

Context Impacts Evolution: An Autoethnography of a Teacher Leader's Professional Growth and Identity
Development

by

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DEDICATION

Thank you to all the Teacher Leaders who continue to find ways to lead and navigate cultural and institutional obstacles. At times the journey may feel lonely but recognize you are changing lives.

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Dr. Ross McClain, thank you for your belief in my journey towards a doctorate. Your support and high expectations for excellence in academic research continue to guide my growth as an educational leader and academic.

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PREFACE

This dissertation explores and analyzes the journey of a teacher leader from a first-person perspective. Although this study focuses on one person's lived experience, it offers insights that can apply beyond one person and one context.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iii
PREFACE	iv
LIST OF TABLES	viii
LIST OF FIGURES	ix
LIST OF APPENDICES	x
ABSTRACT	xi
CHAPTER	
I. Introduction	1
Finding the Gap in Teacher Leadership Research	1
Teacher Leadership Through Lens of Staff Retention and School Improvement	1
Considering the Impact Policy Plays in Promoting Formalized Teacher Leadership Roles	3
Problem Statement	7
Purpose of Present Study	8
Research Questions	9
II. Literature Review	10
Considering the Impact of Induction and Mentoring Policy	10
Peer Perceptions of Formal Teacher Leader Roles	19
Potential Impacts Teacher Leaders Could Have on Student Achievement	22
Barriers to Teacher Leadership	24
Professional and Organizational Cultural Factors	24
Organizational Structures as Barriers	28

Re-envisioning Teacher Leadership	30
Creating New Definitions	30
Approaches to Growing Teacher Leaders	31
Building Teacher Leader Voice Through Autoethnography	33
III. Theoretical Framework and Methods	35
Theoretical Framework	35
Methodology	36
Data Collection	37
Data Analysis	38
Considering Research Study Shortcomings	41
Relational Ethics	42
IV. Data Analysis	43
Outside/In 1990-1994	43
Evolving View on Leadership 1991 – 2008	46
Finding my purpose: Taking up a moralistic call to action	53
Shifting advocacy focus	57
Growing frustration	60
V. Findings and Implications	66
Cognitive dissonance	72
Disposition matters	73
Transformative Learning Theory	74
Gender inequality in K12 leadership	76

Implications of findings	82
Recommendations	83
Conclusion	84
Appendices	86
References	95

LIST OF TABLES

Chapter 4

Table 1 SAC Projects, Focus Areas, and Design	62
---	----

Chapter 5

Table 2 Mezirow's (2000) Phases of Meaning	74
--	----

LIST OF FIGURES

Chapter 3

Figure 1 Critical Reflexivity Process	39
Figure 2 The Relationship between Positionality and Reflexivity	40
Figure 3 Conceptual Mapping Tools	41

Chapter 4

Figure 4 Star Alignment = Teacher Identity	52
--	----

Chapter 5

Figure 5 Thematic Timelines	70
Figure 6 Cognitive Dissonance Evolution	71

LIST OF APPENDICES

APPENDIX

A. Figures 1- 6

Figure 1 Critical Reflexivity Process

Figure 2 The Relationship between Positionality and Reflexivity

Figure 3 Conceptual Mapping Tools

Figure 4 Star Alignment = Teacher Identity

Figure 5 Thematic Timelines

Figure 6 Cognitive Dissonance Evolution

B. Tables 1-2

Table 1 SAC Projects, Focus Areas, and Design

Table 2 Mezirow's (2000) Phases of Meaning

ABSTRACT

Many believe that teacher leaders can positively impact a school system, lifting the level of student achievement as well as cultivating a positive professional culture of learning (Carver & Feiman-Nemser, 2009; Lieberman & Miller, 2004; Nolan & Palazzolo, 2011; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Drawing on the researcher's own lived journey of teacher leadership, this autoethnographic study takes an autobiographical narrative structure, drawing from the researcher's reflective journal entries and professional artifacts (i.e. job application statements, presentations, published narratives and reports). Data analysis employs a self-reflexive approach so as to discover potential intersections between author, other, and contextual conditions. These intersections provide themes as to the influences building my teacher leader identity.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1.1 Finding the Gap in Teacher Leadership Research

The concept of teacher leadership is not new to educational research. Increasingly, the concept of teacher leadership is embedded in the study of school improvement (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). The field of educational research on teacher leadership has focused on the dimensions of practice, characteristics, and contextual factors that challenge or promote teacher leadership. However, less educational research is available on how teacher leadership develops and the effects the growth has on the teacher leader. This research study utilizes an autoethnography narrative research approach in order to explore what one teacher leader describes and understands as her pathway to becoming a teacher leader and the effects that journey has had on her professional identity. It also examines how current school leadership structures impact a teacher leader's perceptions of job satisfaction and willingness to stay in the profession.

1.2 Teacher Leadership Through Lens of Staff Retention and School Improvement

The concept of teacher leadership as a school improvement strategy can be tied back to the education reform initiatives of the 1980's (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Since the 1980's, education researchers and reformers have called attention to the growing trend of under qualified teachers entering their first teaching position, ill prepared and under supported (Darling-Hammond, 1984). This growing trend sparked conversations amongst policy makers, educators, and analysts concerning the potential impact teacher quality can have on student achievement.

The multiple studies on the teaching profession led in the early 1980's by The Rand Corporation served as a catalyst, raising early concerns.

The Rand Corporation's early 1980's studies on the teaching profession, supported in part by the National Institute of Education and The Ford Foundation, drew widespread interest in the studies' findings. The July 1984 briefing to the Rand Corporation Board of Trustees was published as a report authored by Linda Darling-Hammond. The report analyzed data on teacher recruitment, retention patterns, quality of teachers, and the level of appeal the teaching profession held. The analysis revealed "evidence that new recruits to teaching were less academically qualified than those who were leaving, and the number of new entrants was insufficient to meet the coming demand for teachers" (Darling-Hammond, 1984, p. 6). In essence, the alarm was raised that U.S. students were increasingly being taught by under qualified teachers.

The Rand Corporations' 1984 report (Darling-Hammond) on the teaching profession also sounded the alarm of a growing teacher shortage along with the growing trend of under qualified teachers entering the profession. The growing narrative of an impending shortage as well as a shortage in highly qualified instructors added fuel to the NCLB Act. The provisions of NCLB were clear in that students needed to be taught by highly qualified teachers—particularly high-poverty students. Funding through Title II, Part A of ESEA opened up a possible pipeline to nearly \$3 billion in federal funds provided to states to develop high quality teacher induction and mentoring programs.

Early actions in teacher reform spurred significant policy creation where "between 1983 and 1986 forty-six states considered some kind of performance-based compensation system, such as merit pay, career ladders, or mentor teacher plans" (Berry & Ginsberg, 1990, p. 616). Later

teacher leadership reform folded in strategies and models that encouraged more site-based decision making (Sickler, 1988) as well as professional development schools where K12 schools partnered with a neighboring university (Burns & Badiali, 2020; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). In common across all the initiatives to entice and grow highly qualified teachers is the element of active participation where teachers have voice in decision making and engage in learning through collaborative study of practice (York-Barr & Duke, 2004).

1.3 Considering the Impact Policy Plays in Promoting Formalized Teacher Leadership Roles

The concept of teacher leadership positively impacting student achievement is reflected in the multitude of state induction and mentoring policies. Carver and Feiman-Nemser's (2009) qualitative study offers a data set that encompasses three different states with differing induction and mentoring policy. Carver and Feiman-Nemser's (2009) study followed an ethnographic approach, engaging in case studies of three long-standing induction programs. The researchers were intent on examining how policy tools impact actual school-based induction practices. While their study references such induction practices as new teacher seminars, the researchers ultimately focus intensively on the mentor design elements across three different school districts from three different states.

Of the three sites Carver and Feiman-Nemser (2009) selected for their case studies, two were within states (Connecticut and California) with a statewide approach to providing mentor support. The third case study site focused on a large city district (Cincinnati, OH) with a district specific designed mentor program. Carver and Feiman-Nemser (2009) spend a substantial portion of their article detailing the specific policies within each state and district, noting specifically the emphasis or lack thereof in duration of induction and mentoring program support. In addition, the researchers examined each case study with a particular lens focused on

the state's specific policies and state provided program support for mentor training. A final area of focus when studying state policy centered on the level of accountability a state holds for a district to provide induction and mentor programming. Ultimately, Carver and Feiman-Nemser (2009) conclude that the "impact of induction policy will always be limited by the influence of the surrounding context in which the mentor works" (p. 324). The researchers warn that a context of poor leadership, a staff that feels demoralized, and isolated professional cultures cannot truly leverage mentor teacher leaders to be effective.

The topic of teacher leadership has been present in educational research for more than two decades. When tracing back to the impetus of teacher leadership entering the educational research and policy conversation, multiple "waves" of reform take shape. Berry and Ginsberg (1990) organize an argument detailing two main waves of reform that include creating policies to attract and retain highly qualified teachers and, professionalizing teaching and "decentralizing decision-making" (p. 617). Bradley-Levine (2017) extends the wave analogy to include three waves of teacher leadership role types starting in the 1970's. The three waves of role types begin with the formalized teacher leadership of department heads, then expands to include in the second wave curriculum and staff developers, and in the third wave folds in the role of mentor.

The first wave of teacher reform launched in the education reform movement of the 1980s in part due to rising concern about the perceptions of teaching as a career option and "about how state economies are dependent on high-quality education and high-quality teachers" (Berry & Ginsberg, 1990; York-Barr & Duke, 2004, p. 256). As a result, the concept of teacher leadership has "become increasingly embedded in the language and practice of educational improvement" (York-Barr & Duke, 2004, p. 255). Just over 30 years ago, Judith Warren Little, a

renowned scholar of the teaching profession, issued a call to action for teachers to lead school reform (Berry, 2019). The first wave of teacher reform spurred significant policy creation.

The second wave of educational reform brought forth the notion of teacher leaders as a means to professionalize teaching as well as bringing teacher voice into decision making. The second wave folded in reform strategies and models that encouraged more site-based decision making (Sickler, 1988) as well as professional development schools where K12 schools partnered with a neighboring university (Burns & Badiali, 2020; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). In common across all the initiatives to entice and grow highly qualified teachers is the call to action to develop teacher collaboration and voice in the decisions impacting the larger system.

As more states encountered the fraught nature of implementing merit pay and career ladder reforms, the concept of teacher leadership offered a way to circumvent such “technical and political problems” (Berry & Ginsberg, 1990, p. 617). Teachers were viewed as the holders of knowledge on their craft and as such, were invaluable to informing a school’s improvement planning. The second wave professionalization mindset recognized the “daily realities of teaching—variety, uncertainty, and ambiguity—and the need to exercise teacher judgment in addressing these realities” (York-Barr & Duke, 2004, p. 256).

The body of empirical literature on teacher leadership is limited, largely composed of “small-scale case study designs that employ convenient samples and self-report methodologies” (York-Barr & Duke, 2004, p. 257). Nolan and Palazzolo (2011) argue that much of the current literature on teacher leadership is “motivational in intent” (p. 3). Teacher leadership as a reform strategy was originally “intended to empower teachers to take action in ways that would benefit children and schools” (Nolan & Palazzolo, 2011, p. 4). Nolan and Palazzolo (2011) argue that the original intent of teacher leadership reform was intended for all teachers—novice and

experienced. They argue that for teacher leadership to be an effective school reform strategy, teacher leadership needs to be cultivated in all teachers; not just experienced tenured teachers. They go on to emphasize that participation in school decision-making by all teachers can provide significant impact to growing teacher leaders. Nolan and Palazzolo (2011) strongly advocate and call to action fellow teacher educators to recognize that “teacher preparation and new teacher induction programs have the opportunity to teach and promote the value of new teacher leadership” (p. 14). Lieberman and Miller (2004) express the same line of thinking:

When teachers cast off the mantle of technical and managed worker and assume new roles as researchers, meaning makers, scholars, and inventors, they expand the vision of who they are and what they do. They come to view themselves and are viewed by others as intellectuals engaged in inquiry about teaching and learning. Central to this expanded vision of teaching is the idea that teachers are also leaders, educators who can make a difference in schools and schooling now and in the future. (p. 11)

Although many states have since adopted some level of induction and mentoring policy, the ways in which induction and mentoring are enacted vary from state to state. Numerous studies over the past couple of decades have been done on a variety of different induction and mentoring programs (Bickmore & Bickmore, 2010; Carver & Feiman-Nemser, 2009; Fletcher & Strong, 2009; Kang & Berliner, 2012; Miller et al., 2020; Israel et al., 2014; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). Such studies support the hypothesis that a skillfully designed and implemented teacher induction program will increase job satisfaction and retention. While the induction and mentor programming research studies provide insights into what types of activities new teachers find

useful (Kang & Berliner, 2012; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004), less study is present on the ways a school system or state supports developing a mentor teacher leader.

As evidenced in Carver and Feiman-Nemser's (2009) study, increasingly policy makers are playing a role in establishing standards and funding streams for particular visions of teacher leadership. As of 2019, "17 states had adopted teacher leader standards, 22 states offered a license endorsement, and 24 provided formal supports and incentives" (Berry, 2019, p. 51). Judith Warren Little (1988) underscored 30 years ago five key issues schools must address for teacher leadership to be successful. Finding Little's (1988) cautionary advice still pertinent today, Berry (2019) builds upon her five key related issues which include: 1) developing public awareness on the value of teacher leaders, 2) teacher leadership as a way to help one's colleagues versus fix, 3) reward teachers for attaining microcredentialing—seeking out their own learning, 4) create school structures and schedules that provide collaboration time, and 5) develop policies that connect the leadership work of teachers and administrators (Berry, 2019; Little, 1988).

1.4 Problem Statement

The topic of a growing teacher shortage is not new. However, the COVID pandemic has most likely accelerated the number of teachers leaving the profession (Santos, 2021). In early 2022, the Department of Education and its technical assistance partner the National Comprehensive Center released a brief addressing ways school districts could access American Rescue Plan funds as well as other federal resources in an effort to address the growing teacher shortage (*Using American Rescue Plan Funds and Other Federal Resources to Address Teacher Shortages*). The urgency and degree of staff and teacher shortages has led states to explore ways to rehire retirees and provide alternative paths to fast-track teacher certification. While more of the wider public may be starting to feel the impacts of a teacher shortage, researchers have been

raising the alarm for more than ten years (Darling-Hammond, 1984; Kang & Berliner, 2012). The trend of teachers leaving the profession is not new.

With the current urgency to find teachers to cover classrooms, strategies to fill may not suffice as strategies to grow and retain highly qualified teachers. Providing teacher leadership experiences and roles could very well be a strategy for teacher growth as well as making teaching a more attractive career (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). As the teaching force increasingly loses their most highly qualified teachers, it pushes forward the need to “step away from the long-standing hierarchical leadership structures that characterize public education” and re-imagine the roles teacher leaders can play in leading in their school and district (Berry, 2019, p. 49).

1.5 Purpose of the Present Study

The underlying theme for school leaders to consider teacher leadership as a school improvement strategy seems to center heavily on raising student achievement and staving off the hemorrhage of teacher turnover. While student achievement should always be a critical area to address, let it not overshadow the importance of also building education as an attractive profession that offers continuous ways to develop as a professional. What seems to be missing from the educational research on teacher leadership is the teacher leader’s voice reflecting on the long-term effects of leading in the continuing context of hierarchical leadership structures. As the research subject of the study, my own lived experiences as a teacher leader across multiple contexts influences the beliefs I bring into the study. By choosing an autoethnography as a means to investigate and make sense of my professional identity, I am able to investigate and make sense of what shaped my identity and how that evolution has impacted my decisions to stay in education. The study is significant in that it attempts to bring voice to and humanize the teacher leader,

shedding insights into how current hierarchical and cultural norms within teaching impact one's identity and views on leading. By humanizing the teacher leader, the study hopes to influence current educational leaders to reflect on new models of leadership.

1.6 Research Questions

This study uses an autoethnography research design to explore the following questions:

Main research question: What impacts on leadership identity occur for the teacher leader as they interact over multiple years in a formalized teacher leadership role?

Sub-questions:

- What experiences and contextual factors develop a teacher leader?
- How do cultural norms within K12 education impact a teacher leader's perception of leadership?
- How does teacher leadership evolve from an informal to formal teacher leadership role?
- How do school leadership structures impact a teacher leader's perceptions of job satisfaction and willingness to stay in the profession?

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

2.1 Considering the Impact of Induction and Mentoring Policy

With the growth in state mandated policies requiring school systems to implement induction and mentoring programming, it is not surprising that a sizable amount of research connected to teacher leadership has centered on data streams emanating from newly inducted teachers, their mentors, and their administrators. A growing theme coming from the research on mentorship roles and induction programming is noting the gap in preservice programs “oftentimes omitting leadership training” (LeBlanc & Shelton, 1997, p. 34; Murphy 2007, p. 694). As a result, also omitted is the opportunity for preservice teacher candidates to see and experience teacher leadership in a way that builds a positive perception, valuing of, and a feasible role that they can take up in a school system (Nolan & Palazzolo (2011).

A good portion of existing empirical research on the impacts of teacher induction and mentoring focus solely on data derived from program participants (Kang & Berliner, 2012; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). In an effort to provide unambiguous conclusions, researchers Smith and Ingersoll (2004) designed a quantitative study that could collect similar outcome data from both participants and nonparticipants in induction and mentoring programs. Smith and Ingersoll (2004) tapped into a national data set through the 1999-2000 Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), consisting of close to 52,000 elementary and secondary school teachers. In addition, Smith and Ingersoll’s (2004) study linked the SASS data with preliminary data from the 2000-2001 Teacher Follow-up Survey (TFS). Analysis focused on a data set of 3,235 beginning teachers in their first year of teaching. Smith and Ingersoll (2004) sought to answer research

questions concerning the prevalence and designs of induction programs across the U.S. as well as participation data compared to turnover numbers.

Smith and Ingersoll's (2004) study, while robust in terms of a data set, is limited in informing the field on particular induction and mentor program designs that impact growing instructional quality or teacher leadership. Instead, Smith and Ingersoll's (2004) study does a solid job of revealing a growing trend of induction and mentoring programming between 1990 to 2000. Overall, the research revealed that by 1999-2000 "participation rates in induction rose to about 8 in 10" (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004, p. 690). However, participation in induction programs varied widely depending on whether the school was public or private with higher percentages of participation in public schools. Higher percentages of beginning teachers working closely with a mentor were also found in the public versus private school context with approximately 70% in public and 42% and 46% in charter and private schools (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). Large numbers of teachers reported having participated in multiple collaborative supports. After applying the multinomial logistic model to determine whether induction programming impacts turnover, the researchers determined that a beginning teacher having a mentor in their field reduced the risk of leaving by about 30 % (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). The study also determined that rarely did an induction program rely solely on one activity or support.

Like Smith and Ingersoll (2004), researchers Kang and Berliner (2012) also looked to develop a quantitative study that could offer generalizable findings. Once again, the 1999-2000 School and Staffing Survey (SASS) and the 2000-2001 Teacher Follow-up Survey (TFS) were mined as a large-scale quantitative data set. While Kang and Berliner (2012) admired Smith and Ingersoll's (2004) methodology of establishing variables, they believed Smith and Ingersoll's (2004) approach of clustering all turnover teachers as a homogenous group was problematic.

Kang and Berliner (2012) believed that separating voluntary turnovers from involuntary turnovers could better provide insights into the role induction programs play in affecting rates of teacher turnover. Kang and Berliner (2012) went further in their sub-grouping to create an avoidable group and unavoidable voluntary turnover group. From the SASS data set of 5,788 teachers, the researchers applied a restricted model that excluded involuntary and unavoidable turnovers leaving a total of 1,556 teachers as the data set. Due to using a complex sample design instead of simple random sampling, the researchers used the STATA software which could cluster teachers within schools.

Like Smith and Ingersoll (2004), Kang and Berliner (2012) also included examining data in the SASS related to induction activities, focusing in particular on mentoring, seminars, collaboration, planning time, supportive communication with building administration, reduced teaching schedule, reduced preparations, classroom support, classroom observation, and teacher network. However, Kang and Berliner's (2012) study gets closer to examining more specifically what influences kept a new teacher from leaving than Smith and Ingersoll's (2004) study. Using an analytic model, Kang and Berliner (2012) honed in on examining influences of induction programs on beginning teacher turnover among the avoidable turnover subgroup. Kang and Berliner (2012) especially relied on the TFS data as their survey prompted teachers to select reasons for staying, moving, or leaving. Survey participants were provided with 17 possible reasons to select from for leaving or 13 possible reasons to select from for moving to another school. The analysis revealed four induction activities commonly practiced: supportive communication with building administration, regularly scheduled collaboration with other teachers focusing on instruction, seminars, and common planning time with teachers in the same subject area (Kang & Berliner, 2012). Kang and Berliner (2012) were then able to narrow down

to the three induction activities having the greatest impact: seminars, common planning time, and being provided with extra classroom assistance. While seminars and collaboration with colleagues were noted as having positive impact on retention, the induction activities' positive impact was only found with the *mover* subgroup versus the *leaving* subgroup. The extra classroom assistance showed a positive impact on teachers staying with their current building but showed no impact on the leavers' subgroup. Ultimately, Kang and Berliner's (2012) study confirms that for those who stay, induction and mentoring were positively received. However, for the *leaving* subgroup, we are left wondering what fell short for this group in terms of supportive induction and mentoring.

While Smith and Ingersoll (2004) and Kang and Berliner (2012) took great care in conducting quantitative studies, accounting for multiple variables, both research teams admit that the SASS data was limited in terms of specific design details of the induction program and mentor preparation. The SASS did not collect such design structure details as program focus areas, length, cost, or level of intensity. Smith and Ingersoll (2004) readily admit that their research sheds no light on which kinds of programs are most cost effective. Smith and Ingersoll (2004) also note the hole in data concerning how mentors are selected, trained/supported, paired up with mentees, and the amount of interaction between mentor and mentee. However, Smith and Ingersoll (2004) do not see a need for further research studies that "do not involve the kind of careful control that would allow unambiguous conclusions about the particular value added by the program component being considered" (pp. 707-708). The researchers suggest that further research should follow a careful experimental or quasi-experimental study minus a no-treatment control group. However, the later research of Kang and Berliner (2012) did not take the direction of experimental but rather refined the levels of subgroups. Unlike their research predecessors,

Kang and Berliner (2012) provide a recommendation to education policy-makers, teacher educators, and school leadership to provide “systematic structure of programs and training” rather than “simply offering various induction activities” (p. 281). While both research teams offer insight into particular induction activities holding positive retention impact, the details of the design of each activity is not available making it difficult for replicating in other contexts with the same positive outcomes.

The early research of Smith and Ingersoll (2004) on teacher retention in relation to induction and mentor programming continues to spark conversation with more recent research studies on beginning teacher retention. Miller et al. (2020) investigate the association between person-organization and person-group fit with teacher retention. Using a longitudinal data set of 132 early career teachers (ECTs) across Michigan and Indiana along with their social network data from their mentors and colleagues, Miller et al. (2020) constructed a quantitative study. Miller et al. (2020) were drawn in particular to Smith and Ingersoll’s (2004) findings that showed positive retention impact from formal mentoring and opportunities to collaborate with colleagues. Noting that working conditions play a role in retention and that many of the activities positively associated with retention stem from relational collaboration with peers, Miller et al. (2020) hypothesized that the level of match an early career teacher (ECT) perceives having with their colleagues, building, and students could influence retention. More specifically, Miller et al. (2020) wanted to closely study the role person-organization (P-O) fit and person-environment (P-E) fit plays in teacher mobility. Their overall analyses indicate that “ECTs are more likely to continue teaching in their schools when they perceive a high degree of fit with their schools” (Miller et al., 2020, p. 400).

Similar to Smith and Ingersoll (2004) and Kang and Berliner (2012), Miller et al. (2020) designed a quantitative study that could tap into a large survey data set. Miller et al. (2020) were able to tap into the data set collected by a larger research project known as the Michigan Indiana Early Career Teacher (MIECT) study. The MIECT project's goal was to recruit medium-to-large districts across both states that varied in population in terms of SES, race/ethnicity, and had at least ten full-time first 4-year teachers teaching in core content areas in grades 1-8. In the fall 2008-2009 MIECT survey, a survey item asked about formal mentors and/or other close teacher colleagues in their school. Miller et al. (2020) were then able to pinpoint and survey a group of mentors and close colleagues named by the ECTs with the purpose of "obtaining egocentric social network data for the ECTs in the study" (p. 406). For gathering P-O fit data, the researchers created a four-point Likert-scale response with 1 = Strongly disagree to 4=Strongly agree. Question prompts did not directly call out a mentor relationship but rather focused on level of similarity participant perceived having with their colleagues on professional interests, teaching approaches, professional goals, etc. Questions aimed at P-G fit asked participants to list the names of their closest teaching colleagues as well as respond to how often they engage in professional interactions with one or more colleagues who are responsible for instruction. The ECTs then selected the level of frequency from four provided frequency and time span options. The study's overall findings indicated that there were no statistically significant differences between ECTs who left and those that stayed when it came to P-O fit. However, when it came to P-E fit, findings indicate that teacher retention is positively impacted as the level of fit increases.

Although the Miller et al. (2020) study does not explicitly state a connection between teacher induction and mentor programming, their findings center on collaborative relationships. The researchers encourage the prioritization of development of professional relationships

between teacher colleagues at a school, noting that such professional relationship building may hold more positive impact than development of instructional alignment (Miller et al., 2020). However, just like Smith and Ingersoll (2004) and Kang and Berliner (2012), the Miller et al. (2020) study does not provide specific design details of what types of professional relationship building approaches had such a large impact on the ECTs. The closest detail one might glean centered on frequency of professional collaboration opportunities. In addition, the positive influence that professional collaboration as well as feeling you share similar beliefs and values with those around you can have is not a new groundbreaking finding.

While large quantitative studies such as Smith and Ingersoll (2004), Kang and Berliner (2012), and Miller et al. (2020) are able to argue that their data was derived from multiple contexts and also accounted for a multitude of variables, their findings remain generalized predictors lacking study of specific program design elements. Carver and Feiman-Nemser's (2009) qualitative case study of three different states' induction programming offers a good comparison to the large quantitative studies in that the researchers' data set encompasses three different states with differing induction and mentoring policy.

Carver and Feiman-Nemser's (2009) case studies spanned from 1999 – 2001, drawing on qualitative data such as interviews, observations, and policy documents. The researchers used a semi-structured approach to their interviews which spanned across a two-year period with researchers making multiple site visits across each year. Administrators, program directors, and new teachers and their mentors were among those interviewed. The researchers discerned two sets of data: “data that illuminated the nature and quality of programming offered new teachers, including the quality of mentoring provided, and data that uncovered beginning teachers experience in the program” (Carver & Feiman-Nemser, 2009, pp. 301-302). Researchers spent a

minimum of 20 hours observing each new teacher in the study. Overall data collected consisted of more than 70 hours of interview and observation data. Carver and Feiman-Nemser (2009) did not gather retention or student achievement data as their research focus was more on how each case study site interpreted induction policy into action. Their discussion of findings and subsequent theories on impacts of mentor program policy tools follows a grounded theory approach whereby the researchers developed interpretations on the on-going raw data collection (Fraenkel et al., 2007).

While Carver and Feiman-Nemser (2009) spend a significant portion of their article analytically comparing and contrasting three case study sites' state and district induction policy instruments, their analysis of the impacts of induction policy on new teachers is heavily influenced by the researchers' values. While a significant amount of semi-structured interview data was collected, there is no direct analysis shared as to both the semi-structured prompts nor the patterns in the responses of those interviewed. Carver and Feiman-Nemser (2009) state early on their personal stake in why they designed the research, naming their backgrounds as teacher educators whose professional careers "have been devoted to understanding and promoting practices that support teacher learning" (p. 295). The assumption that new teachers "have things to learn, which they could not have learned beforehand, and that regular feedback...will help guide (new teacher) learning in fruitful directions" (Carver & Feiman-Nemser, 2009, p. 309), is clearly present in Carver and Feiman-Nemser's (2009) ultimate findings. While Carver and Feiman-Nemser (2009) state early on that they are not promoting one case study site as the best model, in the end, their analysis concludes that induction policy that contains standards set by the state paired with intentional training and support to mentors produces more effective support of new teacher learning.

Even with the shortcomings of Carver and Feiman-Nemser's (2009) lack of interview data analysis, the case studies of three different sites' enactment of induction and mentoring policy is useful. The research team's site observations capture ways in which teachers engaged in induction and mentoring as well as visible behaviors of engagement with the learning support. The narrative of site-based observations helps to build confidence in Carver and Feiman-Nemser's (2009) conclusions and call to action for states to develop induction and mentoring policy.

While Carver and Feiman-Nemser (2009) focus heavily on one facet of teacher induction support, Bickmore and Bickmore (2010) delve into impacts of a multifaceted approach to teacher induction that includes mentor teacher leaders. Similar to Smith and Ingersoll (2004), Kang and Berliner (2012), and Miller et al. (2020), Bickmore and Bickmore's (2010) study accounts for multiple induction activities. However, the researchers' data set remains small, examining the implementation and effectiveness of two different middle school multifaceted teacher induction programs through perception data from three participant groups: new teachers, mentor teachers, and principals. Using a mixed-method design, the researchers gathered a variety of artifacts which included professional development artifacts, lists of available professional development materials given to new teachers, interviews, and administered surveys. Surveys consisted of both four-point Likert-scale prompts as well as open-ended questions. Mentor and mentee survey prompts mirrored each other with just a slight revision of the opening question stem either referring to "My mentee" or "My mentor" (Bickmore & Bickmore, 2010, p. 1008).

Ultimately Bickmore and Bickmore's (2010) research discerned five concrete induction program elements shown to garner positive perception amongst new teachers, their mentors, and building administrators of helpful impact. The five induction elements include: "orientation, one-

to-one mentoring, interdisciplinary teams, principal support, and professional development” (Bickmore & Bickmore, 2010, p. 1008). At the core of all five induction elements sits the theme of collaboration and relationship building. In addition, their data shares interview excerpts where new teachers note that it was the induction program that made them decide to stay versus look for a higher paying district. However, this study did not provide descriptions of the actual design components to each of the five induction program elements. The generalizability of the content and approach to the provided professional development, mentor training, as well as to the design of the disciplinary team meetings was not shared. Furthermore, the researchers use a small subset of interview data to corroborate their deductive analysis of the larger data sets, calling into question if the overall findings of positive perception were inflated.

Bickmore and Bickmore (2010) admit that a school’s climate plays a pivotal role in how effective an induction program can be. One might question if their findings of positive perceptions were also a result of the context built by both district and building leadership being aligned in their approach and perceived role of teacher leaders. Together, both district and building administrators fostered a professional learning culture where teacher leaders shared in leading learning for their new peers.

2.2 Peer Perceptions of Formal Teacher Leader Roles

Like Bickmore and Bickmore (2010), Israel et al. (2014) lean into a qualitative study design heavily invested in mining interviews to determine trends. However, Israel et al. (2014) attempt to unearth the specific approaches within a mentor/mentee working relationship that strongly influence a mentee’s perception of helpful support versus the more general focus of determining which induction activities are perceived as most useful. The researchers’ study examines professional and emotional mentoring supports within a large urban school district

serving 35,000 students, focusing specifically on new special education teachers. Similar to other studies on new teacher induction and mentoring, Israel et al. (2014) were able to tap into a larger research study data gathering process which engaged a national technical assistance and dissemination center in the data collection process. Using a qualitative approach, the researchers gathered such data as evaluation reports for the 2009-2010 school year, mentor time allocation charts, and new teacher interviews (Israel et al. 2014).

Israel et al. (2014) believed little research had previously been done examining how to best combine mentoring and evaluation of new teachers, particularly new special education teachers (SETs). Recognizing the growing accountability climate in education, Israel et al. (2014) deduced that more information is needed concerning mentors' roles as evaluators. The researchers looked at research done in other fields such as business and medicine and noted the use of Kram's theoretical framework for mentoring which focuses on psychosocial and career supports (Israel et al., 2014; Ragins & Kram, 2007). Believing the Kram framework could provide a useful lens through which to examine mentoring practices for SET induction, the researchers applied the framework and differentiated between the two functions of mentoring: career support and psychosocial support. Career support applied to navigating the organization whereas psychosocial support helped to develop a teacher's sense of self-efficacy and emotional well-being (Israel et al., 2014). In addition to the Kram framework, researchers also had to take into account the Danielson teacher evaluation framework which had been employed in the district of study as the core guide for mentors in focusing their support to mentees. Minor adaptations were made to the Danielson framework by the district however, the four main domains remained: 1) planning and preparation for student learning, 2) creating an environment

for learning, 3) teaching and learning, and 4) professionalism (Danielson, 1996; Israel et al., 2014).

Similar to aspects of Carver and Feiman-Nemser's (2009) study, Israel et al. (2014) also note the types of training and support provided to the mentors. Unlike Carver and Feiman-Nemser's (2009) study, Israel et al. (2014) go into significant detail as to what criteria was used to select a mentor as well as their deep training focus in the Danielson framework as a guide to their mentoring. The level of detail as to the mentor's training and qualifications is extremely useful to others who may be seeking to build a mentor program that can elicit similar positive outcomes. Ultimately, Israel et al. (2014) concluded that data revealed mentors provided both professional and emotional support, however more professional support than emotional support were provided overall. The researchers deduced that the higher prevalence of professional support was due to the strong focus on the Danielson framework. Even though the data showed higher professional support, the researchers also determined that by mentors focusing feedback around Danielson's four domains, they also provided praise and encouragement that also helped to address psychosocial needs (Israel et al., 2014). Hence, mentees perceived having received support in both professional and emotional needs leading the researchers to conclude that support typically was not received in isolation of one focus area over the other. SETs interviews revealed that they valued the professional and emotional support provided by the mentors regardless of their evaluative role and overall felt safe in reaching out to their mentors for professional help (Israel et al., 2014). When the SETs talked of emotional supports offered by their mentors, the support almost always connected into instructional and professional assistance.

Israel et al. (2014) capture important data details previously missed in larger quantitative studies such as Smith and Ingersoll (2004), Kang and Berliner (2012), and Miller et al. (2020).

Their study captures a framework focus to mentor/mentee interactions, degree of expertise of mentors, frequency and intensity of mentor/mentee interactions, and specific feedback focus areas provided to mentees. Similar to Bickmore and Bickmore (2010), Israel et al. (2014) engage in close analysis of qualitative interview data, employing such methods as coding and a constant comparative method of analysis. Mentors' evaluation documents were also closely analyzed through a flat coding method which then allowed for sorting the data into five theme areas revealing feedback focus areas of: "observation feedback (38.1%), collaborative supports (23%), evaluation strategies (19.4%), and instructional supports (14.5%)" (Israel et al., 2014, p. 5). In addition, the researchers share specific mentee interview excerpts, providing a glimpse into the emotional state a mentee was feeling during and following support from a mentor.

Israel et al. (2014) provide the level of context of specific program focus, required expertise and training of mentors, and level of interaction potentially needed for the purposes of replication in another site. However, to potentially replicate similar results, another context would need to potentially adopt the Danielson framework. In addition, the contextual influence of using the Danielson framework as the guiding components of what a mentor teacher leader must support helps to provide a shared perception across building/district administration, mentors, and their mentees. This level of shared perception cannot be underscored enough in how it plays into overall perceptions and acceptance of the teacher leader role of mentor.

2.3 Potential Impacts Teacher Leaders Could Have on Student Achievement

Prior to the larger study of Israel et al. (2014), Fletcher and Strong (2009) voiced a similar lament concerning the lack of research on the impacts of mentoring. However, Fletcher and Strong (2009) were more interested in examining the potential impacts mentoring may have on student achievement. More specifically, their research centered on the potential impact

difference a full-release mentor may have versus a site-based mentor on student achievement. Fletcher and Strong (2009) preface their study with the claim that “sometimes, a less rigorous, but also less expensive and less fragile, quasi-experimental design...provides a more desirable option that is less subject to flaws that might negate any findings a fully experimental study produces” (p. 333). This preface seems to be an effort by the researchers to prime a reader of their study in hopes of potentially heightening the value of their findings even though their data set is small in comparison to other studies.

Fletcher and Strong (2009) focus their study on a large urban school district wishing to improve support of new teachers through a mentor model. Due to limited funds, the district was not able to commit to a complete full-release mentor model. Their lack of resources however, allowed for the researchers to have a comparison study of which mentor model potentially impacts student achievement more. The researchers were able to control the variable of professional development, ensuring that both full-release and site-based mentors received the same training. The study used the results of state testing programs, allowing for the researchers to specifically track achievement data in English Language Arts and mathematics. Although the researchers launched their study with the hypothesis that site-based mentors would know more closely student learning characteristics and hence their mentoring would result in higher student achievement gains--this was not the case. Instead, Fletcher and Strong (2009) found that students of teachers receiving full-release mentor support had better achievement gains than students in classrooms supported by site-based mentors.

Although Fletcher and Strong (2009) are able to implement a quasi-experimental study, a research design earlier researchers Smith and Ingersoll (2004) called upon as missing from induction and mentor studies, their study provides little insight into the types of training and

specific support mentors need nor do they capture the intensity of mentoring in either of the groups studied. Fletcher and Strong (2009) go so far as to admit that their findings could also have been influenced by cross-school differences. The researchers do believe that their study's findings support the value of gradually implementing a program. Due to the lack of resources, the urban district in their study was able to stage implementation, learning along the way the support needs a site-based mentor and full-release mentor may need. What those discovered mentor supports were, though, are not shared in the researchers' study.

2.4 Barriers to Teacher Leadership

2.4.1 Professional and Organizational Cultural Factors

While researchers dig into induction and mentor roles as mechanisms for enacting teacher leadership, other cultural forces are at play impeding teachers from wanting to take up a teacher leadership stance. Bradley-Levine (2017) presents a qualitative study that employs a case study methodology focused on researching how teacher leaders enact leadership and what potentially complicates or enables their leadership. Four teachers comprise the data set with each representing different characteristics in how they view themselves as leaders as well as what influences their approaches to leadership. Bradley-Levine (2017) establishes a chronological framework of the evolving and expanding roles of teacher leaders starting with department heads, then expanding to include curriculum and staff developers, and finally mentors. Bradley-Levine (2017) notes that early reviews of research on the impact of teacher leadership showed little positive outcomes to shifting a school's teaching and learning. The researcher saw a trend in teacher leadership research that suggested norms of the teaching profession may actually be barriers to teacher leadership. In particular, Bradley-Levine (2017) describes the norm of egalitarianism and the norm of privacy. The norm of egalitarianism is a perception that teachers

should focus on doing their own work individually in their classroom and that a colleague should only enter into offering assistance when asked. The norm of privacy represents a mutually understood expectation amongst teachers to be left alone to do their work. Bradley-Levine (2017) draws connection between the two norms to each of the four case studies. The researcher concludes with a call to action for schools to transform the cultural norms of teachers so as to remove the barriers present in the four case studies.

The professional norms teachers hold for themselves and their peers can be potentially the hardest barrier to teacher leadership to eradicate. Like Bradley-Levine (2017), Smylie (1996) also analyzes the professional norms of egalitarianism, privacy, and also adds the norm of autonomy. This trio of norms provides a “yardstick most teachers use to measure...acceptability” (Whitaker, 1995, p. 80) of teacher leadership roles as well as how “proposals for teacher leadership challenge [these] long-established...norms” (Hart, 1995, p.12) The concept of teacher leadership is in direct conflict with the norms of “equality, autonomy, cordiality, and privacy” (Keedy, 1999, p. 788) and can work against any efforts a school system employs to redistribute leadership. Griffin (1995) uses the analogy of “the many-headed hydras of school culture” (p. 44) which captures well the fraught nature of trying to change leadership structures in a culture deeply entrenched in egalitarian, privacy, and autonomy norms. With “few meaningful precedents” (Little, 1990, p. 517) of successful ways to introduce teacher leadership into a school system, attempts to introduce teacher leadership into a school culture is “influenced substantially by patterns of belief and practice that define old work roles and by socialization pressures from the workplace that resist new work roles or reshape them to conform to those prevailing practices and pressures” (Smylie & Brownlee-Conyers, 1992, p. 155).

Like Bradley-Levine (2017), Smylie and Denny (1990) share a similar caution concerning how teachers themselves may be the biggest impediment to the teacher leadership wave of educational reform. Structures and policies may not be enough to shift the “patterns of practice, power, and beliefs that may shape teacher leadership roles” (p. 257). As Smylie and Denny (1990) argue, teacher leader models also need to attend to building new conceptions of norms for what it “means to be a teacher and a member of the teaching profession” (p. 257). Instituting professional learning communities and collaborative meeting time does not necessarily shift long held conceptions of what it means to be a teacher and colleague. What Smylie and Denny (1990) highlight is the pervasive practice of assumptions: assumptions that creating teacher leader job positions does not require work on the district’s part to build a shared understanding of what a teacher leader does to support a building/district. While teacher leadership as a reform strategy has been well underway for several decades, Smylie and Denny (1990) remind the educational field that little attention has been provided to preparing a school setting for new forms of teacher leadership. Ultimately, the researchers conclude that teacher leadership “should be approached as an issue of organizational development rather than solely as an issue of individual empowerment” (Smylie & Denny, 1990, p. 235).

While Bradley-Levine (2017) and Smylie and Denny (1990) focus on particular norms as impediments to teacher leaders, Angelle and DeHart (2011) dig into further elements impacting perceptions of a teacher leader’s credibility with their peers. Similar to Smylie and Denny (1990), Angelle and DeHart (2011) underscore the importance of attending to building a culture within a system that holds a shared vision of and value of teacher leaders. Angelle and DeHart (2011) were curious as to what level of impact a teacher leader’s grade level assignment/background, degree level, and leadership status may have in their peer colleague’s

perceptions. What the researchers found was a high prevalence of teachers who took on leadership roles but had never before viewed themselves as leaders. Their concept of a leader typically was an administrator who also served in a supervisory role. Hence, teacher leaders have a strong inclination to see their work as taking shape in informal ways and predominantly through collaboration. Probably one of the most significant conclusions of Angelle and DeHart's (2011) study underscores that "teacher leadership is a construct difficult to define in limited terms of role and responsibility" (p. 155). Peer's perceptions of a teacher leader depend on their own level of teaching experience, degree level, and experiences with having held a teacher leader role.

One value that permeates deeply the cultural landscape of a school system is the "norm of legitimacy" (Murphy, 2007, p. 687). The norm of legitimacy represents the driving perspective that teachers viewed as legitimate practitioners must be in the classroom with children. With teacher leadership pulling teachers out of the classroom, their peers view them as "compromising their effectiveness with children" (Smylie & Brownlee-Conyers, 1992, p. 164). In close relation to the norm of legitimacy is the "norm of the divide between teaching and administration" (Murphy, 1999; Murphy, 2007, p. 687; Rallis, 1990, p. 196). This divide creates a "strong us-them split" (Teitel, 1996, p. 149) which is compounded by the organizational structures teachers and administrators inhabit. This split supports a "norm of managerial prerogative" (Murphy, 2007, p. 688) which works against the philosophy of shared leadership. At its core, a norm of managerial prerogative "is the belief that school action outside of classrooms is the rightful domain of school administrators" (Murphy, 2007, p. 688). In turn, managerial prerogative breeds the norm of followership, which promotes a belief that teachers are the followers and administrators are the leaders (Murphy, 2007). As followers, teachers are then influenced by the

norm of compliance, feeling compelled to comply with directives coming from the administrator ranks (Murphy, 2007). All of these norms weave together, making teachers wary of taking up a teacher leadership role. For those that do take up a teacher leader role, their leadership is complicated by the family of norms emanating from legitimacy.

2.4.2 Organizational Structures as Barriers

A school system's organizational structure can many times build unintended barriers. As noted by Smylie (1996), "the organizational contexts of schools have substantial influence on the performance and outcomes of teacher leadership" (p. 575). How a school system structures itself reflects the system's values and beliefs on shared leadership and school change (Doyle, 2000). School systems may not recognize the "impediments...found within...the organizational structures" (Duke, 1994, p. 269; Murphy, 2007, p. 682). The pervasive and long entrenched "hierarchical culture of authority" (Lambert, 2003, p. 32; Murphy, 2007, p. 628) are not conducive to accepting "teachers in leadership roles and often actually discourage teachers from taking on additional responsibility" (Murphy, 2007, p. 682; Smyser, 1995, p. 130). As a result, systems create roadblocks to developing distributed leadership (Harris, 2005; Murphy, 2007).

Overcoming the impediments of long held hierarchical views will take intentional and sustained effort. A significant factor contributing to the challenge of shifting organizational systems lives in the simple fact that most teachers and administrators have never experienced anything different from a hierarchical dynamic (Murphy, 2007). The inflexible nature of hierarchical systems "enjoys a good deal of legitimacy (Murphy et al., 2001; Murphy, 2007, p. 683). Frequently seen is the ability of hierarchical systems to "absorb new ideas and initiatives in ways that leave existing organizational structures largely unaffected" (Cohen, 1988; Elmore, 1987; Murphy, 2007, p. 683; Weick, 1976). Murphy's (2007) comprehensive review of literature

on teacher leadership underscores the most problematic impacts hierarchical structures have on teacher leadership which include:

the notion of a single leader (Moller & Katzenmeyer, 1996, p. 6); traditional patterns of relationships (Conley, 1989, p. 2); featuring a boss and subordinates; the idea that the leader is synonymous with boss (Moller & Katzenmeyer, 1996, p. 4); and the metaphor of leader as supervisor (Myers, 1970). (p. 683)

Long standing structures persist that continue to position teachers outside of having voice into systems decision making and policy debate (Murphy, 2007). Just the nature of a teacher's schedule and physical work space isolates them from interacting with their colleagues. The structure of teachers working alone in their classroom leaves little opportunity for collaboration or influence across a system. Boles and Troen (1996) describe this isolation as an "egg crate" (p. 59) structure which in turn promotes "individual rather than collective accountability" (Duke, 1994, p. 270).

Teacher unions also play a role in unraveling teacher leadership in a school system. It is not unusual for teacher unions to use the positions of district teacher leaders as a negotiation strategy when fighting against staff layoffs or pay freezes. Or, push back may arise when "teacher leadership is seen as unsettling well-established patterns of collective bargaining" (Murphy, 2007, p. 684; Wasley, 1991). From a labor relations lens, teacher unions create a distinct divide between teachers and administrators. Tension between teacher unions and district administration is not unusual. As such, this tension can contribute to "discourag[ing] teachers from engaging in roles beyond the classroom" (Killion, 1996, p. 5). On the flip side, with teacher leaders being a part of the teacher union, administrators may interpret teacher leaders as under the control of the teacher union (Institute for Educational Leadership, 2001). Murphy (2007)

underscores that for teacher leadership “to flourish, hierarchical perspectives of labor embedded in school organizations will need to experience a transformation, as will ‘labor-management relationships’” (Boles & Troen, 1994, p. 8; Murphy, 2007, p. 684).

2.5 Re-envisioning Teacher Leadership

2.5.1 Creating New Definitions

Recognizing the potential positive influence teacher leadership could play in retaining and attracting highly qualified teachers, Nerlino (2020) proposes rethinking leadership in a way that “circulates its power among many individuals, disrupting antiquated versions of leadership and making teacher leadership a possibility” (p. 119). Similar to Lieberman and Miller’s (2004) vision of teacher leaders growing through roles as researchers, meaning makers, and inventors, Lambert (2003) builds a similar argument. Lambert (2003) argues that a new definition for teacher leadership is necessary; breaking the hierarchical view of “authority and power” (p. 421). The researcher laments the attitudes of district administrator leadership who resort to strategies of “carrots” to entice teachers into developing as teacher leaders and claims such attitudes result in unsustainable results.

What seems to be the tug and pull in arguments to re-envision teacher leadership is the argument between formal or informal teacher leader roles. Present in the research on teacher leadership is an argument that for a teacher leader to be credible to their peers, he/she must stay “anchored to the reality of the daily classroom practice...because their authority cannot rest on the basis of formal positionality and, instead, must stem from their credibility as expert classroom practitioners” (Snell & Swanson, 2000, p. 4). Nerlino (2020) expresses a similar view and suggests the take up of constructivist leadership theory; rooted in collaborative decision-

making, actions, and tasks versus role titles. Sociocultural theory advocates for teacher collaborative sharing of practice to be embedded within the “legitimate” work of teaching versus discussion of teaching before or after it happens. By taking a constructivist leadership approach, Nerlino (2020) argues that a school expands the number of teacher leaders who are able to lead. However, from the perspective of a teacher leader, the ability to lead while also being a full-time classroom teacher with an assigned student load makes it very difficult to “coach” peers (Knapp, 2017).

2.5.2 Approaches to Growing Teacher Leaders

The power of collaboration as a means towards developing teacher leaders is a growing theme across teacher leadership research (Berry, 2019; Cosenza, 2015; Knapp, 2017; Lambert, 2003; Lieberman & Miller, 2004; Nerlino, 2020; Snell & Swanson, 2000). Knapp’s (2017) autoethnography provides a first person view into how teacher leadership can evolve through teachers forming and engaging in communities of practice. When reflecting on her identity as a teacher leader, Knapp (2017) describes herself as “always being a learner” (p. 7). Knapp’s (2017) autoethnography correlates to Lambert’s (2003) belief that the context that cultivates teacher leaders should be more closely investigated, moving beyond the narrow definition of being just culture, setting, and timing. Similar to the views of Nerlino (2020), Lieberman and Miller (2004), and Knapp (2017), Lambert (2003) also advocates for constructivist leadership where one learns through “the processes of meaning and knowledge construction, inquiry, participation, and reflection” (p. 423). Thus, leadership develops through a reciprocal process of actively engaging with others in thinking, reflection, and inquiry. Lambert (2003) pushes beyond the institutional concepts typically listed in building leadership capacity to include coaching, mentoring, and networking with outside of district providers of professional learning. The

reciprocal nature of the theory Lambert (2003) and Nerlino (2020) underscore emphasizes how one's professional identity evolves through engaging with others in reflective dialogue, inquiry, and shared learning.

There may be signs on the horizon that K12 systems may be ready to move away from a hierarchical leadership design. Berry (2019) sets forth an argument that promising signs are evident that principals and teachers may be ready to shift away from a hierarchical leadership design. Berry (2019) lists four key developments that he believes point to a growing change in teacher leadership. Those developments include a growing body of research showing positive effects teacher leadership produces, local and state policies recognizing teacher leadership, the growth and impacts of educational technology, and research on how teachers learn to lead (Berry, 2019). Berry's (2019) argument encapsulates three sets of studies showing the positive effects of teacher leadership (Ingersoll et al., 2017; Papay et al., 2015; Ronfeldt et al., 2015). Interestingly, Berry (2019) points to such robust studies as Ronfeldt et al. (2015) that draws on multiple years of data from more than 10,000 teachers in Florida's Miami-Dade Public Schools, concluding that through teacher collaboration, instructional practice was improved as well as student learning. Berry (2019) takes a broad stroke in equating that this study proves that teacher collaboration "matters for how teachers learn to lead" (p. 50).

As evidenced in Carver and Feiman-Nemser's (2009) study, increasingly policy makers are playing a role in establishing standards and funding streams for particular visions of teacher leadership. As of 2019, "17 states had adopted teacher leader standards, 22 states offered a license endorsement, and 24 provided formal supports and incentives" (Berry, 2019, p. 51). Judith Warren Little (1988) underscored 30 years ago five key issues schools must address for teacher leadership to be successful. Finding Little's (1988) cautionary advice still pertinent

today, Berry (2019) builds upon her five key related issues which include: 1) developing public awareness on the value of teacher leaders, 2) teacher leadership as a way to help one's colleagues versus fix, 3) reward teachers for attaining microcredentialing—seeking out their own learning, 4) create school structures and schedules that provide collaboration time, and 5) develop policies that connect the leadership work of teachers and administrators (Berry, 2019; Little, 1988).

2.6 Building Teacher Leader Voice Through Autoethnography

The growing teacher shortage and growing trend of alternative certification pathways makes teacher leadership as a means towards professionalizing and retaining highly qualified teachers a critical area to study. A significant amount of current research on teacher leadership studies broadly programmatic impacts, generalizing teacher leaders by role types and character traits (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Researchers, seeing the potential significance of new teacher induction and mentor teacher leadership, have studied teacher retention rates in relation to their experiences with different types of induction support (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004), and have also analyzed the effects mentor support can have on student achievement (Fletcher et al., 2005). However, missing from the research conversation is the actual voice of teacher leaders.

Autoethnography is an evolving qualitative research approach that offers opportunity to more closely investigate how a teacher leader perceives their professional journey and leadership identity. Starr (2014) provides an extensive literature review supporting the use of autoethnography and phenomenology as a way to develop educational leadership. The researcher presents an argument for educational leaders to interrogate through reflexivity their lived experiences and the identity they bring into their leadership work and approaches. Starr urges the use of autoethnography methodology with a phenomenological interpretation whereby an educational leader takes an interpretivist stance and engages in being reflexive. By taking this

approach, the educational leader contextualizes the praxis of leadership, investigating which leadership theories they pull forward to manage a particular leadership dilemma while also considering how their own lived experiences, values, and culture may play into their enactment of leadership. Ultimately, Starr's (2014) recommendation rests on her belief that the field of educational leadership needs to evolve from a singular approach of one-directional "captain of the ship" to understanding the notion of relationality. Leadership is not a "singular act" as the act of leading occurs within a "web of relationships through which all work is accomplished" (Starr, 2014, p.73; Wheatley, 2006, p.165). Starr (2014) poses a call to action for higher education institutions offering leadership programming to provide opportunities and spaces where educational leaders can make sense of what they are seeing, experiencing, and learning thereby going beyond the notion that leadership only comes through positional titles.

A growing field of educational researchers are emphasizing the power of autoethnography as a research approach with legitimacy that can reveal a deeper understanding of contextual impact on developing an individual's perceptions and actions (Hamdan, 2012; Knapp, 2017; Starr, 2014). Through the act of writing an autoethnography, a researcher can build a deeper understanding of their life (Hamdan, 2012). By employing an autoethnography research design to my own research, it brings my own teacher leader voice into my perceived educational leadership journey and identity evolution (Knapp, 2017). By addressing the gap of teacher leader voice in teacher leadership research, my autoethnography strives to provide direct insights into alternative views on leadership.

CHAPTER 3

Theoretical Framework and Methods

3.1 Theoretical Framework

This autoethnography research study employs a social constructivism interpretive framework. With identity development as a central focus of the study, autoethnographic inquiry offers a method that “utilizes data about self and its context to gain an understanding of the connectivity between self and other within the same context” (Ngunjiri et al., 2010, p. 2). As Ellis (2007) argues, autoethnography “starts with personal experiences and studies ‘us’ in relationship and situations” (p. 13). A social constructivism framework aligns well with the purpose of my study, particularly in investigating what contextual factors have influenced my teacher leadership identity and career decisions.

Identity and perspective on lived experiences within a particular context are key data focus areas in autoethnography. This qualitative research method relies on a “back-and-forth movement between experiencing and examining a vulnerable self and observing and revealing the broader context of that experience” (Ellis, 2007, p. 14). By writing about one’s self, I am also writing about others (Ellis, 2007). As I build narratives around particular experiences, I create a window for my readers to peer in and possibly see themselves as a part of a similar story. The act of creating narrative provides opportunity for me as the researcher and researched to develop new ways of understanding and seeing my past experiences in teacher leadership. The act of narrative inquiry requires of me a “kind of wakefulness,” potentially revealing alternate realities I had not yet realized (Clandinin et al., 2007, p. 2).

While autoethnography is no longer considered a new qualitative research method, the approach still may draw criticism due to it not following a traditional social scientific approach. Instead, this qualitative research methodology takes an ontological positioning, recognizing that “multiple realities are constructed through our lived experiences and interactions with others” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 35). The nature of employing an ontological philosophical lens to my autoethnography requires continuous cycles of critical self-reflection. As a research process, an autoethnography draws from a concept introduced by Freire (1971) termed *conscientization*. Through conscientization, a researcher studies the space between self and culture which in turn supports a cyclical series of reflections (Starr, 2010). This cyclical series of critical self-reflections can also be described as analytic reflexivity where the researcher “turn(s) back an inquiry or a theory or a text onto its own formative possibilities” (Macbeth, 2001, p. 36). While contemporary uses of reflexivity tend to be engaged with critical theory, exercising a self-reflexive approach provides a means to finding potential intersections between author, other, and contextual conditions (Macbeth, 2001). These intersections may provide themes on my identity construction and perceptions of leadership.

3.2 Methodology

Autoethnography is a research method requiring a systematic approach to data collection, analysis, and interpretation. Distinctive characteristics of this qualitative research method are the use of self-focused narratives that also analyze context. The systematic approach “to socio-cultural understanding of self sets autoethnography apart from other self-narrative writings such as memoir and autobiography” (Ngunjiri et al., 2010, p. 2). In common across all autoethnographies is the use of personal experience through which the researcher can examine cultural experience (Holman-Jones et al., 2013). With narrative as a core feature of

autoethnography, it can fall prey to criticism of not being more than storytelling. However, autoethnography is markedly different from autobiography, requiring the researcher to go beyond the mere writing of an experience. Authors of autoethnography must “reflect on the nuances of that experience” and how the experience reveals “more general cultural phenomena” (Holman-Jones et al., 2013, p. 23). Through the process of reflection, the researcher is also able to connect and analyze relationships between the emerging themes from experiences with current research, providing further contributions to the field of scholarship.

This study employs a reiterative process of autoethnographic inquiry requiring the use of narrative storytelling, reflecting, and analysis of experiences. Thematic analysis also plays an integral part in unpacking my teacher leader identity formation. In so doing, I as the researcher and researched “interrogate” my leadership journey as both an insider and outsider to being a member of the teacher leader group. By taking an insider/outsider position (Hamdan, 2012), I am able to investigate the construction of my teacher leader identity. As argued by Maydell (2010), “it is impossible to engage fully with the autoethnographic research practice without understanding the impact of other on identity construction of self” (p. 1). Unpacking my teacher leader identity with a close lens on the influences of other guides my critical reflections.

3.3 Data Collection

With a professional career spanning more than thirty years in K12 education, I have accumulated and saved many narrative artifacts capturing at different moments in time my reflections. The artifacts range from journal entries, expressive narratives, professional video, to academic exposition on my sense making of teaching and leading. Additional artifacts that reflect my identity and perspective at given moments in time across my career are professional development planning artifacts, National Writing Project Site Reports and grant summaries, and

professional publications. Collecting diverse data artifacts “coming from multiple sources contributes to the thick description of [my] life and sociocultural context and enhances the credibility of [my] stories and interpretation through triangulation of data sources” (Chang et al., 2013, p. 74).

3.4 Data Analysis

Artifacts were organized chronologically into a filing system which will consisted of file crates. I labeled and read through all artifacts, keeping digital notes on emerging ideas. With an initial review of artifacts completed, I then reviewed my notes on emerging ideas and engaged in a second cycle of artifact review. In reviewing my artifacts a second time, I looked for themes in my teacher leadership journey, placing the themes onto a timeline. For each theme, I generated a self-narrative reflection, exploring what contextual influences were at play and engaged in an insider/outsider perspective taking. Utilizing the self-narrative reflections, I then unpacked each in relation to existing literature on teacher leadership. As I reviewed my own autoethnographic artifacts, I interpreted my own experiences in relation to existing views on teacher leadership in order to offer an interpretation which reflects the qualities of authenticity differently than existing current research. Figure 1 captures my data analysis process which employs critical reflexivity that supports the exploration of contextual influences on my teacher leader identity development.

Within the critical reflexivity process, I engaged in analytic reflexivity. Through conscientization, I studied the space between self, others, and culture/context which in turn supported a cyclical series of reflections. This cyclical series of reflections stemming from my analysis of artifact study and reconceptualization narratives required going back into research literature connected to the emerging themes. Through the process of reflection, I was able to

connect and analyze relationships between the emerging themes from experiences with current research, providing further contributions to the field of scholarship. Figure 2 presents a conceptual image of the components and interactions within analytic reflexivity.

Figure 1

Critical Reflexivity Process

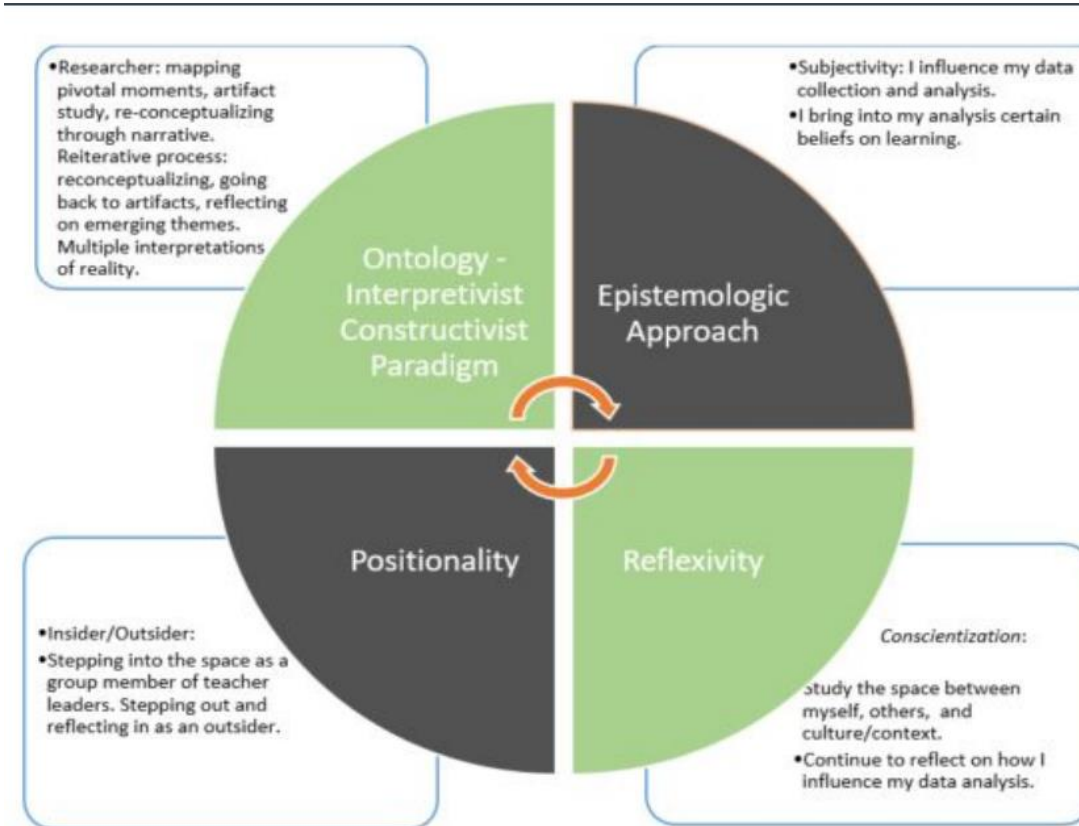
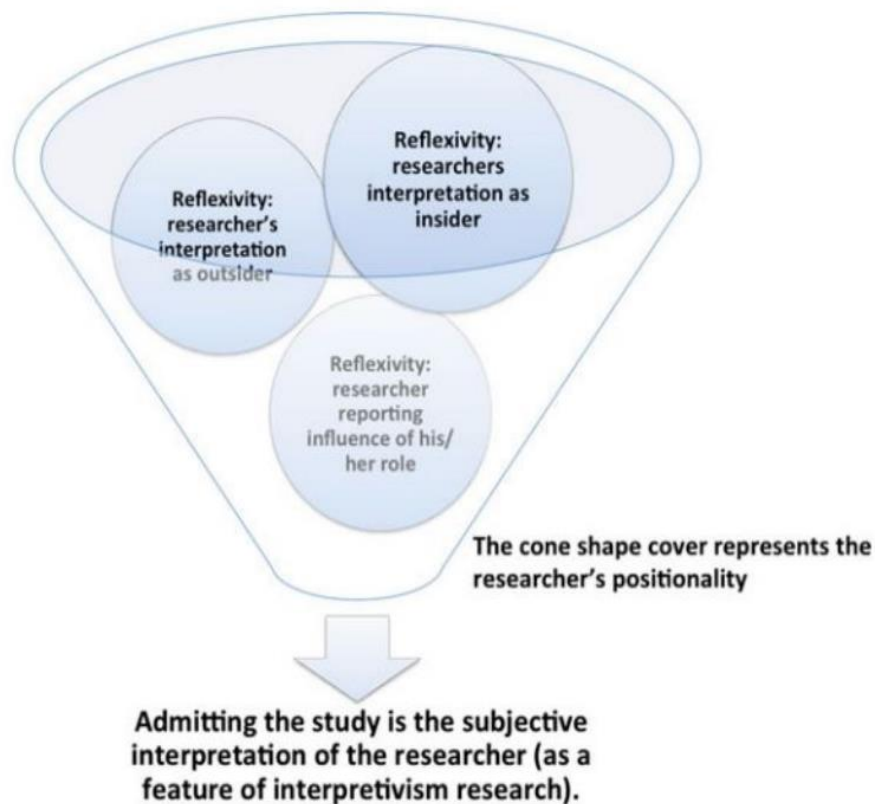


Figure 2

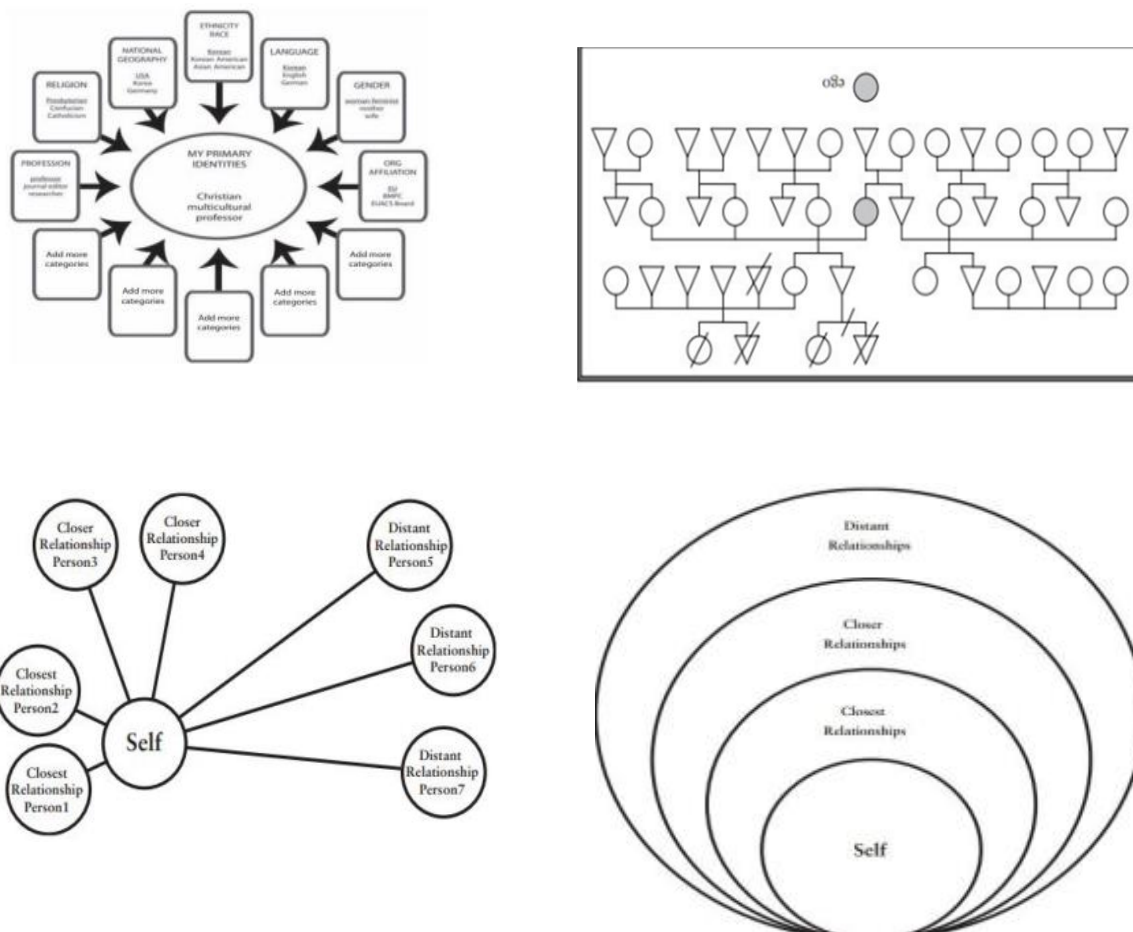
The relationship between positionality and reflexivity (Li, 2020, p. 44)



When reflecting on my past or present, I realized my past experiences and perspectives were a part of my thinking process. Not only did I construct stories, capturing past experiences, I also engaged in trying to make meaning of the events, people, and contextual conditions. My interpreted meanings were formed from my past experiences thus, my self-reflective data represented a mix of present and past. Self-analytical data analysis paired with my self-reflection data analysis. Utilizing cognitive process data engaged my higher order thinking skills (Chang et al., 2013). As I recalled past events, I found meanings that evolved from the experience and evaluated the experience. I utilized conceptual mapping tools (Fig. 3) such as culturegram, relational diagram, or comparison diagram (Chang et al., 2013).

Figure 3

Conceptual mapping tools (Chang et al., 2013, pp. 80, 82-84)



3.5 Considering Research Study Shortcomings

I consider myself fortunate to be in the position of blending my professional life experiences with my research study. However, some may find the closeness between my lived experience and my research problematic, potentially being overly biased and unable to be objective. A limitation to my study is that it only represents one person’s perspectives on their lived experiences with teacher leadership. I would argue, however, that through narrative

storytelling, my one-person perspective may be more likely to influence a reaction from the reader. The intimacy a reader can feel towards a first-person narrative storyteller can evoke potentially more of an emotional connection. My narrative brings an authentic voice of a teacher leader speaking directly on the impacts such a role can have. Cultural psychology takes the stance that culture is not indistinguishable from an individual's perspectives (Greenfield, 2000). Indigenous psychology takes a similar stance, emphasizing that when one "studies behavior in one's own culture, one has de facto an insider's cultural perspective" (Greenfield, 2000, p. 233). While I do not mean to infer that teacher leaders are an indigenous group, being a teacher leader does make me a member of a group, providing me with an insider's perspective.

3.6 Relational Ethics

While I do not have research subjects other than myself as the data set for this autoethnography study, I do still have to be cognizant of relational ethics. In the process of narrative reflections where I weave into my stories and critical reflections interactions with others, I am aware that even the use of pseudonyms may not completely mask them from being identifiable. As Ellis (2007) advises, "autoethnography itself is an ethical practice" revealing people in the process of "figuring things out" (p. 26). Ellis (2007) encourages future autoethnography researchers to recognize that "writing difficult stories is a gift to self, a reflexive attempt to construct meaning in our lives and heal or grow from pain" (p. 26). As a researcher, I want to contribute meaningfully to the scholarly field of teacher leadership. I strive to do so while also considering which truths are worth telling and which secrets need to stay secrets (Ellis, 2007).

CHAPTER 4

Data Analysis

My reflective journals on my fledgling teacher identity begin in my final year of my undergraduate program. It is 1990 at the University of Missouri - Columbia. My first semester of my senior year is focused on teaching methods with the second semester being student teaching. My student teaching takes place in a small rural town—so rural it only has one flasher light to mitigate traffic flow. The entire district is housed under one K-12 roof. My cooperating teacher works two jobs: teaching by day, retail by evening and weekends. Later on, she is the one who helps me shop for an interview suit. I find her approach to teaching boring, even falling asleep at times during her lessons. She believes in unit packets of worksheets. The students receive a packet at the beginning of each unit and they follow it page by page. I feel forced to teach in a way that does not align with my own beliefs on learning. Disenchanted with my experience, I contemplate even leaving teaching.

4.1 Outside/In 1990-1994

My reflective journals during this time have a repeated theme of my perspective of being a ‘better’ teacher than my own past teachers. With a tone of arrogance, I write that “we, the new teachers, will be a group of people with fresh ideas and outlooks—just what our educational system needs.” I find this odd now, as I remember many of my past K-12 teachers as being inspirational to my desire to become a teacher. Possibly this negative view is influenced by my negative student teaching experience. My language use in my reflective journals places me as separate from current practicing teachers who I repeatedly reference through a highly critical

lens. I'm filled with a sense that through my teaching I can have a significant impact. My theory on learning is beginning to grow. I rant against 'passive student learning—spitting back facts' which leads me to believe that my college methods courses are based in a sociocultural constructivist frame. However, nowhere in my reflective journals do I name a specific theory of learning, rather, I describe the conditions in which learning occurs. I continuously position my perspective as a student rather than a teacher. I feel like an outlier in my beliefs on learning and writing instruction. It is interesting that I spend a sizable portion of my reflection on writing instruction. I seem to have stronger beliefs about writing than reading instruction.

As I transition into my student teaching, my reflections begin to show a growing teacher identity and harkens the beginning views on administrators. I adopt a mindset that 'authoritative mandates' do not create change. Battle language of "we [teachers] are on the front lines" versus administrators permeates my reflections. Having only been in a classroom student teaching position for a few months, I am already showing signs of being influenced by an egalitarian culture norm amongst teachers. My stance of "we" also is an early sign of how I view teachers as a collective and equal group. This early on perspective is problematic. As Muijs and Harris (2003) emphasize, "egalitarian values among teachers may militate against any teacher presenting her/himself as a 'leader'" (Katzen-Meyer & Moller, 2001; Little, 1995; Muijs & Harris, 2003, p. 442). Looking back now, I do not remember ever having any interactions with building administrators during my student teaching assignment. Oddly though, my reflections have a negative impression of administrators.

This anti-administrator stance is a definite sign of how powerful norms held within the culture of a school and district can have immediate impact on a new teacher entering the profession. My early reflective journals provide a direct correlation to Murphy's (2007)

description of norms that influence the culture of a school as well as perspectives on leading. My journal reflections show that I am already being influenced by the *norm of legitimacy* as well as the *norm of the divide between teaching and administration*. For both the public and teachers, “teaching is defined ‘almost exclusively by time spent in classrooms with children’” (Little, 1988, p. 100, Murphy, 2007, p. 687). Because of this *norm of legitimacy*, teachers see time for leadership as being outside of the classroom which in turn creates a tension for teacher leaders to be perceived as credible in instructional practices by their peers. The *norm of the divide between teaching and administration*, influences the culture of a building’s views to see the role of teachers is to teach and for administrators to “manage and lead” (Barth, 2001; Murphy, 2007, p. 687). This norm of divide parlays into a “norm of managerial prerogative, or what Keedy (1999) called the ‘norm of the authority and power of administrators’ (p. 787) [which] has a deep root structure in most schools” (Murphy, 2007, p. 688). This norm, as well as the previous two listed, undermine the idea of shared leadership.

A negative stance against standardized testing also emerges in my student teaching semester reflections. Although I do not list it in my journal reflections, my cooperating teacher shares with me how she earns a sizable bonus if her students score well on the state standardized test. As such, she spent significant time on test preparation. She also shares with me a map of the United States that lists average teacher salary by state. Missouri is one of the lowest paying states. I’m struck by the idea that my career will never provide a livable salary and like my cooperating teacher, I’ll be chasing down alternative ways to supplement my wage.

By the end of my student teaching experience, my reflective journals show a significant stance shift of student to teacher identity. I see myself as a part of the teaching profession and take a “we” stance. I rail against my perceived impression that people outside the education

profession see teaching as an “easy job.” I present a dichotomy of “good” and “bad” teachers, with my strong drive to be one of the “good” teachers.

4.2 Evolving View on Leadership 1991- 2008

My view on teachers as leaders shifts dramatically in my first four years out of my undergraduate program. As a soon to be minted teacher, I resonate strongly with the idea of change in instruction not occurring from top down mandates. In my journal, I copy a quote from Nancie Atwell (1987) that states: “Our authority as teachers of writing can’t be adopted by others on an administrator’s command; it comes from the knowledge we’ve gained through diverse personal experience” (p. 16). It is clear that I resonate strongly with Atwell’s views on teaching, particularly the teaching of writing. My identity as a writing teacher is taking hold and I’m drawn to Atwell’s label of *authority* for teachers of writing as well as her referencing *others* as sitting outside this circle of authority and knowledge. It is interesting to also note that Atwell describes the knowledge of teaching writing comes from personal experience—not collaborative professional learning. In retrospect, seeing my strong response to Atwell’s (1987) ideas, it provides a possible theory of my later strong drive to seek out professional development. I see value in expertise that evolves out of personally seeking out professional learning experiences.

With the recession of the early 1990’s, few teachers were retiring, which created a scarcity of teaching job openings. Districts were, so to speak, in a seller’s market, holding out for teaching candidates who already came with years of experience. As a newlywed, I was limited to finding a teaching position in the St. Louis, MO metropolitan area. Feeling determined to bring in an income, I take a paraprofessional position in a self-contained emotionally impaired 7th and 8th grade boys’ classroom. The classroom teacher, seeing that I was certified in secondary ELA,

offered for me to take over the planning and teaching of the ELA portion of the students' daily schedule.

Very quickly I find that my ideas of how to teach reading and writing fall prey to the complexity of the context. In essence, I'm teaching in a one room schoolhouse, having to individualize instruction to each student's needs. Each student has a background history of having been hospitalized and/or in some type of juvenile detention. It would be an understatement to say that they were dealing with some trauma. My idealistic view of being a "good" teacher is shattered. I feel a failure in helping my students learn. One student in particular, Michael (pseudonym), provides me with an experience that unbeknownst to me then, shapes the rest of my teaching career. Michael, an 8th grader, had a literacy level of signing his name. His level of literacy surpassed his parents' who could only sign documents with an "X." I was told by the Special Education staff department leader that "all had been done" for him and to "just pass him along." I could not accept this idea of passing along a student without trying to help him become literate.

Most evening drives home from work were filled with me crying. My heart ached for these students and my frustration with myself grew as I came to realize I had no clue where to start with helping them. However, that did not deter me from trying to help teach Michael how to read so that he could pass his driver's education exam. My strategies were not grounded in any solid literacy background. We walked the school parking lot, memorizing traffic signs. I used flashcards for what I now realize today were considered essential everyday vocabulary. Mid-year, my husband and I transferred back to my home state of Michigan. I never heard if any of my attempts to help Michael helped him pass his driver's exam. However, I found myself haunted with the realization that I did not know how to teach reading. Instead of wanting to quit

teaching, it energized me to seek out answers and further develop my knowledge and expertise. Meeting and working with Michael awakened my social justice commitment – to never give up on a student and to ensure all students could live fully literate lives.

Six months later, I found my life further turned upside down. My marriage ended and I found myself financially broke and without a full-time teaching job. No one would have blamed me if I had at this point given up on ever teaching. Instead, I decided to seek out answers and expertise in literacy instruction. By the time I transitioned into my Masters of Arts in Literacy program at Michigan State University in 1993, my perspective on teaching and learning takes a much more reflective approach and a strong sense of “we.” I continue to rail against standardized testing and how “powerless” teachers are in the dynamic of an “uneducated” community versus teachers “know(ing) best how to assess for learning” (Wilson-Golab, 1993).

In my first semester of my Masters of Arts in Literacy at Michigan State University, I’m frequently told by colleagues already in administration or teaching positions that no school will hire me with a Masters as I will be “too expensive.” My response typically was to say, “well, I rather work in a district that values a teacher seeking out and developing their skills.” Ironically, I land my first full-time teaching position just months after graduating with my MA of Literacy.

My narrative of Michael can be found throughout many of my reflective journals as well as in my cover letters for job applications. It is clear from the multiple journal entries concerning my early failure with Michael, that this served as a pivotal moment that shapes the rest of my journey towards leadership. My reflective journals from my first three years of teaching take on a strong tone of advocacy for students who are typically underserved. My reflections begin to show my growing social justice lens. The concept of “teacher bias” and “thoughtless teachers” permeates my reflections. As I read my reflections from my current day perspective, I’m

somewhat embarrassed of how righteous I feel. However, my strong feelings of purpose behind why I teach is important to note as this identity of social justice advocate continues to evolve across the span of all of my reflective journals.

Between 1994 and 2005, in short succession I remarried and had four children, became a teacher consultant (TC) of the Oakland Writing Project; an affiliate of the National Writing Project, and took on the formal teacher leader role of district 6-12 ELA subject area coordinator. In addition, while pregnant with my fourth child, I transition completely out of the classroom and become a Literacy Specialist serving the middle school. This four-year span shows a dramatic shift in my feelings towards teacher leadership, eliciting a question of why such a fast shift in my teacher identity and stance?

Little did I know at the time of my hiring into my first full-time teaching position, I was landing into an English department led by a re-invigorated department chair. Laura (pseudonym) had re-awakened her personal professional learning drive and was inspired to cultivate a deep professional learning culture in our English department. The egalitarian culture was strong, which inhibited several of my department colleagues from seeking out mentorship from Laura. My Master's program had changed me though. I had embraced being a researcher and a seeker of knowledge. Seeing the department members who were serious about growing their instructional practice, I took the initiative to seek out their mentoring. We met as a professional learning community most mornings prior to the start of the first period, digging into the teaching of writing. Together we formed a Teachers as Writers group where we learned through being writers. Many of my notebook journals from this time period take on an expressive approach, using narrative and poetic prose.

Most days, I spent two hours after the end of the teaching day, meeting one to one with different mentors to talk through my instructional design and approaches. Most weekdays, and sometimes weekends, I was working 12 or more hours a day on developing my instructional practices, lesson design, and assessment practices. This tenacious effort to grow myself as a teacher leader starts to waver as my husband and I begin dealing with infertility. My journal reflections become heavily focused on my frustrations of not being able to have a family life. My hyper-focus on developing myself professionally seems to be replaced with my sole goal of becoming a mother. Although deeply personal, my infertility struggle is pivotal to some of my later struggles with being a teacher leader.

The summer of 2000 is where, as my most revered mentors would say, *the stars aligned* for me as an aspiring teacher leader. Needing to recertify my teaching license, my mentor and ELA department chair suggests I apply for the Oakland Writing Project (affiliate of the National Writing Project) Summer Institute (OWP SI). By doing so, I could earn up to 6 credit hours through a state university affiliation of one of the lead facilitators. Desperately needing to complete a large number of professional development hours, I jump at the opportunity. However, as a new mother of my first child, I am resentful that I have to give up four weeks of my summer with my son to professional development. Many of my reflective entries in the first week of the OWP SI speak to my battle with guilt of being away from my infant son. However, by the second week of reflective entries, I am taking the stance of a teacher researcher and as a writer. I commit, in one of my entries, to “pushing myself to name pedagogy.” In addition, I commit to seeking out mentors whom I can learn how to cultivate change or transformation in adult learners/peers. At one point I admonished myself with “I can’t keep saying ‘I want to’ but ‘I am

doing' when it comes to moving forward in my career. Now is the time for me to learn to be a leader" (Wilson-Golab, 2000, OWP SI Journal).

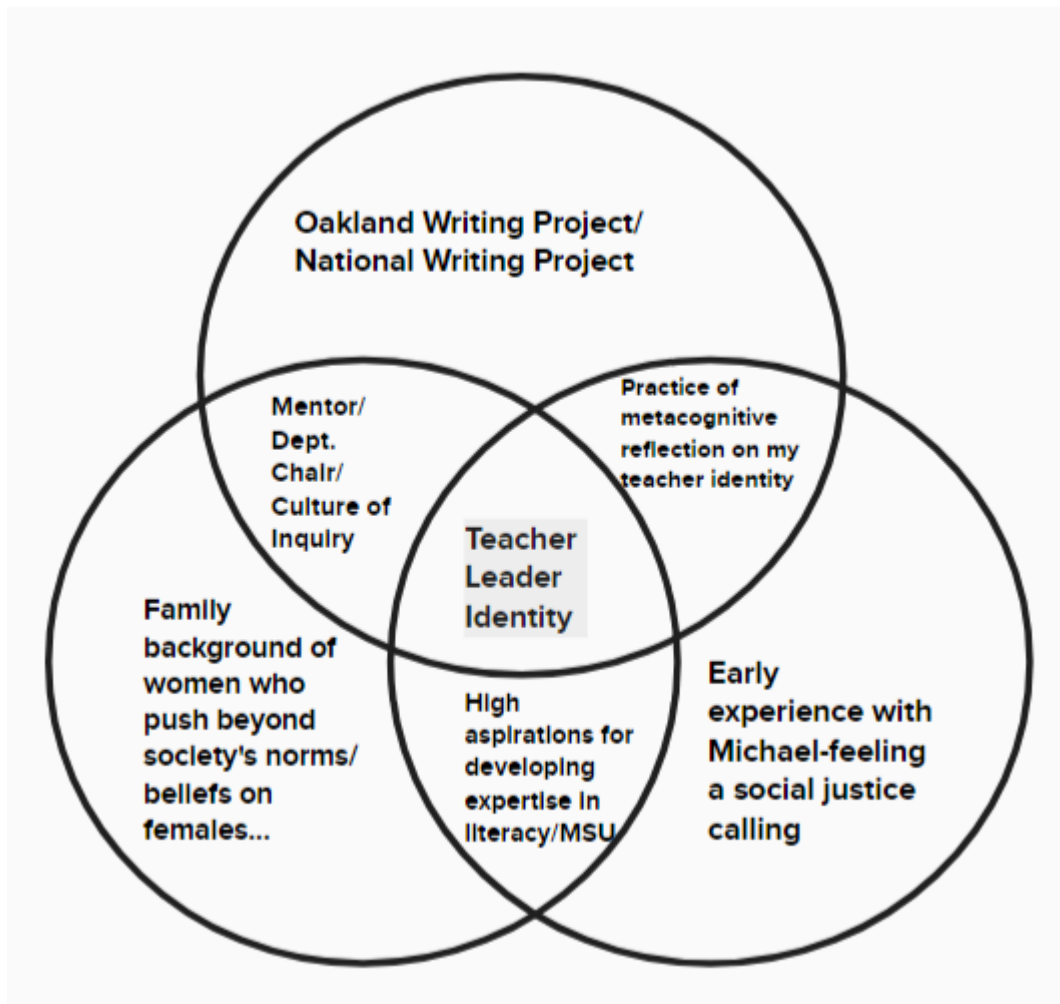
In retrospect, the OWP SI was my first time experiencing a transformative professional learning design. It is significant to note the core tenets of a National Writing Project site's Summer Institute which include: perspective taking, living as a writer, developing into a teacher action inquiry researcher, and committing to growing as a leader. Repeatedly in my OWP SI reflections, I take up the frequently stated description of 'beloved community.' I feel that I have found a community of colleagues who together feel empowered to lead and advocate for the most underserved communities. Lambert (2003) underscores how we, as humans, "yearn for vitality, for purpose" (p. 421). The OWP SI had reignited my purpose of social justice—ensuring all learners become highly literate. Lambert (2003) captures well the pivotal nature of my OWP SI experience:

Teachers who attain such vitality are energized by their own curiosities, their colleagues and their students. They find joy and stimulation in the daily dilemmas of teaching and are intrigued by the challenge of school improvement in adult communities. Teachers become fully alive when their schools and districts provide opportunities for skillful participation, inquiry, dialogue, and reflection. They become more fully alive in the company of others. Such environments evoke and grow teacher leadership. (pp. 421-422)

Although this environment of inquiry, dialogue, and reflection was happening outside of my district, it was connected and continued by my department chair. She provided continuity,

bridging my summer transformational learning back into my daily district work life. In doing so, the *star alignment* became complete, solidifying my teacher leader identity (Fig. 4). My early undergraduate reflections of an idealistic want to change the world—to leave an impact were reawakened. By being able to tap back into my dream of making a difference, I once again had a focused purpose that would continue to be fueled through my practices of being ‘reflective, inquisitive, focused on improving [my] craft, action oriented...and hav[ing] a strong sense of self’ (Lambert, 2003, p. 422).

Figure 4 *Star Alignment = Teacher Identity*



4.3 Finding my purpose: Taking up a moralistic call to action

By the start of the 2000-2001 school year, my perspective on what leadership could look like had evolved from the previous narrow view of leaders only being administrators. Through my mentor Laura and her cultivation of a professional learning community within our ELA department, I was witnessing her leadership to build an inclusive culture of professional learning. As a participant in this inclusive learning community, I begin to see how I too could lead. In essence, both the OWP SI and my department chair's leadership had helped me to "realize [my] purpose, the sense of purpose that [I] brought with [me] into this profession" (Lambert, 2003, p. 425).

The 2000 OWP SI marked the beginning of a twenty-year relationship with the National Writing Project network of sites across the nation. I continued to engage with the OWP in additional mini-institutes based on race, diversity, and equity. By the summer of 2005, I was one of three OWP Summer Institute Co-directors, designing and facilitating transformative learning for teachers across my county region. My district mentor Laura is also a part of the OWP leadership team. I find myself surrounded by mentors strongly engaged in social justice work.

It is my mentor Laura, who comes to my hospital bedside while dealing with a high-risk pregnancy, urging me to apply for the 6-12 ELA Subject Area Coordinator (SAC) position. I'm incredulous as I am totally in the throes of trying to hold onto my twin pregnancy. Sharing with her a *thank you* for the endorsement of confidence in my leadership, I decline. However, as my past district ELA coordinator in whom I greatly admire and aspire to someday be, Laura planted a seed of possibility. That seed just needed some time to grow and in a year's time, I sought out and was selected as the secondary ELA SAC.

My early ELA SAC journal entries reveal my continued struggle of finding a teacher leader stance that suits me. Having experienced inquiry-based collaborations, unbeknownst to me at the time, I lean heavily into a constructivist leadership approach. This constructivist mindset can be seen when I contemplate how to help my colleagues transition into a newly reconfigured district 6-12 system:

I want to be responsive to my colleagues' needs during an emotional transition. Maybe we brainstorm all the things we need to consider and plan for and then divvy up who is in charge of overseeing what. (Wilson-Golab, 2005, SAC journal)

Also present in my 2005 SAC reflection entries is my struggle with how to be a leader amongst my peers when I sit within that peer community:

How can a person truly do a good job [leading] with only 60 minutes a day? How am I supposed to be a leader but also an equal since I work side by side? How can I avoid conflict of interest? (Wilson-Golab, 2005, SAC journal)

As my teacher leadership identity grew, so did my mother's guilt. I struggle with what I frequently reference in my reflective journals as *identity crisis*. The more professionally driven I become, the more divided I feel from other peers of similar age. One particular entry in my 2007 *Writing Institute Journal* captures well my sense of otherness in a recount of picking my young son up from daycare:

I am not a woman who worries over which supermarket has the best price on meat. Nor do I know the neighborhood gossip. So, when I stand waiting outside my son's preschool with all the other mothers, I stand alone and quiet. Most have \$30,000 cars parked out front and amazingly groomed nails, hair, and clothing. In my mind, I escape to a place

where I'm strategizing larger scale educational reforms. I'm bored to tears by the trivial conversations. Part of me wishes I could care and become a part of the great coupon debate. Then maybe I would be a mom that my son would not have to remind, after the fact, of missing snack day.

This theme of identity crisis continues on in multiple entries. One later entry, in particular, names the multiple identities I feel I'm juggling:

Sometimes I feel like there are two identities living a parallel existence. I am a mom of four who finds that laundry is impossible to keep up with, as is which day my son needs to take snacks for his whole class. I am a mom who resorts to yelling when the chaos hits a frenzied pitch. I somehow mix wife in with this [mom] identity. It is of a team and sometimes the person I need to pass the baton to when I just need a break. My career is my other identity. But, I find that in my job, people know I'm a mother of four and as a mother, people know I also carry a full-time job outside the home. (Wilson-Golab, 2007, Writing Institute Journal)

The amount of journal reflections devoted to my identity crisis is significant across 2005-2007. This strong theme is not surprising as I look back from my current perspective. At this point in my life, I have four children ranging in age from 2 years old to 7 years old. In addition, I have taken up formal teacher leader roles that have invigorated me as a growing professional. In a journal entry I blame this tug of war on cultural influences:

I wish that our culture didn't put mothers in a place of identity confusion. When I had my first child, I was handed the usual gifts of books that would outline down to the minute how I run my day and my child's. I found it impossible and so abandoned the 'book

way.’ Often, I would tell other new parents how I was breaking all the rules that books set up. I relished, in the moment, the chuckles that statement would elicit but it would later eat at me...I can’t help but laugh at the old sitcoms I sometimes let my kids watch. Beaver’s mother, always dressed for a possible formal dinner—right up to the pearl necklace; vacuums and dusts day in and day out. She happily waits for her husband to come home and be the wise sage. Then there is Carol Brady. Now this woman has it made! She is a stay at home mother who also has a maid! Yet again, it is clear that her husband is the head of the family...So is this really about me wanting to be seen as equally valuable? Society tells me my value is derived by being a mother who vigilantly makes sure my children receive everything—even at the expense of my own separate identity. And by ‘everything’ I do not mean necessarily physical objects. I’m told that my children need ‘x’ amount of reading time each night; extra-curricular activities to develop socially; parents volunteering time in their classrooms; a regimented, consistent schedule; no more than 30 minutes of T.V. a day. And the list goes on and on...Sometimes I think women let a part of themselves die after children. Their worth is in growing and nurturing their young. I do believe many women are happy to let go of themselves. With children, they now have a driving purpose to get out of bed each day. They have a timeline of issues to expect outlined for them by older mothers and the parenting books. Their feeling of success comes from the successes their children have. Their children’s failures become their failures. (Wilson-Golab, 2007, Writing Institute Journal)

By 2008, I’m deeply involved with the Oakland Writing Project, as were some of my district colleagues. The influence of the OWP/NWP leads me to view leadership as “teacher as learner” and that “influence equals leadership” (Wilson-Golab, 2008, OWP SI Journal). My

journal reflections focus heavily on how I view leadership as well as how I should lead as a teacher. As seen in the below excerpts, I have a strong sense of what I believe to be true about teacher leadership:

- Leadership is not a position but rather, action.
- When I think of teacher leadership, I worry that many who are unhappy are feeling unable to push in another direction.
- You can't mandate a person to be a certain teacher. How do we make those contributions that help shift thinking and practice?

(Wilson-Golab, 2008, OWP SI Journal)

4.4 Shifting advocacy focus

Interestingly, another huge shift in my teacher leader identity and enactment is present in my 2008 OWP SI journal reflections. By this point in time, I have been in the dual formal teacher leadership roles of secondary ELA SAC and the district middle school Literacy Specialist. It is important to note that I have been out of the classroom for three years as well as having increasingly become more involved in the OWP site leadership team. A particular entry in my 2008 OWP SI journal lists the prompt of “how will I go forward in pushing for change?” My response of “continue advocating for good teachers no matter their race, gender, sexual identity...” reveals my shift in advocacy focus. My early reflections speak directly for advocating for underserved students. My growing teacher leadership identity focuses on being an advocate for teachers, who in turn, will be well supported in meeting their students’ needs.

My OWP SI 2008 journal reflections take on a theme that to lead, one must “push” and “never sell out and be quiet because [you] know what [you] may say will cause discomfort or

complexity” (Wilson-Golab). The themes of equity and social justice permeate all of my OWP journals. Site planning notes list the goals of building a “beloved community that is transformative [through the study/practice of] social justice, living with eyes wide open, and action inquiry” (Wilson-Golab, 2007, OWP Site planning journal). I’m significantly influenced by my leadership experiences with the OWP/NWP, particularly in how to structure movements that create tipping points. My early thoughts on creating change is pivotal, as they become strategies I continue throughout the following years:

So, I should focus on starting little social justice fires here and there until the fires grow; until they touch each other’s flames...Build capacity or a tipping point. I need to keep inviting teachers to stop and ponder what we are doing, the implications, and how we move forward. I can’t see [social justice] as getting in the way of my work. It is my work. How do I make or build a community that invites all, values all, and engages learners in learning they see as relevant and useful to their lives? That is my driving question and focus of my day to day. It is also what has created a heavy weight upon my day to day because I’m beginning to see just how big this goal is.

(Wilson-Golab, 2008, OWP SI journal)

It is during the 2008 OWP SI that my reflective journal entries reveal my strong desire to constantly evolve. While my 2007 reflections reveal the theme of mother versus career woman tug of war, it is clear from the following entry that the tug to grow as a career leader holds me in a tighter grip:

Teachers I know lament about wanting a 9 to 5 mindless job; a job where they robotically do and none of it follows them home. But, yet, they say that yet they do not really seek it

out. If I were to be in a status quo place, knowing that [position/job] was it for the next 20 years—I would go out of my mind! I need change and complications to keep my mind from becoming hardened. (Wilson-Golab, 2008, OWP SI Journal)

Reflecting from my current perspective, the clarity of my ‘why I teach/lead’ that evolves and strongly solidifies on social justice in my first years with the Oakland Writing Project was a direct result of an intentional professional learning design. The professional learning design of the OWP institutes could be likened to Freire’s (1970/2006, 1973/2002) critical consciousness framework (Wenner & Campbell, 2017). As “teacher leaders develop critical consciousness, they carefully give consideration to the problems related to diversity and equity within schools and society more broadly by considering the roles historical and social activity had in creating these problems” (Wenner & Campbell, 2017, p. 158). As my critical consciousness grew it also was “wed with a balance of action whereby (I took) action to provide equitable educational opportunities for all students” (Wenner & Campbell, 2017, p. 158). Review of teacher leader research reveals equity and diversity plays a pivotal role in developing and identifying future teacher leaders (Wenner & Campbell, 2017).

My strong embrace as a teacher leader who must champion equity and social justice begins to take shape in terms of the way I design the work of my dual teacher leader roles as secondary ELA SAC and Literacy Specialist. By the end of 2010, my reflective journal entries show a mix of projects (Table 1) that all embed design elements of a constructivist approach, building learning networks, and centering the work in equity and social justice. In addition, my formal role as teacher leader places me in the room with district and building administrators, providing voice to district development.

4.5 Growing frustration

The more I developed and enacted teacher leadership through formal roles, the more I wanted to climb as a leader. By 2009, my reflections more frequently expressed a frustration of what I referred to as “hitting the ceiling” (2009-2010 SAC/OWP Reflection Journal). In retrospect, at the time of drafting these reflections, I was co-facilitating the 2010 OWP SI and had been made aware of a regional Literacy Consultant position opening at my Intermediate School District (ISD: Oakland Schools). Two of my OWP leadership members had worked or currently worked at the ISD. For the past four years, I had expressed to my OWP mentors my desire to someday lead teachers at the county level. The following reflection excerpt shows my internal debate on whether to stay or leave my district teacher leader position and apply for the regional Literacy Consultant position:

When I shared with [a district administrator] my interest in growing as a leader, he responded with ‘I don’t see you staying in the education institution... You are too good for [district level leadership]. Your value runs out in one to two years [if you go to ISD].’ So, if I run away, does that mean [my district] can never change? I have grown as much as I can here. I’ve hit the ceiling. What if I were a man who had taught in the past career in [neighboring district where several of our male district leaders were previously employed]? What if I was willing to be submissive just to hide in a spot? I can’t help but wonder if I’m sacrificing my family for my career. I have something good in terms of allowing me to have more family time—less papers to grade. I feel discounted; that all that I have done to grow has been totally erased by a male chauvinistic regime.

(Wilson-Golab, 2009 OWP SI Journal)

It is interesting to note my continued theme of gender inequality. I perceive district administration leadership positions being heavily dominated by males. If any females rose in the ranks, I perceived that they were willing to play along with what I called the “good ole boy regime.” Ironically, from my reflections, I provide my district administrator with a pass on my gender bias blame. Instead, I felt his honesty of the current context we were in was reflective of a cultural phenomenon he knew he did not have the political capital to overcome on my behalf. This strong desire to lead and press against current gender inequalities of educational leadership, to be ‘seen’ and ‘valued,’ is a theme that is present as early as 2001 in my reflective journals. An offshoot of this desire takes shape in my evolving belief that becoming a published educational author will bring my voice into pressing for change:

My new mantra!! “And when teachers assert their own expertise and demonstrate it through publishing research results growing out of their work in the classrooms, they force fundamental changes in themselves, their roles in the schools, and their place in society.” (Wilson-Golab, 2001 OWP SI; Bullock, 1987)

By 2010-2017, I transitioned into my final phase of teacher leadership. I joined the Oakland Schools Learning Services group as a Literacy Consultant, serving a county of 28 public schools and additional charter school systems. My years of mentoring as a district SAC set me up well for being a learning network designer. In addition, I landed into this role just as the Common Core Standards (CCS) rolled out as well as the battle of assessment consortiums (Smarter Balance and, The Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Career - PARCC) vying to be selected by states as their new standardized testing system.

Table 1 SAC Projects, Focus Areas, and Design

Year(s)	Project Type	Overview	Reflective journal excerpts and/or emerging theme(s)
2006-2007	SAC: Grammar Resource Study (6-7 ELA)	Form a curriculum resource study team consisting of Middle School ELA teachers. Design study using an action inquiry framework.	<i>Grammar is linked with power. (Moralistic call to action.)</i> <i>Co-creates a burning question of inquiry—what are we trying to solve?</i>
2006-2008	SAC: Lab Classroom professional learning	Attend Teachers College Reading & Writing Project (TCRWP) Institute focused on building lab classroom learning frameworks. Form inquiry question focused on reading/writing instruction with small vertical grades ELA teacher cohorts.	<i>My goal is to build a program in the Middle School that builds a love of reading for adolescents and teachers of ALL content areas.</i> <i>Build collaborative partnership with K-5 ELA SAC to co-design professional learning that bridges 4th-7th grade writing instruction.</i>
	SAC: Attending regional, state, and national conferences as district representative.	Attend ACT conferences, meetings with Michigan Department of Education, NCTE, and National Writing Project research collaboratives.	<i>See my role as building expertise in reading/writing through professional networking beyond the district.</i>
	SAC: Developing 3 yr. Strategic Vision Plan, budget planning, curriculum writing, resource studies	Through the coaching of Deputy Superintendent for Teaching and Learning, learn how to create long-term program planning and curriculum resource development study teams. Become aware of policies and their implications on program planning from local board of education on up to state and national level.	<i>Build collaborative partnerships...to co-design.</i> <i>Design job-embedded and long-term PL, rejecting one day training model.</i>
	SAC: partnership brokering with MSU	Broker a learning partnership between Prof. Mark Conley of MSU with the district to engage in the evolving needs of adolescent literacy. Learning partnership is inclusive of all core content area teacher leaders.	<i>Goal is to build a community of teacher researchers within the district.</i>
2008-2010	SAC: form a district Literacy Study Team	Expand learning partnership beyond MSU to include Literacy Consultants at regional intermediate school district (ISD). Introduce Freebody and Luke's (1990) Four Resource Model/Critical Literacy framework.	<i>Co-design with Dep. Supt. a design that pushes (members of group) to become metacognitive about the process of reading.</i> <i>How do we put theory into practice?</i> <i>Important for this to be strongly framed as 6-12 teachers visiting across buildings.</i>
	SAC: member of district leadership groups	Member of the district Instructional Leadership Committee (ILC), Teaching and Learning Council (TLC)	<i>Shared leadership requires communication across many layers—not just the administrative top layer.</i>

I was quickly lofted into the position as Project Lead overseeing the development of the statewide 6-12 ELA Common Core Curriculum development, pilot groups, and design of rollout learning networks. Running concurrently with the CCS work was my ongoing Oakland Writing Project leadership. I became the OWP Site Co-director, which placed me in more direct contact with National Writing Project leadership.

Leveraging the political capital of being an Oakland Schools Literacy Consultant, I experience a level of autonomy to build and lead transformative professional learning that had not existed to such a degree in my past district teacher leader role. I am able to weave together my OWP site leadership with my Literacy Consultant work in such a way that one leverages the other and vice versa. My journals, during this time, reflect my almost frenetic pace of envisioning and enacting collaborative action inquiry research projects that pull in diverse groups of teachers from all over the county and state. I see myself as a “matchmaker–leveraging interesting projects in the region...developing teacher leadership” (Wilson-Golab, 2013 Reflective Journal). Through my work in schools/districts within the State System of Support, I view myself as a designer of “gears of learning” (i.e. Instructional Learning Cycles [ILC], data cycles, instructional coaching, academic focus areas, etc.). I strongly believe in the power of developing teacher leaders and want to do so through building “intellectual homes” for teachers. The inquiry framework continues to be central to my professional development design.

Morning Commute

Susan Wilson-Golab, July 2017

(OWP SI: Depart Literacy Consultant teacher leader role, become administrator)

Coffee in one hand, I maneuver with the other between turn signal and lane change with the confidence of a seasoned driver. In my mind I work through tangled knots. I don't want these knots in my life. Why does it seem like they come in multiples?

The car in front of me kicks up an empty pop can, shifting me away from the knot I don't want to untangle. I begin to notice more debris lining the highway fringe, every so often sucked into the passing car wind and sent rolling across the lanes. A stranded boat sits abandoned for the second day in a row, slouched over onto its flat tire. A paint brush roller slips from its clear plastic packaging and rolls into the ditch out of view. I wonder about the stories of this highway debris. Lives seem to collide but only through discarded and lost pieces—pieces doomed to rot and disintegrate.

I make a mental note—the same daily noting of time that has become routine since July 7th. It's not even a month since resigning and taking a new job. Seven years. And now I was pushing a restart button. I wondered about how the segments of time at each of my past employers wrapped around the cycles in my life. Single to married. Childless to four. Elementary to high school parent. It's not lost on me that this next cycle harkens finality. This is it—I think. This is the last career cycle before retirement. I'm struck by how much life shifted in seven years. No longer a mom of young toddlers. No longer the bedtime snuggles.

My mind betrays me and shifts back to contemplating the knot I don't want to. Tucker, my eleven-year-old Labrador, has begun to stumble and struggle to keep his balance. This has happened before. I've gone through the emotional imagining of losing him. I know he is aging--joints long ago invaded by arthritis. Just the night before my husband shared the veterinarian's "At some point you have to consider quality of life" comment. I know what this means and I know I have to be realistic. My response to my husband had come in my silence and fast downing of my glass of wine. I want to run from this reality. NOT NOW my mind screams.

I steer onto the off-ramp and begin weaving through the maze of city streets. Turning left towards the University I notice the median bursting with a rainbow of zinnias. They stretch proudly, strongly towards the early morning sky. Each bursting with a vibrancy that impresses the gardener in me. Zinnias have always been a favorite of mine. I love the various colors and shapes and most of all, their ability to keep producing new flowers across the summer months. Even into the Fall, my zinnias would persist. Their color muted with hints of brown, I would still cut and prize stretching my summer flowers past their season of life. I make a mental note to plant some next summer, to once again be a gardener tending to short lived beauty.

Pulling into the darkened parking structure, the moment nears where I need to give my mind permission to leave this line of thinking--to push pause. I vow to stop thinking of the inevitable losses and to stretch the time I have--to see the beauty of this moment in time. I allow myself to believe that I can slow time. Maybe giving extra care to Tucker will prolong a season of my life I'm not ready to close just yet.

CHAPTER 5

Findings and Implications

The major challenge inherent in autoethnography is the constant shifting landscape of how one views the world. The present me has the luxury of knowing what occurred following my departure from teacher leadership into a Central Office administrator position. The past me pines for more leadership, pushing against cultural perceptions on women in leadership roles, believing that perseverance always results in positive outcomes. If the present me could have a conversation with the past me, it would temper the idealistic thinking. However, I realize that where I see my leadership identity today will continue to evolve and shift. According to Rambo (2007),

...the writer-researcher must learn to think and write in ways that dismantle stereotyped images of identity and reality. Autoethnography, and indeed all forms of ethnography, presents a unique challenge because the subject the writer attempts to represent is always in motion on various levels. The identities one takes on are constantly shifting as the social landscape and interior world of the individual shifts. Similarly, a self is in a constant state of motion as is a society. (p. 540)

In this final chapter, I delve more deeply into the themes that emerged from my reflective journals and artifacts. Through the use of a social constructivism interpretive framework, I question how themes are related to particular contexts within which particular reflections situate. I continue to employ a “back-and-forth” (Ellis, 2007) process of re-experiencing past events while also taking an outside perspective, forcing a level of vulnerability to see myself in ways that may conflict with my perceived identity. I revisit my main and sub-questions and position

them in relation to my emerging themes. As I find connections between themes and my research questions, I review as well as search out further research that could elicit a new understanding of my past reflections. As I expand my interpretations on my emerging themes, I discuss the implications my study has on theory, research, and practice. Finally, I summarize my study, providing recommendations for potential future research.

As I launched into my data study, I continued to revisit the methodology I had previously laid out. Through the process of analyzing my journals that span twenty-six years of my professional life, I relived many painful struggles. However, it was not just reliving these moments all over again as the one directly experiencing them, it was also the critical self-reflection of taking an outsider view on myself and seeing my naivete, self-consuming professional drive, arrogance towards other practicing teachers, and feelings of gender inequality that made me question if my worldview was extremely narrow and self-serving or based in actual reality.

As I started my data study, I remained true to my initial methodology process. My first data sort was to organize my reflective journals and artifacts into chronological order. As I did this, I would skim the notebook to get a sense of the time period and connecting events to journal reflections. The second data review cycle was a close read of each journal page and transferring emerging themes, repeated phrases and ideas, as well as narrative excerpts into a timeline. The notes were plotted out onto a timeline. Once all journals had been closely read and notes added to the timeline, I added additional context in which particular entries were written. Sometimes contextual notes were about cultural political events occurring at that time, personal life challenges, and additional contextual story that was not present in my journal entry.

With all cycle 2 data in chronological order, I placed the pages of notes across a large table. I read through all the cycle 2 notes multiple times, considering what major themes were present. Using multiple colors of highlighters, I created a color key for themes and highlighted for where the themes were present across the full timeline of notes.

As I highlighted, I continued to refine my categories of themes. I wanted to avoid falling into a chronological personal narrative approach to how I analyzed and wrote my data analysis story. I pushed myself to find themes that spanned a long period of time and which also folded into other significant themes.

What emerged was a mix of analysis that fell into a chronological storyline, however, the themes of different spans (see Fig. 5) of time revealed a transformational evolution where certain pivotal influences activated another layer of change to my teacher leader identity. The shortest theme was the shift from outsider to insider—seeing myself as a teacher and a part of the collective “we.” Although my undergraduate journal reflections are not written during a time when I held a formal teacher leadership role, the perspectives I share in those early entries represent a key starting point in my teacher leadership journey. The 1990-1991 journal reflections confirm Murphy’s (2007) and Bradley-Levine’s (2017) research on cultural norms embedded within schools. I begin to share a mindset of egalitarian values in just the first month of my student teaching reflections. This finding begs the question of just how quickly can new teachers take up the cultural norms that permeate their school? For me; it was just a mere month.

My senior year of my undergraduate teaching program is significant, particularly because my reflections reveal my beliefs and views on teaching and learning before I enter the teaching profession. My outsider stance reveals an arrogant and idealistic view on teaching. Without terrible past K12 schooling experiences, I have to question how my early views may have been

shaped by my college coursework and/or instruction. This finding of my early skepticism towards currently practicing K12 teachers is significant as it points to a perception of divide between current and soon to be teachers potentially cultivated through coursework readings and reflections. Whether done unintentionally, the selected readings, journal prompts, and class discussions shaped in me a very negative view towards current K12 practicing teachers.

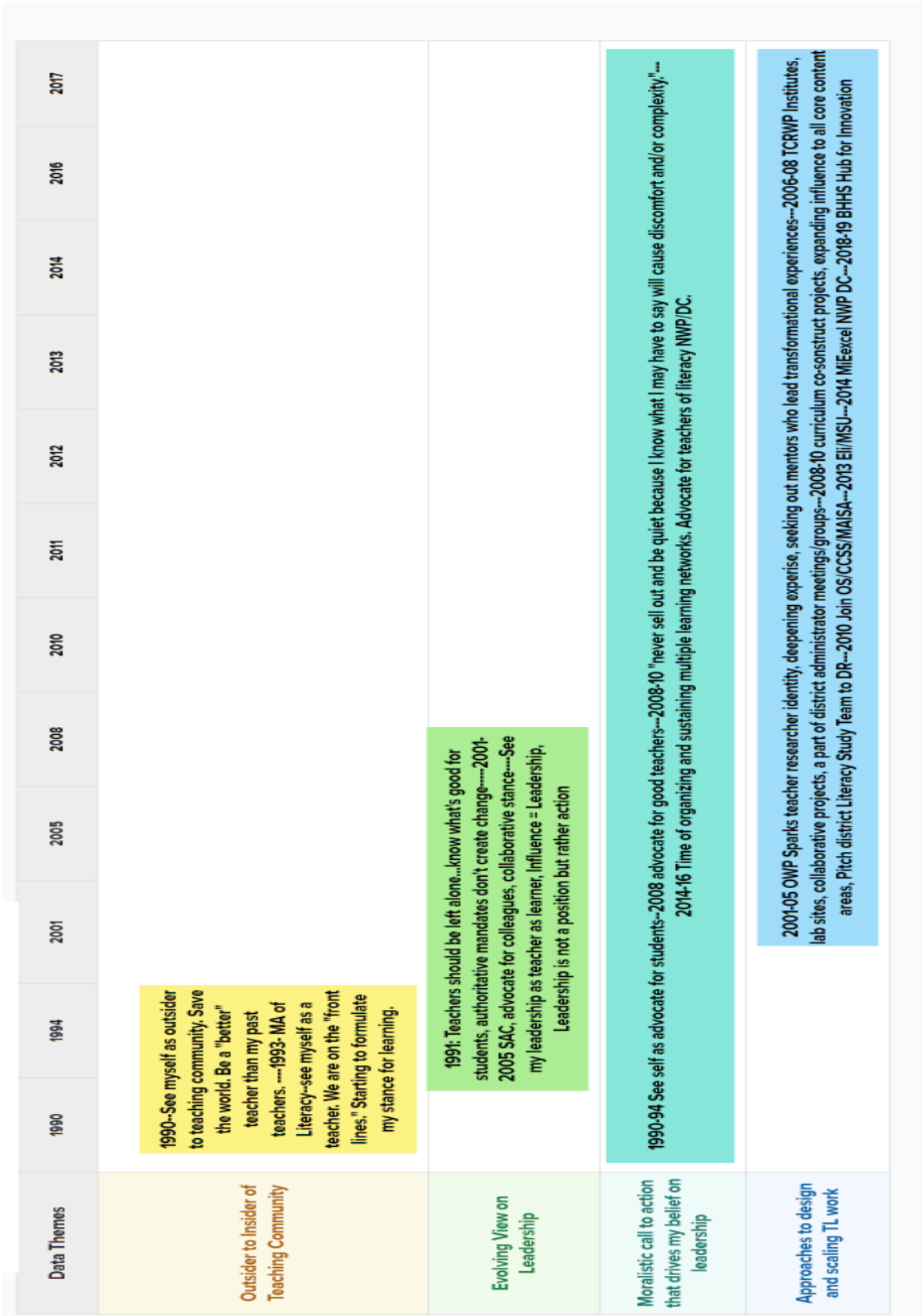
My early skepticism also leads me to consider what pedagogical wars may have been at play at the time of my undergraduate senior year. With many of my reflections centered on the teaching of writing through a process approach framework, one could theorize that the course readings, such as Nancie Atwell's 1987 edition of *In the Middle: Writing, Reading, and Learning with Adolescents*, significantly influenced my views on teaching and teachers. Atwell's (1987) work on the teaching of writing, in particular, presented a pendulum swing from the way I had experienced writing instruction; a traditional linear product approach.

It is in the midst of my student teaching experience that I begin to see myself in the "we" of teachers versus an outsider looking in. My cooperating teacher's drive to get good standardized scores out of her students in order to get a supplemental bonus tugged at my beliefs on what should and should not be the driving purpose to one's teaching. The many reflective entries in my journals across the first four years show a frustration with standardized testing holding teachers "powerless," a view my cooperating teacher presented to me in both what she said and her actions. Interestingly, my cooperating teacher did not share her test prep lessons with other teachers. Instead, she enacted her "professional autonomy, 'which is viewed as freedom from outside scrutiny and the right to make independent judgements' (Wasley, 1991, p. 26), to choose ends and means...to adopt for [her] classroom' (Wilson, 1993, p. 27), 'as a contested right'" (Murphy, 2007, p. 688; Uline & Berkowitz, 2000, p. 419). Nor did I witness

any other colleagues questioning her incorporating a lengthy test preparation unit into the curriculum. Teachers in the building had somehow learned “not to meddle in the affairs of other teachers” (Teitel, 1996, p. 144).

My student teaching experience confirmed for me all the ways I did not want to teach. Which, in turn, confirmed my idealistic view on teaching. This overly idyllic view was pivotal when it came into a real-world context of working with severely emotionally impaired adolescent boys.

Figure 5 Thematic Timelines



5.1 Cognitive dissonance

One of the most significant findings in my reflective journals was how pivotal a series of cognitive dissonance experiences were to evolving my leadership from informal to formal. As Figure 6 represents, across a span of twenty-six years of my teaching career, four significant experiences contributed to my teacher leader evolution: working as a paraprofessional with a struggling teen reader, deepening my expertise with a Masters of Art in Literacy, my first district job and department culture, and finally my experiences across multiple years with the Oakland Writing Project/National Writing Project. As Carver (2016) describes, “perspective transformation or reframing can occur suddenly, often as the result of an activating event, or it may occur through ‘an incremental process in which we gradually change bits of how we see things, not even realizing a transformation has taken place until afterward’” (Carver, 2016, pp. 161-162; Cranton, 2002, p. 65). Both an activating event and a slow incremental process occurred in my teacher leadership evolution.

Figure 6 Cognitive Dissonance Evolution



My first job out of undergraduate represents an activating event in my leadership journey. The moment of realization from my conversation with the Special Education department chair as well as meeting Michael's parents and witnessing their "X" signatures represented a collision with my early idealistic view on teaching. Having a sobering moment of humility; recognizing you do not know enough to help a learner, changed my perspective and purpose to teach. Instead of fleeing from the feelings of failure, it motivated me to become an expert in literacy.

5.2 Disposition matters

Presenting a cataclysmic event as a means to develop teacher leaders is not necessarily useful. What is significant to note is the dispositions I leaned into when feeling I had failed. Continuously, across my reflective journals, I present myself with questions to consider, concepts I need to come back and revisit, titles of books mentioned to me, and lengthy developed metacognitive reflections. My inclination, when faced with not understanding something or failing at something, is to come back at it even stronger the next time. Perkins et al. (2000) note that "dispositions concern not only what people can do, but how they tend to invest their capabilities—what they are disposed to do" (p. 270). I invested in my capabilities to search out new learning, mentors, and commitment to my student learners. Multiple researchers have described "critical thinking as dispositional in nature" (Ennis, 1991, 1986; Facione & Facione, 1992, Perkins et al., 2000, p. 272). In common across the multiple listed dispositional habits of mind are four particular dispositions: open-mindedness, reasonableness, curiosity, and metacognitive reflection (Perkins, et al., 2000). My reflective journals capture my continued push to set aside bias, to consider other perspectives, my curiosity to seek out new knowledge, and years of metacognitive reflections. These developed and practiced dispositions cannot be overlooked in terms of their influence on constructing my identity as a teacher leader.

5.3 Transformative Learning Theory

My series of cognitive dissonance experiences along my journey towards becoming and evolving as a teacher leader could also be attributed to transformative learning theory. As Carver (2016) describes, “transformative learning theory suggests that deep and autonomous learning in adults is prompted by a shift in perspective or frame of reference (p. 161). Carver’s research on teacher leader transformative identity evolution utilized Mezirow’s (2000) theory of transformative learning. Mezirow (2000) described his perspective on transformation as

The process of becoming critically aware of how and why our assumptions have come to constrain the way we perceive, understand, and feel about our world; changing these structures of habitual expectation to make possible a more inclusive, discriminating, and integrative perspective; and, finally, making choices or otherwise acting upon these new understandings. (p. 167)

Although painful at times to read and relive, my journals capture my continuous cycle of peeling back the layers of my assumptions and biases. As I reframed my “assumptions and beliefs, learning occur(ed)” (Carver, 2016, p. 168; Mezirow, 2000).

The most notable evidence of my transformative learning occurs in relation to my entry and years of interaction with the National Writing Project. The Oakland Writing Project four-week Summer Institute (SI) provided me with a professional learning environment where “adult learners (felt) supported as they engag(ed) in critical reflection and collaborative dialogue” (Carver, 2016, p. 162; Hayes, 2001). Through the practice of journaling, structured conversations about beliefs and values on learning and equity, and engaging in teacher research aimed at solving problems in our teaching practices, we were able to develop our practice of critical

reflection. Through our practice of critical reflection on our values, beliefs, and potential biases we were able to “explore new ways of acting and being” (Carver, 2016, p. 163, Cranton, 2002).

Mezirow’s (2000) transformative learning theory maps out phases of “meaning making” an adult learner traverses (Table 2); a layering process with key stages that push an adult learner to evolve and/or abandon past held identities. As Carver (2016) argues, “it is not enough to layer new understanding onto old...before new learning can occur, one needs to first uncover and then assess one’s hidden assumptions” (p. 162). My years of journal reflections, particularly during my engagement with the Writing Project, portray Mezirow’s (2000) Phases of Meaning.

Table 2 *Mezirow’s (2000) Phases of Meaning*

Phases of meaning in transformative learning
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identifying and examining dilemma or critical incident (e.g., change in job or life circumstances)• Examining one’s feelings (e.g., fear, anger)• Conducting critical assessment of one’s assumptions• Recognizing that one’s discontent and process of transformation are shared• Exploring options for new roles, relationships, and actions• Planning a course of action• Acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one’s plans• Provisional trying of new roles• Building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships• Reintegrating into one’s life based on conditions dictated by one’s new perspective

Baumgartner (2001) expands the concept of transformative learning by applying Dirkx’s (1998) four-lens approach to real world examples. Dirkx’s (1998) four-lens approach includes: Freire’s (2000) concept of “conscientization” (p. 17); Mezirow’s (1991; 2000) cognitive-rational approach; Daloz (1986; 1999) developmental approach; and the link between spirituality and learning (Baumgartner, 2001; Dirkx, 1997, 1998; Healy, 2000). Freire’s (2000) focus on transformative learning orients around social justice, whereas Mezirow (1991; 2000) focuses on

“rational thought and reflection in the transformative learning process” (Baumgartner, 2001, p. 17). Further research on transformational learning has expanded Mezirow’s theory, shifting away from a linear process to a “more individualistic, fluid, and recursive” process (Baumgartner, 2001, p. 18; Taylor, 2000b, p. 292). Baumgartner (2001) concludes that “transformational learning is a complex process involving thoughts and feelings” (p. 18). Similar to Carver (2016), Baumgartner (2001) also emphasizes that transformational learning does not necessarily occur after a single dramatic event rather, transformation may be a “long cumulative process” (Baumgartner, 2001, p. 18; Taylor, 2000b, p. 300). For me, my teacher leader identity evolved after multiple experiences converged, clarifying for me my purpose to lead for social justice.

5.4 Gender inequality in K12 leadership

For me, the further I got into my formal teacher leader roles, the more driven I was to continue expanding my leadership. The more I desired growth opportunities, the fewer there were in my district teacher leader roles. As I began to feel the road of opportunities coming to an end, the more frustrated I was with a system led primarily by males. Although I was many times in a role of leading professional development of building and district leadership, I felt frustrated with the hierarchy. I felt undervalued and perceived as lesser than administrators. I was drawn to the role of county Literacy Consultant as it represented opportunities to lead and influence far surpassing a district teacher leader role. Although I transitioned into a consulting role, I still led learning from the stance of being a teacher leader.

Research shows that in the educational field that is “populated (significantly) by women, the glass ceiling effect is still present” (Addi-Racah & Ayalon, 2001; Mahitivanichcha & Rorrer, 2006; Moreau, Osgood & Halsall, 2007; Sanchez & Thornton, 2010, p. 2). In my reflective journals I even use the phrase “hitting a ceiling.”

Once I felt I was ready for the next level of leadership, the message I received was that I should consider being an elementary principal. The National Center for Educational Statistics (2006) data revealed that “women make up 75 % of teaching positions in the United States, yet they occupy only 58.7 % of principal positions at the elementary level and 26.9 % at the secondary level” (p. 47; Killingsworth et al., 2010, p. 532). Killingsworth et al.’s (2010) research sheds a different light on the early recommendations I received in terms of the next leadership pathway to take. I had always wondered why male administrators would look at me, a secondary teacher by training, and suggest I consider an elementary principalship. The suggestion was never a secondary level administrator position.

Studies exist on organizational perspectives on women working in school settings that have “shown that women are often only afforded leadership positions with the sponsorship of men” (Jabbar et al., 2016, p. 3; Mahitivanchcha & Rorrer, 2006; J. Marshall, 1995; Ortiz & Marshall, 1998). In each of my teacher leader roles, while mentored by female teacher leaders, it was always a male administrator that sponsored my leadership, clearing a path for me to lead as a teacher leader.

Some researchers delving into the roots of gender inequality in education go as far back as the 18th century (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Jabbar et al., 2016), noting that males initially dominated the teaching field. However, by the mid-1800’s, with an increase in jobs in different fields, men left teaching to pursue other opportunities (Jabbar et al., 2016; Reich, 1974). This exodus created more openings for women to take up teaching positions, quickly outnumbering male teachers in the field. Women, limited on work opportunities, were willing to take a teaching position at a lower wage than men (Jabbar et al., 2016; Mitrano, 1978). The combination of the exodus of men leaving teaching and the perception of teachers being “caregivers” and women

“associated with care work;” teaching became viewed as a “feminized field” (Jabbar et al., 2016, pp. 10-11; Tyack & Hansot, 1982).

With the feminization of the teaching profession, males who remained in education looked for administration roles (Tyack, 1974). By the early “1900s, teaching and administrative positions became increasingly segregated by gender, and some states even passed laws to prevent women from moving into administrative roles” (Beale, 1936; Jabbar et al., 2016, p. 11). My own grandparents, both educators, experienced just such an example of this research finding of engineered policies creating gender inequality.

March 22, 2021 Facebook post:

Today my mom gifted this priceless treasure (framed teaching certificate) to me. Sifting through flood damage, she found and salvaged my grandmother’s 1934 teaching certificate. I’m proud to say I come from a long line of women who pushed past society’s notions of what a woman could aspire to be. My grandmother’s father died of the Spanish Flu when she was very young. Her mother worked and raised three daughters as a single mother. As a young woman, my grandmother went off to college and got her teaching degree. She married a fellow teacher in her district—my grandfather. At the time, because she married a fellow teacher, it was assumed the woman would stand down from her teaching position. My grandparents had to keep their marriage a secret so as to both stay employed. I miss her and think of her often. Her strong will and independence carry on in my mother, me, and now my daughters. (Wilson-Golab, 2021)

My years long laments concerning balancing work aspirations and family situations within this larger discussion of gender inequality. Apparently, I am not alone in my struggles with trying to maintain my home and family duties as an aspiring teacher leader. Multiple research

studies have noted that “when females obtain or seek positions as educational leaders, it is not easy to balance their work and family obligations” (Coleman, 2001, 2005; Mahitivanichcha & Rorrer, 2008; Moreau, Osgood, & Halsall, 2007; Sanchez & Thornton, 2010, p. 6; Wrushen & Sherman, 2008). Glass (2000) attempted to answer why fewer women made it into upper administration jobs. One particular reason Glass (2000) attributes to fewer women ascending into upper educational leadership relates to their role of childbearing and raising children (Allred et al., (2017). Glass (2000) presents the assumption that women will take “breaks from their careers to bear and raise children (and) by the time they have the credentials and experience to transition into mid-management or central office positions, they are often nearing retirement” (Glass, 2000, Allred et al., 2017, p. 8).

Journal reflection, August 28, 2023

The sun is dipping down in the northern Ohio skyline as my mother and I make the trek down I-80 to her fifth chemo treatment at the Cleveland Clinic. My once strong mother sits in the passenger seat with just a few wisps of gray hair left on her head. On these chemo treks she talks to me non-stop, reflecting on how her life has led her to this point in time. I listen, and reflect on our relationship, the history of women in my family tree, the theme of stubbornness, perseverance, and unwillingness to accept the status quo. This particular trip we began to talk—to admit to—our feelings of failure in our professional lives. She set aside her dreams of medical school to get married. She graduated with a bachelors in science and obtained a job in a lab at a chemical company, the same company my father worked for as a chemical engineer. My father, she tells me, wanted to start a family right away. She did not. She wanted to work. To be a

professional for a period of time. But, she laments, she felt she needed to provide more for my father's dreams than her own.

Tonight is the first time I've ever heard her share how every morning after having my older brother, she would stand at the apartment window, watching other women go off to work. She admits that the hurt and anger stayed with her for fifteen years. I think, to myself, that she underestimates just how long that hurt sat festering deep within her. Like her mother and like her mother's mother, my mom and I have not broken the chain of women in our family pressing back against cultural norms placed on women.

My grandmother at the tender age of five watched her mother nurse her dad who came home from WWI with the Spanish flu. He did not survive and my great grandmother then also fell ill with the flu. She fought and lived. She found herself a widower and single mother of three daughters. She did not remarry until after all of her daughters were out of the house. Nor did she rely on government aid. I have tremendous respect for my great grandmother, knowing that at the time she was a single mother raising three daughters, a woman was extremely limited on ways to earn a livable wage.

My grandmother attended college and obtained an elementary teaching degree. I can remember visiting my grandmother's classroom as a young child. My grandfather had died several years earlier. A day before his death, he urged my grandmother to sell the farm should he not make it. He worried how much the farm would be a burden for her. Not only did my grandmother keep teaching well into her late sixties, she also kept the farm and continued having the land farmed.

All of this history plays through my head as I focus on the road. I know what's coming next in my mother's story. Her voice breaks but she pushes forward. Was it her small stature? Her shyness? Her feelings of playing the role she felt as a woman during the sixties she was expected to fulfill? She tells me that she is proud of me for getting established in my career and staying in it while having and raising my children. She regrets how she felt perceived in her first job once becoming pregnant. "It was like," she said, "I no longer existed."

My journals reveal years of me seeking outside of district professional learning that filled weeks in my summers and weekends during the school year. Rarely were any of my outside professional learning experiences funded by my district employer. I was personally driven to become an expert in literacy and writing instruction. Lynch et al. (2012) notes the current "24/7 work culture" permeating education, highly prizing competition, long hours of work, and "organizational dedication" (Killingsworth et al., 2010, p. 13). Jabber et al. (2010) notes "increasingly, reforms focus on 'marketplace discourses' (Sisson & Iverson, 2014, p. 224) about the professionalization of teaching and leadership, accountability, and efficiency, which pits the idea of educators as caregivers against educators as experts (Sisson & Iverson, 2014)" (p. 13). It is clear from my journal entries that I aspire to be an expert, and at times, feel frustrated with peers who crave status quo roles.

Throughout my reflective journals, my mentoring into how to lead relies heavily on a constructivist leadership style; being a co-researcher, a collaborative thinking partner, and servant leader. Yet, researchers contend that social and cultural perceptions of what makes a good leader tend more towards a "deep-seeded masculine conception of leadership" (Adkinson, 1981; Killingsworth et al., 2010, p. 531; Northhouse, 2009; Rusch, 2004). Studies exist that find

employers are drawn more to such attributes of decisiveness and authoritative approaches, typically associated with males (Acker & Feuerverger, 1996; Blount, 1998; Killingsworth et al., 2010; Shakeshaft et al., 2007; Skrla, Reyes, & Scheurich, 2000, Trinidad & Normore, 2005). Similarly, Coleman (2003) notes that women are perceived as “caring, tolerant, emotional, intuitive, gentle, and predisposed towards collaboration, empowerment, and teamwork” (p. 30). These perceived female traits, ironically, are “identified as transformational, shared leadership styles” (Sanchez & Thornton, 2010, p. 4). The use of the term “feminine ways of knowing” is prevalent across multiple research studies, serving as a header for the multiple perceived attributes of female leaders as being “less linear, separate, and hierarchical than (male leaders)” (Luttrell, 1989, p. 35; Sanchez & Thornton, 2010, p. 4).

Although more recent research is noting a paradigm shift away from hierarchical leadership approaches to more transformational and community-based approaches (Doyle, 2004; Sanchez & Thornton, 2010), employer perceptions hold tight to the leadership notion of managerial and hierarchical approaches (Coleman, 2003; Dana & Bourisaw, 2006; Fennell, 2005; Grogan, 2005; Sanchez & Thornton, 2010).

5.5 Implications of findings

Teacher leadership, particularly focused around content area expertise, draws teacher leaders down growth pathways that do not fit the perceived approaches and experiences needed to move into higher level administration roles. With the teaching force predominantly female, one could hypothesize that teacher leader roles are primarily filled by women. This feminizes the perception of the teacher leader role. Research studies have found “female and male career paths

show that men have more job opportunities and higher probability than women and fewer barriers to promotion” (Jabbar et al., 2016, p. 22; Kim & Brunner, 2009).

A large amount of research on teacher leaders positions their key contributions as improving teaching and student performance (Darling-Hammond, 1984; Fletcher & Strong, 2009; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Another significant area of research focuses on how teacher leadership situates within certain contextual conditions, mentoring, and types of professional development (Bickmore & Bickmore, 2010; Carver & Feiman-Nemser, 2009; Israel et al., 2014; Kang & Berliner, 2012; Miller et al., 2020; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). My autoethnography study findings align well with other studies in terms of the types of experiences, mentoring, and dispositional development that can cultivate teacher leadership (Angelle & DeHart, 2011; Berry, 2019; Knapp, 2017; Lambert, 2003; Lieberman & Miller, 2004; Little, 1988; Nerlino, 2020). What truly was a surprise in my data analysis was the strong undercurrent of frustration with perceived gender inequalities. The more I learned to lead, the more leadership experiences I wanted. Yet, the messages I received were that I didn’t have the right leadership approaches or stepping stone experiences.

5.6 Recommendations

I join a growing group of researchers who shine a light on the need to do further research on the persistent gender inequalities in educational leadership (Alston, 2000; Brooking, 2008; Coleman, 2005; Killingsworth et al., 2010; Rigor, 1992; Sanchez & Thornton, 2010; Young, 2005). While creating and fostering the conditions that grow teacher leaders is critical to research, an additional layer would be to also capture genders represented within such studies. Additionally, future qualitative research should be designed in such ways as to gather research participants’ personal reflection as to what drove them to take up a teacher leader role. Future

teacher leader research needs to expand beyond studying from afar global themes. Rather, future research on teacher leadership needs to bring the voices of teacher leaders into the room, humanizing what drives their leadership purpose(s).

With the strong norms of egalitarian culture within schools, which in turn anchors teacher leadership roles as being most effective when the teacher leader remains in the classroom (Murphy, 2007), a high percentage of female educators are relegated to remain in only lower level leadership positions. If transformational learning theory is pivotal to growing leadership, educational leadership programs should consider incorporating curriculum and structured dialogues with leadership cohorts as to leadership approaches that foster building such learning environments and conditions. In addition, the topic of gender inequality in educational leadership should also be a core piece of future educational leadership programs. Finally, building the disposition and practice of metacognitive reflection should be a core practice in both teacher certification programs as well as educational leadership programs.

5.7 Conclusion

The power of tapping into clarity of purpose driving one's career and professional learning could be the critical first building block to developing future educational leaders. Finding opportunity to engage in metacognitive reflection and structured dialogues on topics of equity and social justice in a trusting community of professional peers was a key component to my developing into a teacher leader. Educational professional organizations that foster teacher action inquiry, such as the National Writing Project, can be just as or more influential than a teacher's local district or building's professional learning community (PLC). We must strive to build an educational leadership culture that sees value in a 'feminine way of knowing' leadership approach. In so doing, masculine and feminine approaches to leadership are not in competition,

rather, leaders lean into attributes that will best suit the context, needs, and long-term professional learning culture goals.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Figure 1 *Critical Reflexivity Process*

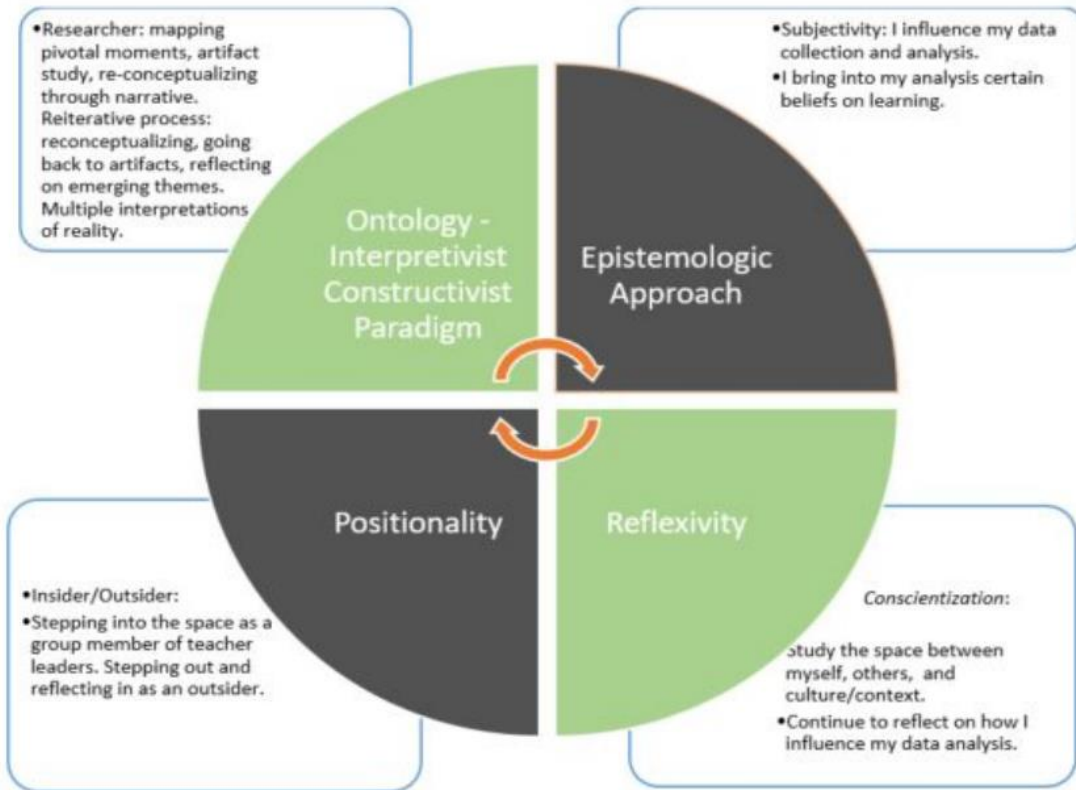


Figure 2 *The relationship between positionality and reflexivity (Li, 2020, p. 44)*

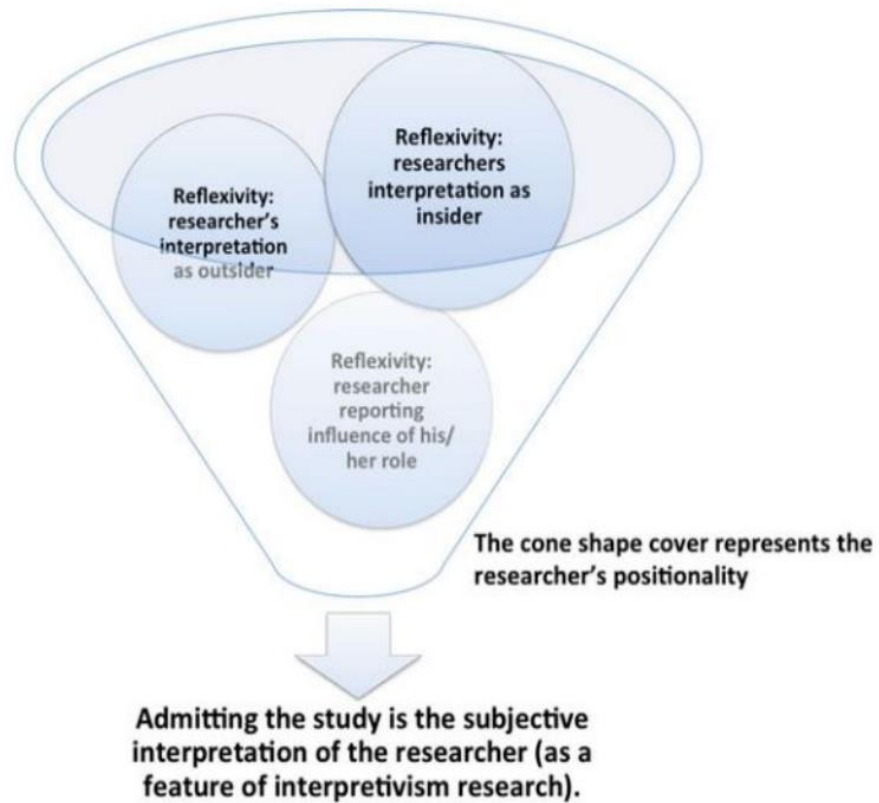


Figure 3 Conceptual mapping tools (Chang et al., 2013, pp. 80, 82-84)

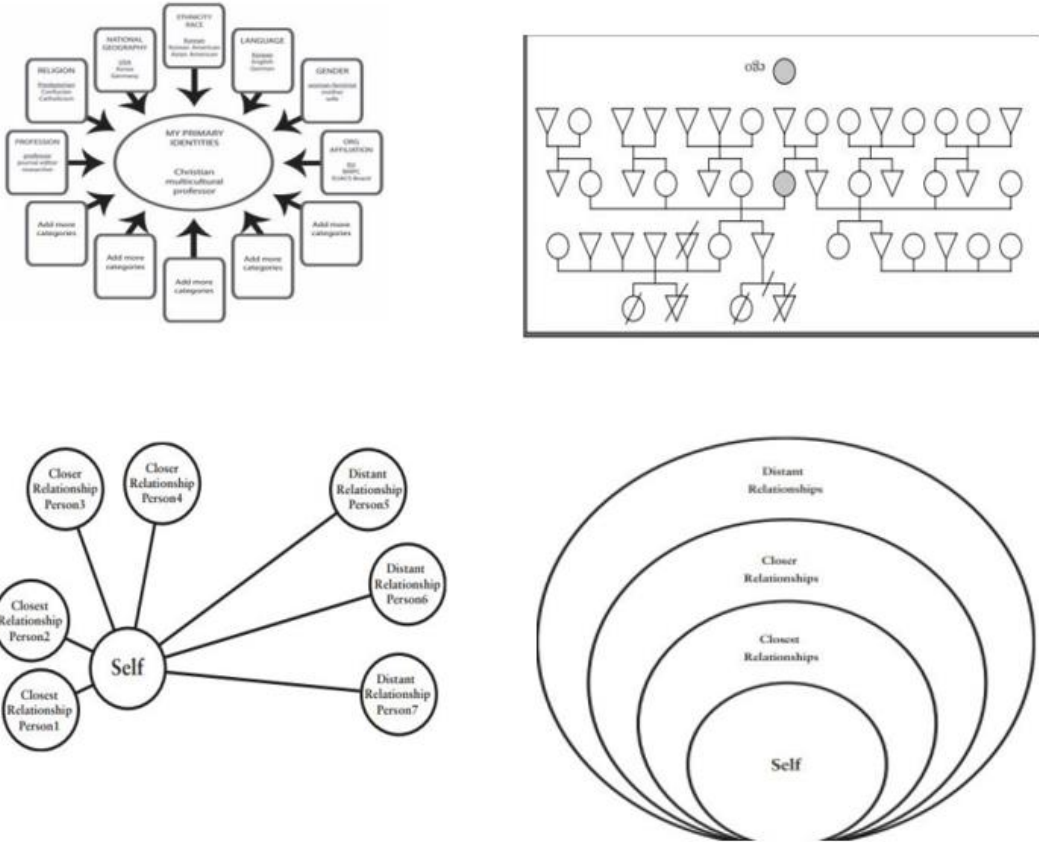


Figure 4 *Star Alignment = Teacher Identity*

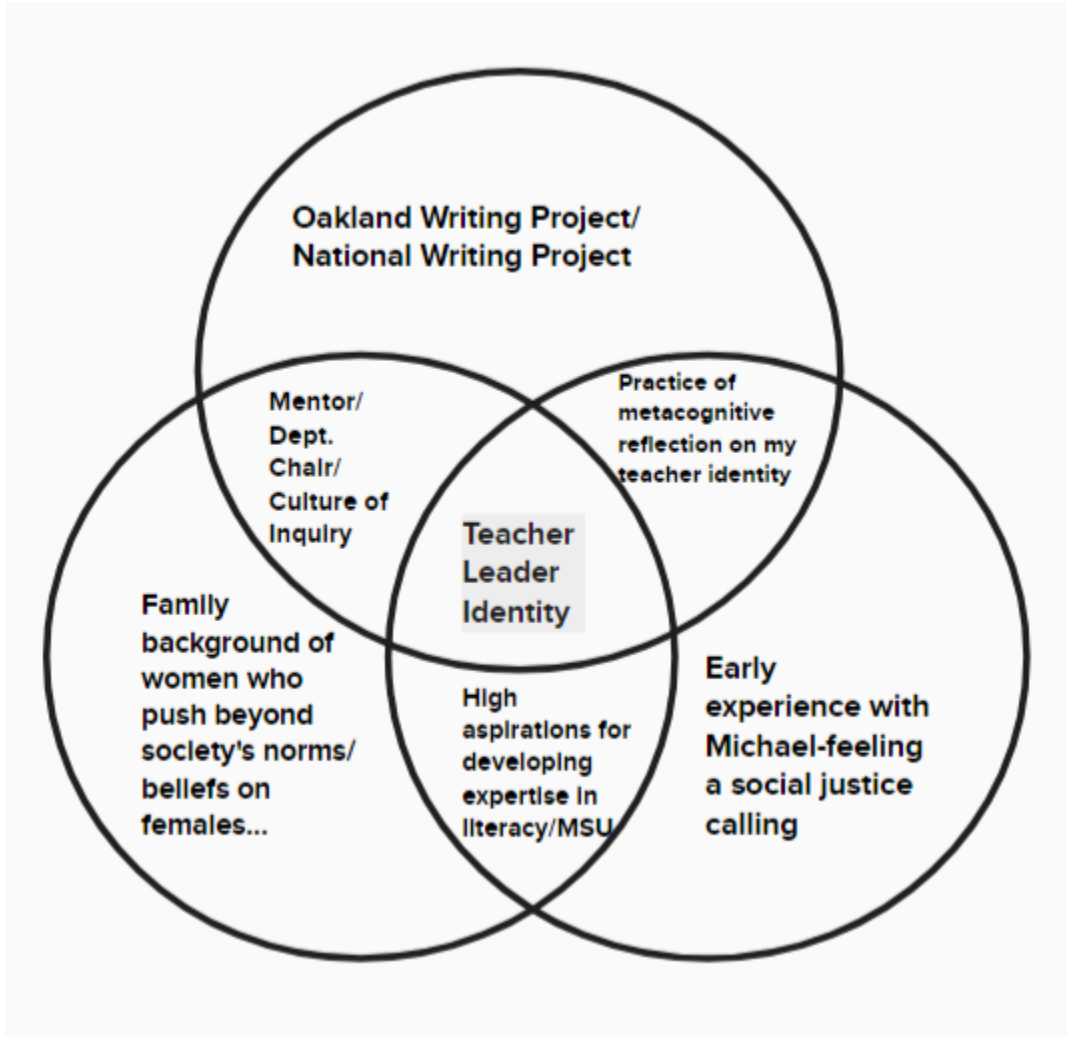


Figure 5 Thematic Timelines

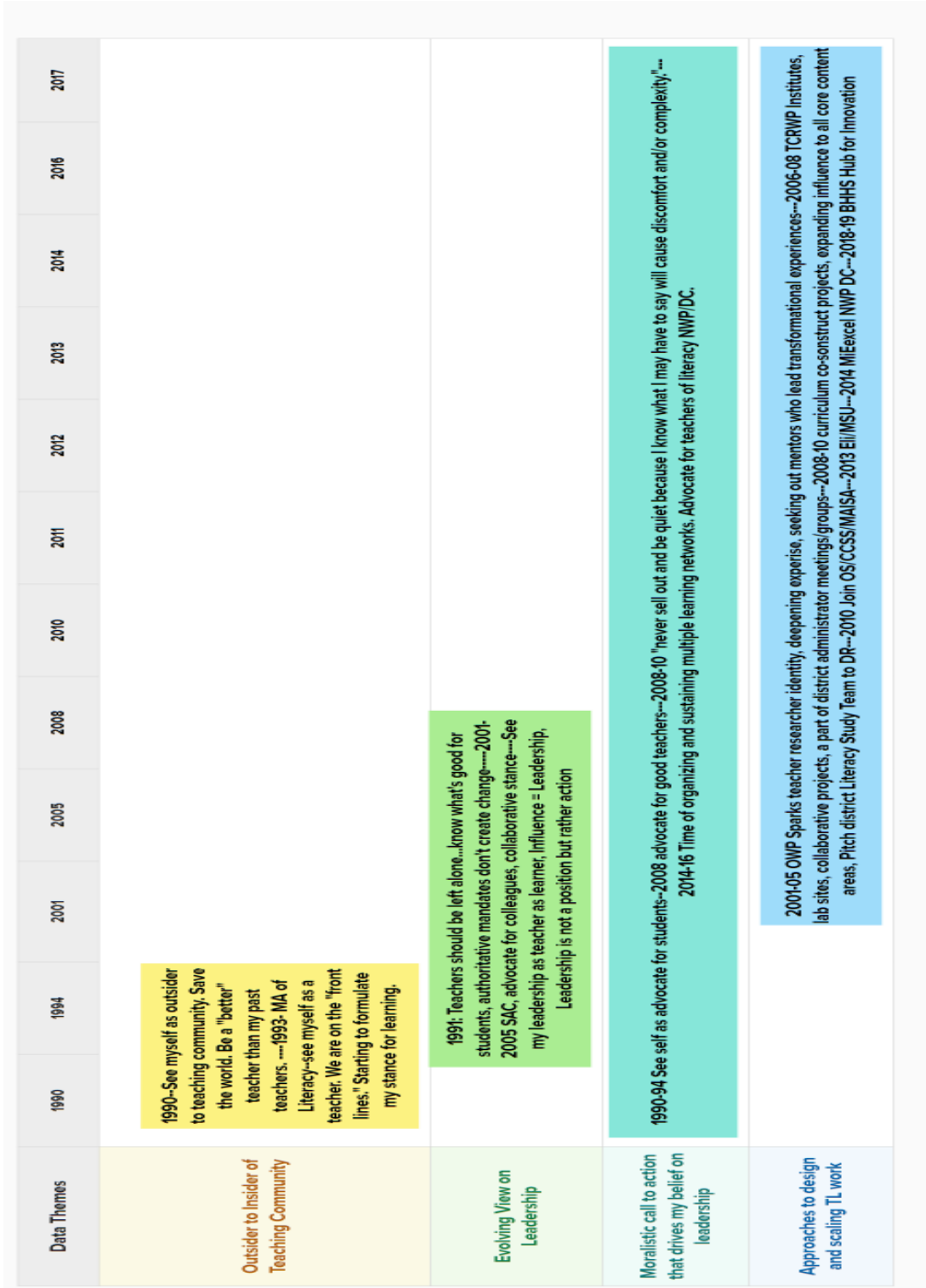


Figure 6 Cognitive Dissonance Evolution



APPENDIX B

Table 1 SAC Projects, Focus Areas, and Design

Year(s)	Project Type	Overview	Reflective journal excerpts and/or emerging theme(s)
2006-2007	SAC: Grammar Resource Study (6-7 ELA)	Form a curriculum resource study team consisting of Middle School ELA teachers. Design study using an action inquiry framework.	<i>Grammar is linked with power. (Moralistic call to action.)</i> <i>Co-create a burning question of inquiry—what are we trying to solve?</i>
2006-2008	SAC: Lab Classroom professional learning	Attend Teachers College Reading & Writing Project (TCRWP) Institute focused on building lab classroom learning frameworks. Form inquiry question focused on reading/writing instruction with small vertical grades ELA teacher cohorts.	<i>My goal is to build a program in the Middle School that builds a love of reading for adolescents and teachers of ALL content areas.</i> <i>Build collaborative partnership with K-5 ELA SAC to co-design professional learning that bridges 4th-7th grade writing instruction.</i>
	SAC: Attending regional, state, and national conferences as district representative.	Attend ACT conferences, meetings with Michigan Department of Education, NCTE, and National Writing Project research collaboratives.	<i>See my role as building expertise in reading/writing through professional networking beyond the district.</i>
	SAC: Developing 3 yr. Strategic Vision Plan, budget planning, curriculum writing, resource studies	Through the coaching of Deputy Superintendent for Teaching and Learning, learn how to create long-term program planning and curriculum resource development study teams. Become aware of policies and their implications on program planning from local board of education on up to state and national level.	<i>Build collaborative partnerships...to co-design.</i> <i>Design job-embedded and long-term PL...rejecting one day training model.</i>
	SAC: partnership brokering with MSU	Broker a learning partnership between Prof. Mark Conley of MSU with the district to engage in the evolving needs of adolescent literacy. Learning partnership is inclusive of all core content area teacher leaders.	<i>Goal is to build a community of teacher researchers within the district.</i>
2008-2010	SAC: form a district Literacy Study Team	Expand learning partnership beyond MSU to include Literacy Consultants at regional intermediate school district (ISD). Introduce Freebody and Luke's (1990) Four Resource Model/Critical Literacy framework.	<i>Co-design with Dep. Supt. a design that pushes [members of group] to become metacognitive about the process of reading.</i> <i>How do we put theory into practice?</i> <i>Important for this to be strongly framed as 6-12 teachers visiting across buildings.</i>
	SAC: member of district leadership groups	Member of the district Instructional Leadership Committee (ILC), Teaching and Learning Council (TLC)	<i>Shared leadership requires communication across many layers—not just the administrative top layer.</i>

Table 2 Mezirow's (2000) Phases of Meaning

Phases of meaning in transformative learning

- Identifying and examining dilemma or critical incident (e.g., change in job or life circumstances)
 - Examining one's feelings (e.g., fear, anger)
 - Conducting critical assessment of one's assumptions
 - Recognizing that one's discontent and process of transformation are shared
 - Exploring options for new roles, relationships, and actions
 - Planning a course of action
 - Acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans
 - Provisional trying of new roles
 - Building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships
 - Reintegrating into one's life based on conditions dictated by one's new perspective
-

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