflect on personal leadership practices and needs	Individual reflection Individual sharing Whole-group discussion • Leadership Self-Assessment
Notes	•		
10 min	Leadership Reflection Journal	To process our learning experience	Individual reflection

		so far and make connections to our work.	• Reflection Journal doc
Notes	•		
5 min	Closing • One big take-away OR • Share leadership goal	To reflect on learning. To bring our session to a close.	Whole-group discussion Individual reflection • CoP Agenda
Notes	•		
For Next Time	•		

APPENDIX C

PARTICIPANT REFLECTION JOURNAL

Participant Reflection Journal Prompts

(Completed during the last 10 minutes of the TL-CoP Group Meeting)

TL CoP Session 1

Prompt 1: How might these collaborative conversations build your capacity as a leader moving forward? What do you hope will come out of these conversations that will support you as a leader? [practice, domain, community]

-

Prompt 2: How could the leadership self-assessment build your capacity as a leader? What areas of strength or support stand out for you? [practice, domain]

TL CoP Session 2

Start of Session:

Based on your Leadership Self-Assessment, what are three topics you would like to investigate?

-

End of Session:

Prompt 1: In what ways did the group discussion support your progress as a leader? [community, practice]

-

Prompt 2: How might our collaborative conversations positively impact our decision-making and inform our work moving forward? [community, practice, domain]

-

TL CoP Session 3

Prompt 1: In what ways did the group discussion today impact your thinking on *(topic chosen by CoP)*? [domain, community]

-

Prompt 2: Based on the information in this module, choose a SMART goal for the next four weeks that supports you as a leader and/or supports your interdisciplinary team teachers. [practice, domain]

Specific (Name the goal):

_____

Measurable (What will success look like after 4 weeks?):

_____

_____

Attainable (What makes this a realistic goal for you?)

_____

Relevant (How will this support you or your team?)

_____

Time-bound: 4 Weeks - To be reassessed in 4 weeks

TL CoP Sessions 4-5

Prompt 1: In what ways did the group discussion today impact your thinking on teaming roles and responsibilities [domain, community]?

-

Prompt 2: How might our collaborative conversations today positively impact our decision-making and inform our work moving forward [practice]?

-

Prompt 3: Reflecting on our goal (developing roles and responsibilities document) and our work today, what are some successes? What are some obstacles? What are some action steps that you could take to move our goal forward? [practice]

-

TL CoP Session 7

Prompt 1: After reviewing our goal from the last four weeks, what are some successes you experienced and progress that you made? What are some obstacles or challenges you encountered? How might you overcome these challenges? What are some action steps that you could take to continue to move our goal forward?

-

Prompt 2: In what ways did the collaborative environment support you as a leader? [CLT; community]

-

Prompt 3: How do you see the TL CoP moving forward? What would come next? [CLT; practice]

-

Prompt 4: What are some insights you might share that have not been asked directly? [CLT]

APPENDIX D

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interview: Team Leadership on Interdisciplinary Teams

Prior to the interview:
Participation in this interview is purely voluntary. If you choose not to participate in this interview or withdraw from the interview at any time, there will be no penalty whatsoever. If you find some interview questions difficult to answer, you have every right to ask for that question to be skipped.

The interview will take no more than 1.5 hours. I would also like your permission to audio record the interview for transcription purposes only. Please let me know if you do not want the interview to be recorded; you also can change your mind after the interview starts, just let me know.

All data collected from the interview will be confidential. Data may be reported in my dissertation, presentations, or publications but your name will not be used. To ensure confidentiality, all data will be analyzed as a group case, not by the individual participants, and data will be reported through a composite narrative. The interview audio recording will be labeled with a study ID rather than your name, transferred to a password-protected computer, deleted from the original recording device, then deleted permanently once transcribed.

Interview Questions:

Project Roles and Responsibilities [Domain]: We started out the group with the intent of investigating various leadership practices but ended up working on identifying team roles and responsibilities.

1. How did you feel about that change?
2. Do you feel that this work is benefiting you in your role as a team leader? How?
3. Do you feel this work is benefiting your team members? How?
4. What work is still left to be done in relation to defining team roles and responsibilities?
5. If the TLs continue to work on this, what do you think is the next step?

TL COP Experience:

One of this goals of this intervention, was to develop and maintain a Community of Practice. A COP is defined as…

6. How do you think the TL CoP experience went overall? Positives? Challenges?

7. How did these TL COP meetings (experience?) compare to the prior TL meetings?

8. What aspects of this TL CoP have been helpful to you? (Leadership Self-Assessment; TL CoP meetings; Independent readings; Reflection Journals) What was less/not helpful? [practice]

9. Did the TL COP help you to feel more connected to other team leaders? How?

10. When I first imagined this TL COP, I planned for TLs to take turns leading/guiding the work each time we met. This didn't end up happening, and instead, the group decided for me to take the leadership role. Do you think this style of COP meetings is sustainable? Why or why not? (possible follow up: what would need to happen for this style of meeting to be sustained?)*[CLT; Distributed Leadership]*

Affect on Leadership: front matter - run up pitch

11. Across your participation in the TL COP, did you make any changes or notice anything different about your leadership practices? [practice]

12. Can you think of a time across the TL COP (meetings or other experiences in the school) that you used your voice to advocate for change? Tell me about that experience…

    1. [Follow up] How do you think your participation in the TL COP interacted with that experience?

13. Do you think we should continue the TL CoP? How often?

Final Thoughts

14. Is there anything you would like to share that you have not been asked? Final thoughts?

APPENDIX E

IRB APPROVAL LETTER

ASU Knowledge Enterprise Development

EXEMPTION GRANTED

Amy Markos
Division of Educational Leadership and Innovation - West Campus
602/543-6624
Amy.Markos@asu.edu

Dear Amy Markos:

On 2/13/2023 the ASU IRB reviewed the following protocol:

Type of Review:	Modification / Update
Title:	Teacher Leadership on Interdisciplinary Teams
Investigator:	Amy Markos
IRB ID:	STUDY00017054
Funding:	None
Grant Title:	None
Grant ID:	None
Documents Reviewed:	[redacted] Research Approval, Category: Off-site authorizations (school permission, other IRB approvals, Tribal permission etc);

The IRB determined that the protocol is considered exempt pursuant to Federal Regulations 45CFR46 (1) Educational settings, (2)(ii) Tests, surveys, interviews, or observation (low risk) on 2/13/2023.

In conducting this protocol you are required to follow the requirements listed in the INVESTIGATOR MANUAL (HRP-103).

If any changes are made to the study, the IRB must be notified at research.integrity@asu.edu to determine if additional reviews/approvals are required. Changes may include but not limited to revisions to data collection, survey and/or interview questions, and vulnerable populations, etc.

Sincerely,

IRB Administrator

cc: Lee Preston
Lee Preston

APPENDIX F

DISTRICT APPROVAL FOR RESEARCH

[redacted]

January 20, 2023

Dear Ms Lee Preston:

The [redacted] Research Priority Board has approved your request to conduct research in [redacted] project titled "Teacher Leadership on Interdisciplinary Teams".

The District requires a report of your findings along with any copies of studies that are published with this data. Thank you for your cooperation in these matters and we look forward to your results.

Sincerely,

[redacted]

[redacted]

APPENDIX G

RECRUITMENT CONSENT FORM

Dear Colleague:

My name is Lee Preston and I am a doctoral student in the Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College (MLFTC) at Arizona State University (ASU). I am working under the direction of Dr. Amy Markos, a faculty member in MLFTC. We are conducting a research study on leadership skills for interdisciplinary team leaders. The purpose of this interview is to better understand how team leaders view leadership and to identify the skills team leaders need to guide interdisciplinary teams.

We are asking for your help, which will involve your participation in an interview. We anticipate the interview to take no more than 45 minutes. The interview will be conducted via Zoom, a virtual meeting platform. With your permission, I would like to video record the interview for transcription purposes only. Please let me know if you do not want the interview to be recorded; you also can change your mind after the interview starts, just let me know.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to participate or withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty whatsoever. You must be 18 years of age or older to participate.
Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you find that some interview questions are difficult to answer, you have every right to ask for that question to be skipped. You must be 18 years of age or older to participate.

The benefit to participation is the opportunity for you to reflect on and think more about your own leadership skills and experiences. Your responses may also inform future iterations of the study. Thus, there is potential to enhance the experiences of your colleagues. There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to your participation.

Your responses will be confidential. Results from this study may be used in my dissertation, presentations, or publications but your name will not be used. The interview recording will be labeled with a study ID rather than your name, transferred to a password-protected computer, and deleted from the original recording device, then deleted permanently once transcribed.

If you have any questions concerning the research study, please contact the research team – Amy Markos at amy.markos@asu.edu or 602-543-6624, or Lee Preston at lacox@asu.edu or 480-465-7237.

Once you have signed this form, please email it to lacox@asu.edu

Thank you,

Lee Preston, Doctoral Student
Amy Markos, Professor

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact Amy Markos at 602-543-6624 or the Chair of Human Subjects Institutional Review Board through the ASU Office of Research Integrity and Assurance at (480) 965-6788.

By signing below you are agreeing to be part of the study.

Name: _____ (please type or print your full name)
Signature: _____
Date: _____

Appendix H

TEAMING ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES DOCUMENT

Teaming Roles and Responsibilities (TRR) Matrix

The Rhodes teaming model relies on all team members to work together for team success. The teaming culture is part of what makes Rhodes unique. It creates a positive and collaborative environment for staff and students and encourages opportunities for all teachers to lead. This document can be used to guide teams in taking on roles and leadership and to ensure that there is clarity about responsibilities. This is a living document. Please talk to your team if you have questions or if there are changes to be made.

	Admin	Team Lead	Team Members
Culture	• Responsible for organizing regular staff positive culture activities	• Supporting whole school positive culture initiatives • Build a positive team culture that values the experiences and perspectives of each team member • Model and facilitate a team to reflect the essential attitudes and skills established in the Portrait of a Graduate	• Supporting Rhodes positive culture initiatives • Supporting a positive team and student culture • Model those essential attitudes and skills to their students • Represent and actively participate in the positive team culture being built on the team and campus
Crucial Conversations	• Provide training / conduct / support on crucial conversations • Actively monitoring all staff and intervening in cases where team member teachers are not adhering in a positive manner to the responsibilities and expectations distributed to them by their lead teachers. • Mediating in situations or conflicts between team members or team leads that are negatively impacting the team's culture. • Clear chain of command communicated • Be open to suggestions	• Have / facilitate / support crucial conversations with team members as needed • Communicating with admin re when teachers are not adhering to expectations • Mediating in minor situations or conflicts between team members or team leads that are negatively impacting the team's culture. • Be open to suggestions	• Have or participate in crucial conversations with colleagues when needed • Communicate with team lead or admin if there are conflicts that need mediation • Be open to suggestions • Have conversations about change and implementation

Teaming Roles and Responsibilities (TRR) Matrix

Logistics	• Provide/support TL time to complete R&R (suggested weekly meetings) • Mindfully look at bigger picture to make sure TL duties and responsibilities are manageable • Clearly establish spheres of responsibility for the logistics of various programs (i.e., scheduling, interventions, etc) on the campus • Makes recommendations for logistics that impact the whole campus • Meeting quarterly with team leads for informal updates and problem-solving	• Schedule/facilitate regular team meetings with consistent agenda • Organize/distribute responsibilities with consideration for team members' expertise/interests • Facilitate team in creating shared systems, procedures, and tools for managing students' social/emotional/behavioral/academic needs	• Commit to fulfilling duties and responsibilities agreed upon with admin and team leads (ex, newsletter, club, tardies, note-taker, etc.) • Take initiative in supporting the team • Co-create and follow with fidelity the shared procedures, systems, and tools for managing students' social/emotional/behavioral/academic needs
Communication	• Full school decisions communicated by admin • Send weekly all school communication by email • Check and respond to emails/chats/mail in a timely manner • Ensure communication is confidential and necessary	• Acts as liaison between the team and admin • Reinforce admin communication • Check and respond to emails/chats/mail in a timely manner • Ensure communication is confidential and necessary • Initiate team-to-team communication	• Positively communicate with Team Lead and rest of the team • Advocate for yourself with team and/or team lead when you need support (student behavior, support in roles and responsibilities, etc.) • Check and respond to emails/chats/mail in a timely manner • Ensure communication is confidential and necessary

Teaming Roles and Responsibilities (TRR) Matrix

Student Behaviors	• Handles severe behaviors or repeat offenses • Liaise on student behavior issues (referrals, Riverview, community partners, etc.) • RJ connections • Communicate student behaviors to teams when appropriate	• Manages behavior interventions (i.e., checks the sheet for repeat offenders, assists teachers to come up with a plan, refers students to counseling/admin) • Maintains confidentiality about student discipline records • RJ connection	• Build positive relationships with students • Co-create and follow with fidelity the shared procedures, systems, and tools for managing students' social/emotional/behavioral/academic needs • Handles minor behavior infractions in the classroom • Act as buddy room for other teachers • Maintains confidentiality about student discipline records
Instruction	• Provide and honor times for collaboration • Guide instructional leader meetings • Attend team meetings for instructional leadership, especially beginning of year • Communicate instruction guidance from district	• Build collaboration between team members for cross-curricular planning • Provide and honor times for collaboration • Support the team in reviewing data and setting goals	• Consistently review and adjust instruction based on student data as decided by the instructional leadership team. • Co-create and co-deliver lessons with grade and/or content counterparts (Cross-curricular planning/teaching)

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Lee Preston has over 21 years of experience as an educator and is currently serving as a site administrator in Mesa, Arizona. Her career in special education began in Tempe, Arizona, where her commitment to students with special needs took root. She earned her Bachelor's degree in Humanities from Arizona State University and later pursued a Master's degree in Special Education from the University of Phoenix. Lee's passion for leadership led her to a second Master's degree in Educational Leadership from ASU. Throughout her career, she taught in various locations, including Tempe, Mesa, Suzhou (China), and Rabat (Morocco). Lee has worked on numerous teams and held teacher leadership positions at each school. Today, Lee continues to be an advocate for students with special needs and a dedicated leader in Mesa's educational community.