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UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Greeley, Colorado

The Graduate School

PRINCIPALS' PERCEPTIONS OF DISTRIBUTED
LEADERSHIP IN AN ELEMENTARY
SCHOOL SETTING

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Education

David D. Eggen

College of Education and Behavioral Sciences
School of Educational Research, Leadership, and Technology
Program of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies

August, 2010

This Dissertation by: David D. Eggen

Entitled: *Principals' Perceptions of Distributed Leadership in an Elementary School Setting*

has been approved as meeting the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Education in the College of Education and Behavioral Sciences in School of Educational Research, Leadership, and Technology, Program of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies

Accepted by the Doctoral Committee

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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation is a qualitative study of principals' perceptions on distributed leadership in elementary schools. With the complex challenges of leading schools, this study was designed to explore practicing principals' perceptions on the practice of distributed leadership, the barriers to distributed leadership, and the impact of distributed leadership on student achievement.

The study collected interview and school artifact data from nine practicing elementary principals serving in six Front Range school districts in Colorado. The principals were identified by their superintendents as having a high propensity to distribute leadership tasks to others. In addition, the principals were classified based on school size and years of experience to determine if there was a perceptual difference in school size or years of experience when distributing leadership tasks to others.

The findings revealed that elementary principals believed strongly in the practice of distributing leadership to others (mainly teachers). They identified both formal and informal groups of people to whom they distributed leadership; it was found that both instructional and administrative tasks were distributed. Principals identified peer influence, established trust, and expert knowledge as factors for successful distribution of tasks. Principals also identified barriers to distributing leadership at the school-level and individual level. Principals revealed that distributing leadership had a positive impact on

student achievement through instructional program effectiveness, student assessment gains, and increased opportunities for students. Although elementary principals in this study favored distributing leadership tasks to others, implications for practice should be considered. Principals must be willing to embrace the concept of distributing leadership tasks to others, recognize the ever-present design of schools as bureaucratic organizations, and acknowledge the delicate balance of the teacher's role as an instructional practitioner and a school leader.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Today is a crucial time in educational reform to develop a new leadership framework for understanding school leadership with the intention of maintaining educational improvement and sustainability. The current demand on school leaders to increase student achievement continues to reach new heights. Increasingly more competitive world economies are forcing schools to educate a workforce to keep up with market demands. Schools no longer hold a monopoly on knowledge and have to compete with external sources such as on-line learning and private resources for student learning (Lieberman & Miller, 2004). These complex problems are rapidly placing demands on school leaders to create a viable educational structure for increased student achievement. Fullan (2001) states, "The more complex society gets, the more sophisticated leadership must become" (p. ix). Therefore, educational leadership must continue to seek new models to sustain leadership and accelerate increased academic growth to meet the needs of all children (Donaldson, 2006).

In order for school leaders to positively impact their schools, they must continually reexamine the way in which they lead school organizations. Alma Harris (2008) states, "In the increasingly complex world of education, more diverse types of leadership will be required that are flexible enough to meet changing challenges and new

demands" (pp. 13-14). If leaders do not improve their leadership skills in leading schools, negative ramifications may occur. This pressure has already created diminishing pools of qualified principal candidates and the departure of current principals out of the profession (Harris, 2008; Whitaker, 2003).

Elementary school principals are already recognizing the growing demand of their time and skill to perform endless hours of school leadership tasks to accommodate required achievement goals. As research supports (Copeland, 2001; Donaldson 2006; Whitaker, 2003), the role of the principal has included the following additional leadership responsibilities at the building and district levels: managing school schedules and budgets, evaluating teachers, performing student disciplinarian actions, supervising special education, involving community and parent support (Harris, 2008; Neuman & Simmons, 2000; Whitaker, 2003), and becoming instructional leaders on top of their managerial tasks (Leithwood, Seashore-Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). Expectations for the principal position have steadily expanded over the years but few things have been taken away (Copeland, 2001). In other words, "principals should embody all the traits and skills that remedy all the defects of the schools in which they work" (Elmore, 2000, p. 14).

Since the late 1960s, under the Effective School Movement, the building principal or school leader was identified as an integral part in school improvement (Glanz, 2006). Up until that time, schools seemed satisfied with managerial administration until they were asked to educate a more substantial portion of students who were not achieving in school (Donaldson, 2006). The preparation of school leaders in administrative preparation programs has been a major focus on improving schools for the last few

decades in leadership reform. Today, with the standard-based movement and No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in full maturity, leadership is needed more than ever to address the issue of educating all students to meet the standards of proficiency.

Leadership is instrumental in organizational reform (Leithwood et al., 2007). This is true in business organizations as well. In the book *Good to Great*, Jim Collins (2001) writes about Level Five leadership. Level Five leaders embody a myriad of characteristics and abilities to turn a good company into a great company. Collins' book reveals the importance of leadership in organizational reform. Without effective leadership, schools may fall short of expectations and even face restructuring by state agencies (No Child Left Behind [NCLB], 2002). A report entitled *How the World's Best-performing School Systems Come Out on Top* (McKinsey Report, 2007) found sustained leadership to be crucial in school reform. It states:

> School reforms rarely succeed without effective leadership both at the school level of the system and at the level of the individual schools. Similarly we did not find a single school system that had been turned around that did not possess sustained, committed and talented leadership. (p. 71)

Leadership is vital to school and system success; without it, school reforms would diminish or fail.

Past efforts to understanding school leadership have mostly focused on the single leader concept or "heroic" leader to increase his or her capacity for leadership success and, hence, school success (Camburn, Rowan, & Taylor, 2003; Spillane, 2006). Currently, educational organizations across the nation still support mainly classical leadership styles where a single person leads the school or district (Donaldson, 2006). Donaldson describes classical leadership with four overarching themes:

1. Leaders have formal authority and school-wide roles

2. Leaders have superior expertise and information

3. A rational production system is managed by leaders

4. Leaders control students, staff, and activities. (p. 41)

Classical leadership is bundled into the few who possess positional power; often their legacy is too short to make lasting changes in schools (Crowther, Kaagan, Ferguson, & Hann, 2002). Unfortunately, this type of leadership has a hero effect that lasts only as long as the leader in charge is holding the position. Donaldson (2006) believes that classical leadership does not match the reality of work in schools, fails to promote organizational improvements, and does not create a sustainable structure for the leaders. This is evident in principals leaving the profession in large numbers and states having a difficult time filling vacant leadership positions (Copeland, 2001; Donaldson, 2006).

These shortcomings have forced researchers (Elmore, 2000; Gronn, 2003; Spillane, 2006) to offer a new framework for understanding leadership that aligns more closely to the demands of educating all students to the same universal standards of proficiency as defined by No Child Left Behind (NCLB). Emerging from the research is a concept called distributed leadership that has recently been paralleled with terms like shared, collaborative, democratic, or participative (Leithwood et al., 2004). However, the concept of distributed leadership has a greater significance in the understanding and thinking about leadership (Harris, 2008; Spillane, 2006). The broader understanding of distributed leadership may employ the use of shared, collaborative, democratic, or participative leadership to solve a leadership task; ultimately, however, leadership must be viewed in more robust terms. Distributed leadership moves beyond the different

groups of people involved and incorporates the complexity of the situation into the practice of decision-making (Spillane, 2006). A review of distributed theories will augment this study.

Distributed Leadership Theories

Distributed leadership has roots in early research conducted by C.A. Gibbs (1954). Gibbs wrote about leadership from a social perspective on the organization of people. Gibbs thought that by understanding leadership selection and training, society could harness its own "social fate" (p. 877). He describes three theories on leadership. The first, unitary traits, characterizes leaders as having an encompassing trait for all situations. This theory has been found to be an inaccurate description of leadership since it is impossible for someone to have traits for all situations. The second theory, constellation-of-traits, exposes a recognizable pattern of traits the leader has at his or her disposal. This theory also fails to define leadership accurately since persons who possess certain traits do not become leaders; a leader in one situation may not be a leader in another. Third, interactional theory incorporates a larger sense of leadership to include leader, followers, the group, the structure, and the situation of the task. He posits, "What is needed is a conception in which the complex interactions of these factors can be incorporated" (p. 914). Early on, Gibbs notes that leadership is complex and is a function of the leader's traits, social situation, and the interaction between them. Others researcher have followed Gibbs.

To sustain improvements in schools on a large scale, Richard Elmore (2000) describes distributed leadership as "multiple sources of guidance and direction, following the contours of expertise in an organization, made coherent through a common culture"

(p. 15). Elmore argues that school leadership must be "de-romanticized" (p. 13) in American culture so as to create a leadership experience that is more congruent to the workings of current educational systems. Describing schools as complex, Elmore suggests that in "knowledge-intensive" (p. 15) schools, there is no way to complete leadership tasks without distributing them to others.

Elmore (2000) advances distributed leadership to improve the success in large-scale school reform by suggesting five design principles:

1. Maintain a tight instructional focus sustained over time.

2. Routinize accountability for practice and performance in face-to face relationships.

3. Reduce isolation and open practice up to direct observation, analysis, and criticism.

4. Exercise differential treatment based on performance and capacity, not volunteerism.

5. Devolve increased discretion based on practice and performance (p. 30).

In order for effective school reform to occur, Elmore believes there must be a concentrated action among people with varying levels of content experience and a role respect for people who complete the task.

Peter Gronn (2003) views distributed leadership as a concerted action that can be viewed from a holistic encapsulation of leadership rather than an aggregate of individual leadership acts. He outlines three concerted actions that provide evidence of leadership actions: (a) spontaneous collaboration, (b) intuitive working relations, and (c) institutionalized practices (pp. 35-36). First, Gronn describes *spontaneous collaboration*

as work spread across multiple participants. Collaboration of participants can take shape

in a variety of ways depending on the situation and needs of the organization. Second,

intuitive working relations focuses on the working relationships formed when certain

expertise from a mixture of people is needed to complete a task. Gronn refers to these

working relationships as typical to friendships or marriage where all parties work from a

common framework. Third, *institutionalized practice* refers to the formal and informal

practices found within the organization. Formal and informal practices can occur side-

by-side and be institutionalized based on the attributions of the leadership. Gronn's work

on distributed leadership is grounded in the argument that the study on leadership must

move beyond the single leader and focus on the function of leadership as a contribution

of others.

Spillane (2006), building on the work of Elmore (2000) and Gronn (2003),

defines distributed leadership as "collective interactions among leaders, followers, and

their situation that are paramount" (Spillane, 2006, p. 4). He identifies multiple

constituents as the leader-plus aspect of his model. Spillane's distributed leadership

theory focuses on groups of constituents, leaders and followers, defined to a specific

situation rather than single leaders acting in isolation. In terms of practicing distributed

leadership, Spillane describes it as a "framework for thinking about and framing

investigations of leadership practice" (p. 102). His theory includes three important

elements:

1. Leadership practice is the central and anchoring concern.
2. Leadership practice is generated in the interactions of leaders, followers, and
    their situation; each element is essential for leadership practice.

3. The situation both defines leadership practice and is defined through

    leadership practice (p. 4).

Spillane (2006) uses Adams School in Chicago as an example of distributed leadership. Adams School uses a five-week assessment routine to involve leaders from a variety of educational areas in the school. The school includes the literacy coordinator, teachers, principal, and African American heritage coordinator in this particular setting to co-perform leadership routines either separately or together depending on the leadership task. This example of distributed leadership in Adams School identifies Spillane's theory of stretching leadership tasks between leaders, followers, and the situation over time.

Spillane (2006) goes beyond the single leader or "heroic" (p. 4) leader concept to describe leadership as more than the skills and ability of an individual leader; it should be viewed as a practice amongst leaders and followers in situations. He argues that viewing leadership from a single person perspective does not capture the true dynamics of the leadership function in schools.

Researchers stand in unison with the paradigm shift away from focusing leadership on one single or "heroic" leader to define leadership. Leadership is to be viewed with more complexity, with a broader scope, and stretched over leaders and followers working in various situations (Elmore, 2000; Gronn, 2003; Spillane, 2006). Due to the complexity of schools, individual leadership traits and skills are not enough to meet the demands schools face. Therefore, a new framework for understanding and practicing leadership is needed.

In education, studies supporting the practice of distributed leadership have surfaced. According to Leithwood et al. (2004), distributed leadership has contributed to

the effectiveness of school success through building the capacity of teachers. Researchers (Camburn et al., 2003; Harris, 2008; Spillane 2006; Timperley, 2005) who have studied distributed leadership theory have determined positive validation for this theory and believe more research must be done in this area to benefit student achievement and its sustainability in schools.

The Problem

With the focus on leadership reform in schools and the increased demands on school leaders, researchers (Elmore, 2000; Harris, 2008; Gronn, 2003; Spillane, 2006) are promulgating the idea that a new leadership framework is needed in schools to meet the demands of sustained achievement for all students. School districts continue to state that it is difficult to find building leaders as current ones retire (Copeland, 2001). School leaders have already indicated that the task of leading schools is no longer an attractive position to hold (Copeland, 2001; Harris, 2008; Whitaker, 2003). With school leaders not filling positions or leaving the profession, and with increased standards accountability, it is time to explore the possibilities of an emergent leadership framework called distributed leadership.

Donaldson (2006) suggests that building leaders are frustrated with their abilities to reform schools single-handedly, let alone adding more leadership skills to make them over as new leaders. School leaders are failing to match their leadership abilities with the demands of current educational reforms. In order to maintain school leadership as a vital piece in school reform, research needs to explore new methods to enhance leadership characteristics in schools and increase the effectiveness of principal sustainability and school success.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to examine elementary principal perceptions of distributed leadership theory to determine if this is a viable leadership model that leaders of elementary schools can utilize to educate all children to current educational standards in elementary schools. This qualitative study focused on interviews of currently practicing elementary principals in Colorado. Currently, research supports distributing leadership practices among connected constituents to improve educational systems (Harris, 2008; Leithwood et al., 2004; Spillane, 2006). However, more research is needed on the principal's practice to distribute leadership and if this creates sustained academic achievement. In this study, it was vital to interview elementary principals on the practice of distributed leadership in an attempt to explore the characteristics that identify distributed leadership in schools today as a framework for continued growth for all students.

Research Questions

This study was led by the following three research questions to gain insight into the practice of distributing leadership in elementary schools.

Q1   What are elementary principals' perceptions on the practice of distributing leadership tasks?

Q2   What are elementary principals' perceptions on the barriers of distributing leadership tasks?

Q3   What are elementary principals' perceptions on the impact of distributed leadership on student achievement?

Current research supports that building principals have positive direct and indirect contributions on student achievement (Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Leithwood et al., 2004; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). It is also supported that leadership can define the

course of reform in schools (Harris 2008; Leithwood et al., 2004; McKinsey Report, 2007). Researchers (Harris, 2008; Spillane, 2006) agree that distributed leadership tasks exist and have research to support the evidence. However, more research is needed on principal perceptions of the practice and barriers of distributing leadership and if it creates sustained academic achievement. Therefore, a focus on the elementary principal as a contributing factor to student success in this study will further add to the research on distributed leadership and sustained academic achievement.

Rationale

Ultimately, schools were created to help students learn and function in the world in which they live (Spring, 2000). Since its early beginnings, schools were transformed to meet the political demands of the time. For example, during the Cold War and subsequent launch of Sputnik by the Russians, schools were asked to increase their emphasis on math and science (Dow, 1991; Hartman, 2008). In 1983, the National Commission on Excellence (U.S. Department of Education) released a report entitled *A Nation at Risk*. Schools were once again asked to commit to higher standards for all because schools were thought to be failing our children in an insurmountable way (Lund & Wild, 1993). Today, schools are once again asked to ensure that all schools achieve 100% student proficiency by the year 2014 under the current No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). As schools work toward students attaining high learning standards, leadership must also evolve to handle the increased complexity of our world (Harris, 2008). However, research indicates that individual leaders cannot achieve school success through the use of individual leadership traits alone (Donaldson, 2006). As a result of increased educational demands, principals are leaving

the position and few are choosing this career (Copeland, 2001; Harris 2008; Whitaker, 2003). Reframing leadership from the single-leader concept utilizing distributed leadership theory schools may meet the requirements of NCLB, the standards-based movement, and all students' success.

Significance of Study

The significance of this qualitative study was to add to the currently expanding body of research on distributed leadership in elementary schools. Studies in this area previously have been conducted using both quantitative and qualitative methods to address this topic. Most studies have revealed evidence that leadership tasks are being distributed to others. Research also reveals that distributing leadership tasks to others has a positive effect on building teacher capacity and student achievement (Camburn et al., 2003; Harris, 2008; Leithwood et al., 2004; Spillane, 2006; Timperley, 2005). However, research has been limited on (a) the practice of distributed leadership, (b) the barriers of distributed leadership, and (c) the importance of academic achievement and long-term school success. By adding additional research to the already growing body of research, practicing principals and higher education officials who prepare principal preparation programs could benefit from this study.

This study may assist current practicing principals by developing new ways in which to frame their leadership practice. In addition, it may provide the principal with information on organizational structures, task allocation, and identifying constituent expertise to assist in leadership decision-making. Higher education officials could also use this research information to analyze the effectiveness of developing programs for

principal preparation. Practicing principals and higher education officials would benefit from this study.

Definition of Terms

Adequate yearly progress (AYP). An accountability measure defined individually by states to meet the objectives of current NCLB legislation. It is a measurement standard that states incorporate to measure a LEA or school's yearly performance (U.S. Department of Education, 2002).

Collaborative leadership. "Leading in a way in which leaders structure decision-making processes to allow appropriate staff, student and parent participation that a shared vision and agreed-upon ways of implementing the direction, politics and programs of the school can occur" (Telford, 1996, p. 26).

Democratic leadership. Leadership that creates consensus through the participation of others (Fullan, 2001).

Distributed leadership. Leadership practice distributed over leaders, followers, and their situation where it incorporates the activities of multiple groups of individuals (Spillane, 2006).

Leadership. According to Spillane (2006),

Leadership refers to activities tied to the core work of the organization that are designed by organization members to influence the motivation, knowledge, affect, or practices of other organizational members of that are understood by organizational members as intended to influence their motivation, knowledge, affect or practice. (p. 12)

Participative leadership. Participative leadership focuses on shared decision-making from participants of the group (Leithwood, Jantzi, & Steinbach, 1999).

School leadership. "The mobilization of people to adapt a school's practice and beliefs so that it more fully achieves its mission with all children" (Donaldson, 2006, p. 2).

Shared leadership. "An emergent state where team members collectively lead each other" (Avolio, Walumbwa, & Weber, 2009, p. 431).

Sustained academic achievement. Students enrolled in a public educational system must show increased academic growth according to the benchmarks set forth by each individual state as measured by No Child Left Behind (NCLB). The goal is for each student to achieve at grade-level or better in reading and mathematics by the year 2014 (U.S. Department of Education, 2008).

Teacher leadership. "It applies the distinctive power of teaching to shape meaning for children, youth, and adults. And it contributes to long-term, enhanced quality of community life" (Crowther et al., 2002, p. 10).

Limitations to the Study

Qualitative methods by design limit the generalizability of this information to other situations. In addition to the method of study, a number of other factors limited this study: sample participants, sample size, and matrix of school size, and years of experience.

1. Interviews were conducted with currently practicing elementary principals only. Other groups associated with the school did not provide data for this study. The nature of distributed leadership suggests that followers (teachers, classified personnel, students, and parents, etc.) represent an important aspect of distributed leadership practice. Collecting data from only one aspect of the distributed leadership practice

limited the data to determine if distributed leadership practice actually occurred as how it was perceived by elementary principals.

2. The study consisted of a small sample size of elementary principals. Only nine elementary principals in Colorado participated in this study.

3. The small geographical location from which the sample size was selected was limited in this study. Elementary principals were selected from 6 of the 178 (St. Hilaire, 2010) school districts in Colorado.

4. This study included only public elementary schools and did not include any private or religious elementary schools. This was purposeful due to the requirements of No Child Left Behind (2002) affecting public schools.

Summary

This qualitative study was conducted to gain further understanding of principal perceptions on the practice of distributing leadership in schools. Research supports that this model has merit with current school reform (Elmore, 2000; Gronn, 2003; Spillane, 2006). The paradigm shift away from the single leader and movement toward a more distributed environment is promising for leaders and the schools they lead. This study will add empirical value to the success of this framework for future use in elementary schools. Chapter II reviews the literature on this topic of study. Chapter III describes the methodology of the study and Chapter IV discusses the results of the study. Chapter V presents the summary of the findings, recommendations, and conclusions as well as future areas of study.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Educational leadership is at the heart of major reform for schools. It is imperative that research is conducted at the school level to gain further insight into the complexity of leadership in today's schools. This review on educational leadership grounds the need for this study. It begins with a historical perspective of educational leadership, tracing the beginning of the study of educational leaders as factors for school effectiveness and follows with a descriptive analysis on the structures of distributed leadership as a possible framework for leadership success. Included in the research review are leadership elements based on organizational structures, principal effects on student achievement, implication of No Child Left Behind, and teachers and their roles in distributed leadership. The literature review provides an overview of the important topics surrounding distributed leadership in schools.

Effective Schools Research

The focus on educational leadership as a contributor to school performance began in the late 1960s (Donaldson, 2006; Mace-Matluck, 1987). Prior to that time, most reform efforts were conducted at the district level rather than at the school level (Donaldson 2006). School level leadership was accepted as a middle management function executed by male principals in schools with mostly female faculty and staff (Biklen, 1995). Most decisions about schools often came from above the school-level;

whereas a good school leader was considered a person who followed direction and provided adequate results. When it was found that schools were not meeting the needs of all students, a shift in perspective was necessary (Donaldson, 2006). With the shift of focus to the school level, many important studies were conducted during this period that led way to the emergence of educational leadership as a positive factor in student achievement.

Brookover, Beady, Flood, Schweitzer, and Wisenbaker (1979) indicated that the beliefs of teachers and principals contributed to the positive achievement gains of students. A study conducted by Edmonds (1979) synthesized the literature from several studies on effective school research. He highlighted the importance of educational leadership in creating effective schools. Edmonds identified six characteristics of effective schools: (a) strong administrative leadership; (b) a climate of high expectation; (c) an orderly, safe climate conducive to teaching and learning; (d) basic skill acquisition takes precedence over all other activities; (e) school resources targeted towards fundamental objectives; and (f) frequently monitor student progress. This early analysis set the foundation for researchers to continue to focus on the educational leader as a promising factor in creating effective schools.

More recently, Marzano (2000) conducted an analysis of research on effective schools. Marzano, building on the research of Scheerens and Bosker (1997), found eight factors that incorporated school-level factors to increase student achievement and overall school effectiveness:

1. Opportunity to learn
2. Time
3. Monitoring
4. Pressure to achieve

5. Parental involvement
6. School climate
7. Leadership
8. Cooperation. (Marzano, 2000, p. 56)

It is evident that leadership has emerged as a school level factor to increase school

effectiveness. Marzano goes beyond listing leadership as just one of the school-level

factors and states, "… leadership could be considered the single most important aspect of

effective school reform" (p. 172).

Effective school research created a new era in the way researchers viewed school

level effects on student achievement. Prior to this time, individual schools were not the

focus of study; the focus was mainly at the district or system level (Donaldson, 2006).

Since the Effective School Movement, school leadership has focused on the individual

school leader's ability to promote effective school leadership and create an environment

of success for all students (Gronn, 2003). Thus, a review of the effects principals have on

student achievement is necessary.

Early research has revealed mixed results of direct principal effects on increased

student achievement. Some studies reveal a 2 to 8% variation in student achievement

among schools; however, other studies reveal that principals have had little to no effect

on student achievement (Hallinger & Heck, 1996). More recent research has determined

that a greater variance in student achievement exists. Leithwood et al. (2004) state that

the total direct and indirect effects on student achievement are .25 of the school effect.

Marzano et al.'s (2005) meta-analysis of the research also found that leadership had a .25

effect on student achievement. An effect size of .25 gives cause for researchers to

discover what leadership activities exist that allow for such a variance in student

achievement.

Marzano et al. (2005) found 21 principal responsibilities in their meta-analysis of the research that led to the variance effect on student achievement. He concluded that situational awareness, flexibility, discipline, outreach, and monitoring/evaluating had the highest effects on student's achievement from .27 to .33 of total student variance. Leithwood et al. (2004) discovered three "basic" leadership practices for school success (p. 8): setting direction, developing people, and redesigning the organization. The study revealed that setting direction and all of its subtasks accumulated the largest impact for student achievement from leaders (Leithwood et al., 2004).

Both research meta-analyses revealed a connection to a leader's responsibilities and his or her ability to create a viable system for increased student achievement. Principals had an effect on student achievement; however, creating a successful system in a high accountability era can be difficult. Leaders also have to be aware of external forces that shape the leadership environment. A review and understanding of No Child Left Behind will identify the accountability pressures school leaders now face.

No Child Left Behind

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB; 2002) has created dramatic changes in the way the public holds schools accountable. Broad sweeping changes enacted by this legislation requires schools to focus on areas such as evidence-based academic instruction, employing qualified teachers and paraprofessionals, increasing parental choice, and implementing a reliable measure of student accountability. This legislation sent a message to schools that federal and state governments were taking a more formal role in education (Center of Education Policy, 2003).

NCLB legislation (2002) had established guidelines and aggressive goals for school and student success.. In addition, the legislation was designed to help close the achievement gap in the areas of race, ethnic background, income level, disability, and limited English proficiency. Individual states are required to disaggregate the data to define the comparison of these sub-groups from year to year to determine if each group and the sub-groups are meeting their Average Yearly Progress (AYP). If schools fail to meet the AYP, they may face significant sanctions (NCLB, 2002).

Other requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act (2002) include the assurance that students are taught by highly qualified teachers and paraprofessionals. To be considered highly qualified, teachers must have a bachelor's degree, state certification or licensure, and demonstrate competency in the subject area being instructed (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). By 2005-2006, teachers were to be highly qualified to teach in the core academic subject areas. In addition, paraprofessionals were to be highly qualified by the year 2006 with either a two-year degree beyond high school or having passed a rigorous state test (Center of Educational Policy, 2003). Both groups of educators must be willing to obtain additional instructional preparation or be asked to leave their duties or be reassigned. Since the passage of NCLB in January of 2002, school districts and state education departments have worked feverishly to accommodate the rigid design of this legislative act. Time is closing in on the end date goal of the year 2014 where all children must meet a proficiency rating on state standards.

Popham (2005) argues that schools will reach a threshold of proficiency and will no longer be able to move forward to meet their goal of 100%. Therefore, many schools will be placed into school improvement through the sanctions of this legislation. Schools

that fail to meet AYP in consecutive years will have to write improvement plans. These plans are to be written collaboratively with all constituents associated with the school, primarily to meet the legislation's requirement for increased student performance (NCLB, 2002).

As political pressure in education mounts, as seen with NCLB (2002), the demand on schools to achieve 100% proficiency continues to be tremendous (Lashway, 2003). As a result, leaders of our public schools are faced with addressing a new era of high expectation and accountability. This new assertion comes with a significant, punitive ramification for school leaders and the schools they lead (Lashway, 2003). According to NCLB, schools that fail to meet AYP goals will be required to implement strategies for school improvement or face restructuring. School leaders are now faced with tough decisions as to how to lead schools.

School leaders and, more specifically, building-level principals are experiencing an ever-increasing demand to sustain long lasting student academic achievement. Historically, the managerial function of the school leader has evolved to include additional leadership complexity (Harris, 2008; Leithwood, Mascall, & Strauss, 2009). Collaboration with all people associated with the school has been required by NCLB (2002) to accommodate societal demands for school success. The future of school success will be determined by the leader's ability to create an environment where teachers and the community are able to collaboratively lead. An exploration of organizational structures is vital to leadership success.

Organizational Structures

Expanding past individual cognition (Timperley, 2005) to the organization has roots in Sergiovanni's work in 1984; he posits, "Leadership and its organizational context are inseparable and it is difficult to understand one without the other" (p.115). Gronn (2000) describes the relationship between the duality: "Through time, that emerging and always potentially modifiable organizational structure, in turn, acts back on or shapes the conduct of the agents" (p. 322). The connection between the individual leader and the organization gives way to a new broader dimension of discovery on leadership.

Historically, research on leadership reform has been primarily focused through "trait" research (Taylor, 1994) in which the structure of the organization and the principal position at the top of the hierarchy has remained relatively constant over time. Elmore (2000) argues that the current structure of leadership design and practice are at fault in failing current demands. He states that principals and superintendents are "hired exclusively from the ranks of practice" (p. 2). This practice fails to bring in new ideas from people with a new perspective on how to lead schools. Changes in systemic constraints, as created by the structure of organizational bureaucratic hierarchy, should be considered to accommodate the needed change required for success in our schools (Elmore, 2000).

Past research on leadership traits has focused entirely on the individual's skills and talents as the role leader of a school (Donaldson, 2006). To understand a more complete picture of the principal role, it is also important to identify the characteristics of the structure they lead. Therefore, the following analysis of two organizational structures

addresses the fundamental design of the bureaucratic school model and the learning

system school model.

Organization as a Bureaucracy

The organization as a bureaucracy is best explained by the idea that organizations

are able to control the process of producing a desired output. Just like a machine with

working parts, an organization can also integrate parts to make a combined workable

system (Morgan, 2006). Bureaucratic organization is similar to what William Schneider

(1994) defines as a combination of control culture--a culture focusing on certainty,

predictability, and stability to enhance organizational success and competence culture--a

culture focused on efficiency, excellence, and expertise.

The major components of the bureaucracy include focusing the organizational

effort on a single objective. Systems of this kind work best when producing the same

product--work assignments are scripted and perfected to improve efficiency. These

systems can be found in stable environments that adjust work activity according to a

predetermined set of regulations and established norms (Blase & Kirby, 2000). If the

employee is compliant to this system, operations run efficiently; however, if they are not

compliant, then problems may occur (Morgan, 2006). This type of system in schools is

designed to regiment and standardize procedures within the organization (Beach &

Reinhartz, 2000).

Early on, schools adopted this model as a result of increased economies of scale

and complexity (Elmore, 2000). The rise in rigid and controlling structures became

synonymous with the principles of scientific management. Elmore argues this system,

over time, has become the management of structures rather than the management of

instruction, i.e., most administrative duties include "a logic of confidence" (p. 6) that

translates to protecting teaching from public intrusion and creating the appearance of

rational management.

Organization as Learning System

The major components of the organization as a learning system involve complex

learning tasks that meet organizational objectives. As with learning organizations or

knowledge organizations (Uhl-Bien, Marion, & McKelvey, 2007), elements of support

can come from all areas in the organization (Morgan, 2006). Morgan suggests this

process "rests in creating networks of interactions that can self-organize and be shaped

and driven by the intelligence of everyone involved" (p. 116). Uhl-Bien et al. describes

the complexity of organizations as follows:

> It takes complexity to defeat complexity… Knowledge Era leadership requires a
> change in thinking away from individual, controlling view, and toward views of
> organization as complex adaptive systems that enable continuous creation and
> capture knowledge. (p. 301)

Another component of the learning organization suggests that control and

leadership must become decentralized (Morgan, 2006) or flattened (Ouchi, 2003),

something not congruent with the bureaucratic system. In learning systems, it is

important for organizations to set goals and objectives at all levels of the work formation,

not just at the top or at a distance. By disseminating and diffusing control structures,

employees can feel empowered within the organization. When employees are

empowered, "people are strongly encouraged to think and act creatively and to take

reasonable risks" (Schneider, 1994, p. 91). When this is the scenario, employees and

others can contribute directly to the mission of the organization through the collaboration

process.

Divergent System Models

A macro review of the two organizational systems reveals a dichotomy of structure and influence that may affect how a leader practices leadership in the organization. The traditional bureaucratic model is concerned with "the idea that management is a process of planning, organization, command, coordination, and control" (Morgan, 2006, p.18); whereas the learning organization moves "people to expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire" (Senge, 2006, p. 3). Elmore (2000) argues that schools are failing to meet the demands of the standards-based movement due to a traditional lack of focus on improving the "technical core" (p. 6) of schools. Instead, school leaders focus their work on preserving the image that schools are meeting the needs of their constituents. Kofman and Senge (1995) state, "We are so focused on our security that we don't see the price we pay: living in bureaucratic organizations where the wonder and joy of learning have no place" (pp. 42-43). The bureaucratic model has met some resistance with learning systems organizations.

Leadership practices bound to rigid hierarchical organizational structure do not match with knowledge-based work systems (Harris, 2008). In a world economy that has shifted or flattened (Freidman, 2005), leadership practices in the hierarchical model seem inadequate (Senge, 2006). Leadership and structure must work together to redesign a system that improves the structure of schooling (Hargreaves, 2009). Hargreaves shares five components of his plan for the required shift: (a) flatter, less hierarchical staff structure; (b) distributed leadership; (c) student leadership; (d) leadership development and succession; and (e) participative decision-making processes. Researchers (Gronn, 2000; Leithwood et al., 2004; Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2004) have discussed the

need to focus on the structure in which leaders or agents function (Spillane et al., 2004) as a major component in leadership practice.

Harris (2002) believes changing structures may be more difficult. She states, "It would be naïve to assume that the structural, cultural, and the micro-political barriers operating in schools would simply fall away to accommodate and support distributed leadership" (p. 12). Redefining the external structure may be quite difficult considering the design of our state and federal bureaucracies; however, redefining the perception of school control may not. For example, Snyder and Anderson's (1986) seminal work in systems thinking can provide principals with an avenue to shift their perception away from the isolated worker to a culture of shared vision and collaboration with closely related working units. With a shift in organizational perception, the principal may comprehend the importance of aligning systems to improve the work process of the organization and accommodate pending accountability requirements.

The role of the system in the development of leadership is of importance to the overall discovery of practice and school reform. Leadership does not occur in isolation; rather it works concomitantly with structures and various constituents internal and external to the organization. It is incumbent on the leader to work within a system that best defines the work of the organization. Elmore (2000) argues that current leadership practices are not able to meet current standards-based reforms. He states, "Public schools and school systems, as they are presently constituted, are simply not led in ways that enable them to respond to the increasing demands they face under the standards-based reform" (p. 2). Elmore and others (Gronn, 2003; Leithwood et al., 2007; Spillane et al., 2004) suggest that another leadership theory exists that offers promise to leaders as a way

to aggregate the actions of leaders and followers through varying practice and situation (Spillane, 2006). A review of distributed leadership theories will establish a foundation for proposed leadership reform for school organizations.

Distributed Leadership Theories

The theory of distributed leadership is not a new concept and has historical roots in research. Cecil Gibbs in 1954 promulgated the idea that leadership can be distributed amongst groups. He states, "Leadership is an interactional phenomenon, and interaction theory seems best fitted to provide a framework for studies of leadership" (p. 917). His work has led others (Elmore, 2000; Gronn, 2003; Spillane, Diamond, & Jita, 2003) to identify that leadership is more than the traits of a single leader; the situation plays a pivotal role in the leadership practice. Timperley (2005) suggests that leadership has always been distributed in organizations and is surprised how long it has taken to create a framework in which to study it. However, this perspective on leadership has been difficult to identify in practice.

Distributed leadership has had difficulty establishing itself as a lucid leadership theory and has been mislabeled as a single leadership practice to reform schools. Some researchers (Harris, 2005; Hopkins & Jackson, 2003) have argued that it is not easily identifiable and begs the question whether it has any empirical value on student achievement (Bennett, Wise, Woods, & Harvey, 2004). It has taken many years of discussion and exploration to identify and generate a clearer understanding of the concept.

Distributed leadership is not simply dividing leadership tasks (Harris, 2008) and handing them to available constituents; it is a framework for understanding the

complexities of leadership itself (Spillane et al., 2004). It has survived in theory because it provides reform at the school level to reduce its structural rigidity and focuses attention on the core of instruction (Harris, 2008). Harris posits that distributed leadership is popular for three reasons: empirical, representational, and normative powers.

It has empirical power because research is being unveiled that makes a positive difference in organizational outcomes and student learning. It has representational power because it represents the emergence of a new leadership approach to meet the external demands of schools. Finally, it has normative power because it reflects needed changes in leadership practice in schools (Harris, 2008). All three reasons give promise to the value of continued research. Three researchers provide a more detailed explanation of distributed leadership.

Elmore's Distributed Framework

Elmore (2000) takes a normative approach when describing distributed leadership as a simple process of connecting the expertise of each individual member of the group to the situation at hand. Two main leadership tasks guide his model: (a) the leaders must describe the groundwork that other leaders from various backgrounds would have to follow and (b) the leaders must decide how members would share the responsibility in a system for large-scale improvements. He also identifies five principles that lay the foundation for his model of distributed leadership:

- The purpose of leadership is the improvement of instructional practice and performance, regardless of role.
- Instructional improvement requires continuous learning.
- Learning requires modeling.

- The roles and activities of leadership flow from the expertise required for learning and improvement, not from the dictates of the institution.

- The exercise of authority requires reciprocity of accountability and capacity.

Elmore identifies his theory with a practical perspective. He divides leadership roles into five categories: *policy, professional, system, school*, and *practice*.

Elmore (2000) describes policy as a leader's responsibility to set performance targets, approve standards, and monitor progress towards goals. He defines professional as the leader's responsibility to develop set standards and new instructional practices, design staff development, and pilot new structures. System is described as a leader's responsibility to improve strategies for improvement, allocate system resources toward instructions, and buffer non-instructional issues from faculty. Elmore describes school as a leader's function toward recruiting and evaluating teachers and implementing an incentive structure for schools. Finally, practice is described as evaluating professional development, student work, and professional practice of colleagues. Elmore posits that the leadership functions are not as important as how the functions are distributed to the people who possess the expertise (Elmore, 2000).

Elmore's (2000) distributed framework relies on the assumption that leadership must be distributed in order to promote large-scale improvements. This can be accomplished by distributing leadership tasks to those who have the expertise closest to the problem for improvement. In addition, Elmore suggests that mutual dependency, reciprocity of accountability and capacity, and centrality of instructional practice define a leadership's function to obtain large-scale school reform.

Gronn's Distributed Framework

Gronn (2000) defines distributed leadership through the concept of activity theory. Built upon research by Mintzberg (1973) and Engestrom (1987), activity theory is "a means of tracking distributed influence and leadership" and its role in coordinating the division of labor (Gronn, 2000, p. 334). Gronn uses activity theory because of its importance in describing the connection of human behavior with the world.

Gronn (2000) explains that six components (rules, subject, instrument, object, division of labor and community) are located at equal distance on the triangle from each other; they are always mediated and not direct. Subjects (individuals or groups) do not directly and purposively work with objects but involve instruments (artifacts) or other components of the system to achieve the desired outcome. The key point to be made is that the activities are always a part of a collective labor process (Gronn, 2000; see Figure 1).
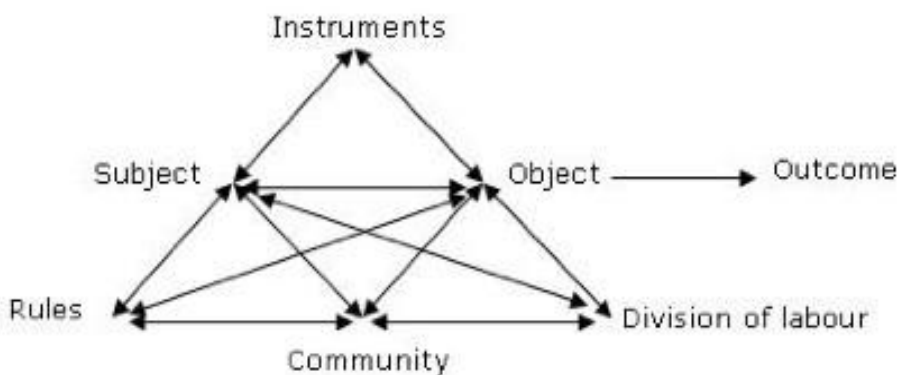
Figure 1. The mediational structure of an activity system (Engestrom, 1987, p. 78).

The work conducted by Gronn (2000) explains that leadership has a place in the organization; however, it must be redefined or structured to meet the needs of the new system of change. Gronn (2003) supports leadership change based on his concerns that the current system of educational leaders becomes engaged in "greedy work" (p. 156). He posits that educational leaders have been pinpointed as the saviors of the organization similar to CEOs of large corporations. Educational policymakers have brought about this system of leadership fantasy and done little to make the desired changes possible. Although this may be a harsh analysis of educational leadership, it has merit since several researchers (Elmore, 2000; Harris, 2008; Leithwood et al., 2009; Spillane, 2006) discuss the need for a shift in the way leadership is viewed in schools.

Spillane's Distributed Framework

Spillane (2006) describes distributed leadership as an activity that is spread through leaders, followers, and their ability to execute leadership tasks. Spillane et al. (2004) agree with Gronn (2000) that the structure of the organization acts as an agency for leaders to utilize artifacts to conduct leadership tasks. They argue that leadership is not just what a principal knows or does but a complex system of interactions between people and situations (see Figure 2 below).

L

L

L

Leaders

LEADERSHIP PRACTICE

F

F

F

Time

Situation   Followers
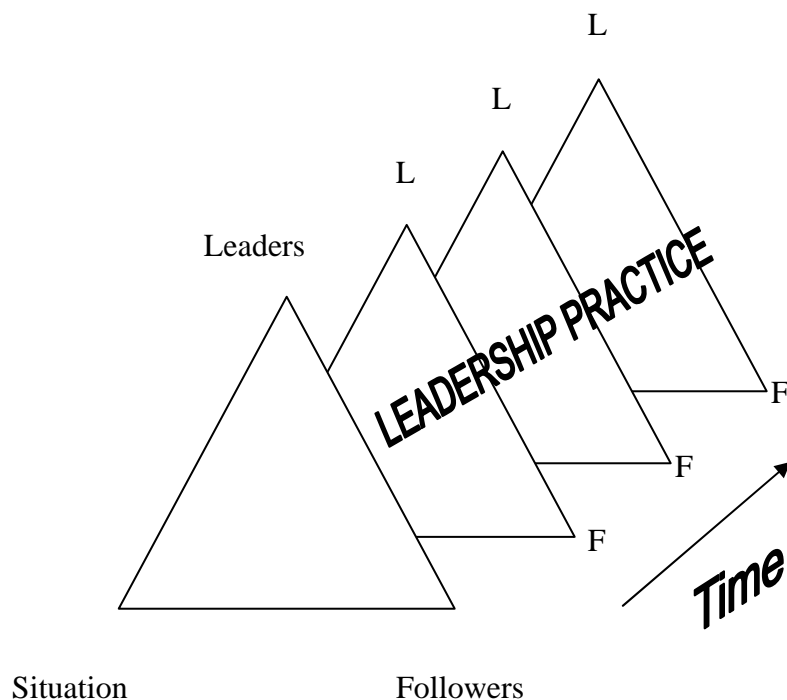
Figure 2. Leadership practice from a distributive perspective (Spillane, 2006, p. 3).

To better understand the working relationship, Spillane et al. (2004) developed a

conceptual framework for understanding the way leaders distribute leadership. Central to

this understanding are four central ideas: (a) leadership tasks and functions, (b) enacting

leadership tasks, (c) social distribution of task enactment, and (d) situational distribution

of leadership practice. Leadership tasks and functions are broken into two overarching

themes-- macro and micro tasks (Spillane et al., 2004). Macro tasks are framed around

larger complex issues surrounding leadership tasks. They would include, but are not

limited to,

- constructing and selling an instructional vision;

- developing and managing a school culture conducive to conversations about the core technology of instruction by building norms of trust, collaboration, and academic press among staff;

- procuring and distributing resources, including material time, support and compensation;

- supporting teacher growth and development;

- providing both summative and formative monitoring of instruction and innovation; and

- establishing school climate in which disciplinary issues do not dominate instructional issues. (Spillane et al., 2004, p. 13)

Micro tasks are much smaller in scope and can be a smaller piece of a macro task. For example, a micro task could entail scheduling teacher release time to build on the overall vision of the school or the task could employ staff training on the possibilities of a new reading program. Both micro tasks are smaller tasks associated with a much larger macro task (Spillane et al., 2004).

Beyond the identification of the micro and macro task is the process of carrying out the task as part of the school's leadership function. Spillane et al. (2004) identify the second piece of the framework as enacting leadership tasks. When studying leadership, it is imperative to focus on the interaction between leaders and followers to gain insight on how leadership unfolds. This can be accomplished through observing day-to-day leadership activities. The enactment of leadership task may vary depending on the expertise of the leader and the follower.

The third piece of the framework is the social distribution of task enactment, i.e., leadership spread through the school. This can take shape in a variety of structural ways. For example, distribution may work as a co-performance where leaders work side-by-side to complete a task. Alternatively, two or more people may work separately but come together to complete a task by sharing their work on the topic (Spillane et al., 2004).

The final piece of the framework is the situational distribution of leadership practice. Spillane et al. (2004) describe this piece as a separation from contingency theory. Contingency theory views situations as external to leadership functions; whereas Spillane et al. believe that situations are within the context of the leadership decision-making and a part of the practice of leadership.

Spillane et al. (2004) offer a comprehensive framework for studying leadership in schools. Recalling that distributed leadership is a paradigm shift from the individual leader to a more complex view of leadership across multiple leaders, they assert that complex organizations need to be studied with complex methods to best understand the comprehensiveness of leadership in schools. A review of current research studies gives insight into the exploration of distributed leadership in practice in schools.

Research on Distributed Leadership

Research on distributed leadership has begun to emerge with a positive result in schools. Many studies have explored the practice of distributed leadership to gain an understanding of the leadership context. Highlighted are three studies conducted by leaders in the field of distributed leadership that build cause and meaning into this researcher's planned investigation.

A study conducted in 2005 by Spillane, Camburn, and Pareja (2007) focused on the co-performance of management and leadership activities in a principal's workday. The sample size included 52 school principals who represented elementary, middle, high, and special schools. This mixed-method design included experience sampling method (ESM) logs, an end-of-the-day principal log, a principal questionnaire, a school staff

questionnaire, observations of school principals, and school principals' responses to open-ended scenarios.

The results indicated that the school principals co-performed 47% of the activities for which they were held responsible or 33% of all work activities over a six-day work period. In addition, the leadership and management functions were broken into administrative type activities and instruction and curriculum activities. These activities were co-performed at about the same level for each activity: administrative activities were at 35% and instruction and curriculum were at 30%. It was also found that the distribution of tasks was different at each school.

Spillane et al. (2007) found that leadership was distributed across multiple agents in formal and informal roles. Although the authors of the study confirmed that there were limitations to the study, especially in the ESM logs, they believed that this data collection sample provided insight into actual leadership practices occurring in schools. The researchers argued that observation and anecdotal data at the time leadership practice occurs is paramount to its discovery.

Another distributed leadership study conducted by Leithwood et al. (2007) inquired about the patterns of leadership distribution, performance of leadership functions, characteristics of non-administrative leaders, and factors promoting and inhibiting the distribution of leadership function. This two-phase study was conducted within eight elementary and secondary schools in one large school district that promoted distributed or shared leadership for more than a decade (Leithwood et al., 2007). The data samples came from 67 district staff, school administrators, non-administrative school leaders, and teachers (Leithwood et al., 2007).

Leithwood et al.'s (2007) study discovered that patterns of distribution of leadership tasks fell mainly into the category of planful alignment--the most effective pattern for leadership distribution. Planful alignment refers to the leadership task or functions given planful thought by the leader (Leithwood et al., 2007). It was also discovered that planful alignment drops off significantly as the priority level of the task declines. They had hypothesized that planful alignment would be the most effective followed by spontaneous alignment, spontaneous misalignment, and anarchic alignment (being least effective).

In terms of leadership performance, Leithwood et al. (2007) studied four broad categories of leadership function: setting direction, developing people, redesigning the organization, and managing the instructional program. It was found that leadership was differentiated and dependent on task. However, most leadership functions remained with senior management. Secondly, Leithwood et al. hypothesized that the more complex the task, the more people would be working on the task. The study found this to vary and was not supported sufficiently by the data. Finally, it was hypothesized that the complexity of the task would draw in those with expertise in completing the task; however, this too was also inconclusive and could have resulted as a bias of the research design.

Characteristics of non-administrative leaders were also studied. Leithwood et al. (2007) identified 10 characteristics of non-administrative leaders: interpersonal skills, organizational skills, personal qualities, professional qualities, commitment to an initiative, range of undertakings, respect for others' cultures, source of good ideas, breadth of experience, and designation as formal leader. It was found that the most

frequently identified category was personal qualities. The second most was commitment and third was interpersonal skills. The researchers posited that there was very little difference between the characteristics of non-administrative leaders and formal leaders.

The final area studied was in the area of influence on the development of distributing leadership. It was found "that distributed patterns of leadership are nurtured when collaborative structures are established" (Leithwood et al., 2007, p. 246). In addition, distributed patterns relied more heavily on expert power than positional power. In summary, distributed patterns develop when there are opportunities for staff to meet to build capacity (Leithwood et al., 2007).

Leithwood et al.'s (2007) study adds empirical value to the concept of distributed leadership. The study revealed many important findings, especially in the area of workload demand for formal leadership. Leithwood et al. state, "Perhaps we should not be surprised since school-based management represents the most determined, explicit, and widespread effort to date, to plan fully distribute leadership functions among districts and their schools as a strategy for school improvement" (p. 63).

These two studies focused on the interaction between leaders, followers, and leadership practice. Both studies revealed valuable insight into the complexity of distributing leadership to others while disaggregating the practice of leadership tasks and functions. However, they had limited information on the direct effectiveness of distributed leadership on student achievement. A study by Timperley (2005) attempted to connect distributed leadership with student achievement.

Timperley (2005) conducted a research study using Spillane et al.'s (2004) distributed leadership framework to test the empirical value of distributed leadership on

school improvement. Her grounded-theory, four-year research study included seven elementary schools in New Zealand. Her data collection method included interviews and observational data with the building principal, literacy leaders, and three first grade teachers. Three meetings were held in each building and the interview questions focused on the activities of the meetings. All data were compared to two independent variables--literacy skills and overall achievement.

Timperley's (2005) findings concluded that schools with distributed leadership practices spread across its boundaries improved student achievement. Her data revealed an initial dichotomy between the two schools in how they conducted their instructional meetings on literacy. Group one conducted their meetings with responsibility falling on the individual teacher's ability to implement the program. In addition, group one did not discuss student achievement data with any connection to the current program in place. Contrarily, group two focused their attention on communicating the message that all students can achieve. Second, the responsibility of student learning rests with all teachers and staff to develop appropriate teaching strategies. Third, they analyzed and disaggregated the student achievement data to better understand how to improve instruction. In comparison after year two, group two had higher achievement data than group one. In year three of the study, group one adopted group two's meeting components and found an increase in student achievement following year three (Timperley, 2005). As a result of her three-year study, evidence exists that distributing leadership tasks to others increases student achievement.

Using two of Spillane's distributed framework constructs--social distribution of task enactment and situational distribution of leadership practice, Timperley (2005) found

that schools which operated with a higher degree of personal accountability were more apt to discount extraneous factors working against student achievement success. In addition, schools that distributed leadership tasks based on expertise rather than formal position had higher achievement scores. Moreover, leaders who created artifacts associated closest to the solution of the problem had better student achievement results.

Timperley's study (2005) revealed that distributed leadership should only be used if the action is directly related to activities that contributed to the increased effectiveness of instruction to students. Evidence shown in this study gives claim to a positive impact on student achievement as viewed through the use of the theoretical framework created by Spillane et al. (2004) to help define the distribution of leadership.

Although studies (Camburn et al., 2003; Leithwood et al. 2004; Timperley, 2005; Spillane et al., 2007) are emerging that add positive evidence of distributed leadership theory in schools, more studies are needed. Although research has captured positive evidence of distributed leadership in schools and has been linked to increased student achievement, results are limited and isolated to small sample sizes. The studies have, however, given researchers added direction for continued exploration on this topic. The roles of two major contributing participants--principals and teachers--are hereby explored to help define the practice of distributed leadership.

Principal's Role in Distributed Leadership

Paramount in sustaining distributed leadership as a framework to enhance student achievement is the principal's willingness to shift his or her singular leadership perception about the context of a school's system and structure. Spillane et al. (2004) define *system* as a place of a recognizable "level of stability and regularized pattern of

social interaction"; whereas *structure* is "the properties of social systems that enable and constrain social action" (p. 22). Principals must yield to the larger context of leadership and look across the landscape for a broader understanding. In doing so, principals seek new methods for increased collaborative involvement and find value in facilitating expertise amongst the leaders of the school toward a common goal (Murphy, Smylie, Mayrowetz, & Seashore-Louis, 2009).

One study from a successful California school revealed that the principal was able to create opportunities for teachers to lead and provide structured support (Chrisman, 2005). The principal fostered teacher leadership in the area of data evaluation, action research, policy input, and teacher mentoring. Other principals in this California district adopted a distributed approach because of increased student achievement. In Riverside County, California, the County Achievement Team (CAT), led by the school's principal, worked collaboratively to increase student achievement (Moore, 2001). This collaboration was in the form of parents, community, teachers, and other school leaders involving themselves in the mission of the school--to increase student achievement. With the principal deeply involved in the distributed process, schools started to see the gains in student achievement. Both examples reveal positive outcomes as a result of spreading leadership tasks to others.

In other cases, distributing leadership to others has been difficult in schools and efforts to spread leadership tasks have often met resistance. Murphy et al. (2009) offer four factors on why distributing leadership to others can be difficult. First, current school structures have worked to provide structure and access to education for a diverse student population. Second, schools have benefited some people, thereby creating resistance

among those who found an advantage in the current school structure. Third, school structures are familiar; people have come to know them and few are willing to change the structure. Finally, schools are not easy to change due to the external structures keeping them in place, i.e., state bureaucracies shaping the practice through accountability and financial aspects of education (Murphy et al., 2009). Challenges exist internally and externally, making it difficult at times to incorporate a distributed approach to leadership. However, the principal holds the key to its success.

Facilitation has to begin with the principal. As Murphy et al. (2009) state, "For principals, especially for those in the position for some length of time, championing and supporting distributed leadership necessitates a transformation in their understanding of leadership and in the ways they enact their leadership roles" (p. 183). Whitaker (1997) concluded that some principals believed that the building had teacher leaders who possessed facilitation skills, grant writing skills, and instructional skills. In addition, some principals at times believed teachers had more skills in leadership than their own.

The principal is the catalyst in the reform effort toward distributed leadership. He or she must be willing to view the current organizational system as a learning system, be willing to support and contribute to the success of distributing leadership, and facilitate individual and group commitment to ensure that increased student achievement is realized. When a principal involves more people in the decision making process, a sense of ownership occurs that enhances commitment of the people involved (Harris, 2008; Leithwood et al., 2007).

**Teacher's Role in Distributed
Leadership**

A major component of distributed leadership rests with the teacher and his or her

expertise to help lead the school. Research has shown that teachers can provide

leadership to schools to improve and increase student achievement (Lambert, 2003;

Lieberman & Miller, 2004; Whitaker, 1997). In context, distributed leadership is not

taking leadership tasks and placing them directly onto the workload of teachers (Harris,

2008; Leithwood et al., 2004; Spillane, 2006) but distributed to teachers in various ways.

Spillane (2006) identifies three ways to distribute leadership to formal and

informal leaders: division of labor, co-performance, and parallel performance. Division

of labor is a separation of tasks between leaders and followers. Co-performance is a

collaborative effort between leaders and followers on a task. Parallel performance is

when a leader and follower work separately but on the same task. All three give formal

and informal leaders an opportunity to contribute in leadership practice within schools.

Documented research shows that teachers have the greatest effect on student

achievement (Goldhaber, 2002; Marzano et al., 2005; Sanders, 2000). Effective teachers

can sustain a full year's growth in academic achievement (Rowan, Camburn, & Richard,

2004) while poor quality teachers can have negative or damaging effects on students

(Sanders, 2000). According to Quaglia, Marion, and McIntire (1991), teachers enter the

teaching profession with a deep sense of efficacy toward students. They state, "Teachers

often speak of their work as being a calling or a mission, and report that they attach little

importance to advancement or extrinsic rewards" (p. 207). Czubaj (1996) states that

motivated teachers are also able to transfer that motivation to student learning.

Conversely, teachers who are dissatisfied or unmotivated perceive themselves as having

low student expectations (Quaglia et al., 1991). Teachers become unmotivated as a result of their inability to see their work as making a difference with the students with whom they work. A distributed environment is seen as a way for teachers to have input into the methods of impacting on student achievement and "cultivating leadership in their professional careers" (Whitaker, 1997, p. 15). Education reform at the classroom level requires teachers to be involved in the process (York-Barr & Duke, 2004).

Distributing leadership can pose some complexities for teachers. Timperley (2005) states, "While distributed leadership amongst teachers may be desirable, some caution needs to be sounded about the potential difficulties involved" (p. 412). She believes teachers may face negative unforeseen consequences. For example, a concern facing teachers is the promotion of teachers as leaders who may not be experts in the area of needed leadership (Timperley, 2005). Another unforeseen consequence could stem from perceived principal favoritism. Teachers selected by the principal may be viewed by other teachers as being favored by the principal rather than being selected based on his or her expertise (Murphy et al., 2009). Her study revealed that unintended consequences could also surface for teacher leaders who step into the role of leadership through their own volition or external selection. For example, other teachers could view the teacher leader as moving too close to administration and a sense of teacher loyalty is violated (Murphy et al., 2009). Whitaker (1997) states, "Data suggest that the teacher-leaders were uncomfortable in 'riding the fence' between being a teacher and an administrator" (p. 14). Negative consequences can surface when distributing leadership; therefore, careful consideration must be taken to reduce or eliminate this outcome.

Teacher leadership has promise in schools (Lieberman & Miller, 2004). Because teachers have the largest effect on student achievement through instructional practice, teachers must have a larger role in the direction of the school. Among the various roles they can fill, Lieberman and Miller state that teachers can assume leadership responsibilities by advocating new forms of accountability and assessment, becoming innovators in the reconstruction of norms of achievement and expectations for students, and becoming stewards of an invigorated profession. Teachers have a valuable and influential role in the distributed framework for successful leadership reform.

Gaps in the Literature

Research in the area of distributed leadership has yielded positive results regarding the effectiveness of this model to transform schools, especially in the area of increasing teacher capacity (Leithwood et al., 2004) and student achievement (Camburn et al., 2003; Spillane et al., 2007; Timperley, 2005). However, more research is needed. What has not been explored in great depth are the perceptions of practicing elementary principals to determine if distributed leadership identifies sustainable leadership practices for school success. This researcher believes that elementary principals hold important knowledge concerning leadership reform efforts and are key to the success of implementing effective leadership practices. In addition, this researcher believes that barriers exist in schools that challenge the implementation of distributed leadership. This concern can be explored through the principal's identification of where the barriers exist and if they can be overcome.

Studies (Camburn et al., 2003; Leithwood et al., 2004; Spillane et al., 2007; Timperley, 2005) reveal positive connections between the distribution of leadership tasks

and increased student achievement. Again, this is a difficult correlation to make since the principal is not connected directly with the students. However, Marzano et al. (2005) and Leithwood et al. offer evidence that principals can create a positive effect on student achievement. More research is needed at the elementary principal level in a qualitative study to determine how leadership is practiced, when it is distributed, and the conditions under which distribution is effective in making reform changes in schools that impact student achievement (Timperley, 2005).

Conclusion

This literature review examined issues regarding the history of leadership as a function of school improvement through effective school research, principal leadership and its effects on student achievement, the demands of NCLB, distributed leadership theory and study, organizational structures, and teachers' leadership roles in distributed leadership. Without effective research at the school level, many reform efforts may fall short of expected school reform outcomes. According to the McKinsey Report (2007), there is little evidence of school reform without effective leadership. The practice of distributed leadership will determine if the demands of schools are met. More research needs to be conducted to determine if distributing leadership to others is a viable means by which to lead schools. The next chapter identifies the methodology of this study.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to examine elementary principal perceptions on the practice of distributed leadership to determine if this is a viable leadership framework that leaders of elementary schools can utilize to create an environment of leadership sustainability and school success. This investigation was led by the following three research questions:

Q1   What are elementary principals' perceptions on the practice of distributing leadership?

Q2   What are elementary principals' perceptions on the barriers of distributing leadership?

Q3   What are elementary principals' perceptions on the impact of distributed leadership on student achievement?

The Qualitative Approach

Qualitative methods were chosen over quantitative design to explore an in-depth understanding of distributed leadership through perceptions of elementary principals. Both methods of study have been used in past research on this topic; however, very few studies have interviewed elementary principals exclusively to discover principal perceptions of the practice of leadership distribution and the effectiveness of this framework in practice to maintain leadership sustainability and school success.

Qualitative research builds on inductive exploration rather than testing an existing hypothesis or theory (Merriam, 1998). In this study, the researcher gathered data to clarify the practice of distributed leadership in elementary school settings through principal perceptions. This is advantageous in qualitative research due to what Merriam suggests as "… the view that reality is constructed by individuals interacting with their social worlds" (p. 6). Practicing principals gave their interpretations of distributed leadership practices, barriers, and impact on student achievement.

To clarify distributed leadership and its practice (Merriam, 1998), interviews and the collection of school artifacts provided a clear understanding of distributed leadership from an elementary principal perspective. This study hoped to explore those facets of distributed leadership.

Framework

To better understand the practice of distributed leadership, a framework is necessary (Spillane, 2006). This study utilized the framework created by Spillane et al. (2004) to explore the internal dynamics of distributed leadership practice. Although other frameworks exist, this researcher believed this framework best measured the complexity of the distributed leadership model as perceived by the elementary principal due to its inclusion of leaders, followers, situation, and practice in defining leadership. It included (a) leadership tasks and functions, (b) enacting leadership tasks, (c) social distribution of task enactment, and (d) situational distribution of leadership practice.

Leadership tasks and functions define the types of leadership tasks that can be distributed to others. Spillane et al. (2004) identify tasks as both macro and micro. Macro tasks are much larger in scope and complexity; they include school visioning and

establishing school climate and culture. Micro tasks are much smaller in scope and can be a sub-set of a much larger macro task, i.e., teachers meeting in collaborative groups to work on specific goals for school visioning. Leadership tasks and functions help identify which types of tasks are distributed to others.

Enacting leadership tasks provides a framework to investigate the practice of distributing leadership tasks. Spillane et al. (2004) believe that to understand distributed leadership as a practice, leaders must have a clear understanding of the situation and follower strengths when distributing tasks to individuals or groups of people. For example, school leaders may use their knowledge on subject matter and pedagogy in connection with their knowledge on teacher learning to influence how they distribute leadership tasks to others. Enacting leadership tasks can help identify how "school leaders define, present, and carry out their tasks" (p. 15).

Social distribution of task enactment involves the practice of distributing tasks across multiple individuals or groups. This distribution can take place with formal and informal leaders. An example could be school staff using assessment data to change instructional methods in a classroom. Spillane et al. (2004) suggest that there are many steps in changing instructional practice: initial assessment of students, analysis of assessment, priorities established, and teacher participates in professional development to implement new instruction. Social distribution reveals the interdependency of the relationship of others to carry out enacted tasks.

Situational distribution of leadership practice incorporates the distribution of tasks that include an interactive web of leaders and followers, artifacts, and situation (Spillane et al., 2004). For example, a school leader must adapt his or her leadership practices

based on the experience or lack of experience of staff. A leader might also use artifacts that enhance the process of leadership. These may include tools such as memos, meeting agendas, computer programs to analyze student assessment data, and symbols such as language-based systems and vocabularies. In addition to positive distribution, negative conditions may prohibit distribution such as communication problems between teachers and adversarial relationships between home and school to provide support for classroom instructional practices. Situational distribution of leadership practices encapsulates all areas of leadership distribution--leaders, followers, practices, and situation.

In her four-year study, Timperley (2005) used two constructs-- social distribution of task enactment and situational distribution of leadership practice--to frame her study on distributed leadership in elementary schools. Using Spillane et al.'s (2004) partial framework helped identify which tasks were distributed and how they were distributed to others. This researcher used all four constructs of the framework to explore principal perceptions on the practice of distributed leadership.

Data Collection

Data were collected from individual interviews and the collection of school artifacts associated with distributing leadership from practicing elementary principals in Colorado.

Procedure

A purposive sampling of practicing elementary principals in Colorado was selected for this study. Principals were selected based on their current practice of distributing leadership tasks to others as identified by their superintendents or superintendent designee. Superintendents were contacted in Front Range school districts

in Colorado for assistance in identifying elementary principals who meet this criterion.

The criterion focus paralleled Spillane's (2006) definition of distributed leadership--

leadership practice is distributed over leaders, followers, and their situation where it

incorporates the activities of multiple groups of individuals.

In order to gather data from a cross-sectional population, elementary principals

were also selected to represent two demographic factors. The selection was based on

years of school leadership experience and school student population. Principals were

selected based on 1-3 years, 4-9 years, and 10 or more years of experience. Years of

school leadership experience categories were chosen based on information from the

National Center for Educational Statistics (2007). Principals were also selected from

small schools (less than 250 students), medium schools (251-500 students), and large

schools (501 or more students). School size categories were chosen based on current

school size information from the Colorado Department of Education (2008). This

researcher utilized years of experience and school size to determine if there were

perceptual differences in the distribution of leadership practices, barriers, and student

achievement results. Nine elementary principals (three elementary principals each from

small, medium, and large sized schools) were chosen to provide an adequate cross-

sectional sample.

Once the elementary principal was identified by his or her superintendent or

superintendent designee and he or she agreed to participate, the researcher scheduled the

interview with the respondent and then sent an advance copy of the interview questions

and a common definition of distributed leadership (see Appendix B). Prior to the

interview, a consent form was presented for respondent signature giving the researcher

permission to proceed with the interview. The interview was conducted in the most convenient locale for the respondent. It was the researcher's plan to request interviews at the principal's present school building; however, the decision was left to the respondent.

Interviews

The researcher was the primary data collection instrument (Merriam, 1998; Shank, 2002) in this study. Interviews were chosen to obtain information when the practice of leadership could not be observed directly or replicated (Merriam, 1998). Interview data are best used to gather perceptions of people and the construction of reality (Punch, 1998). Spillane (2006) states that leadership can occur "without evidence of its outcome" (p. 5); therefore, collecting information through interviews and school artifacts gave this researcher the best data possible.

Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes. Questions were sent to the respondents in advance so they could formulate a comprehensive response to each question. The questions being asked of the respondents in the interview (see Appendix A) included interpretive questions (Strauss, Schatzman, Bucher, & Sabshin, 1981) designed to allow the respondent to give his or her interpretation of his or her practice. Additional demographic questions were asked to gather additional data on school size, poverty level of school, grade levels represented in school, leadership experience, gender, and ethnicity of principal. The questions were developed from the research questions and the conceptual framework developed by Spillane et al. (2004) on distributed leadership.

Interviews were conducted using a semi-structured format as described by Merriam (1998). Semi-structured interviews allow for a prescribed list of questions followed by an open-ended opportunity for the respondents to share additional

information. This format was chosen to establish a preset list of questions to be asked of all respondents in the same order to ascertain a level of transferability to the study (Merriam, 1998).

The interview data were collected in both written and digital form through the use of written notes and a digital audio recorder. Written notes were taken during the interview to highlight key points and the digital data were transcribed by the researcher. The collected data were held in strict confidence by the researcher and by the researcher's advisor. Names of participants and schools were not used so as to not identify them amongst the public or their peers. The transcribed notes were labeled with a note on years of experience and school size (e.g., L10 or M6). Once the notes were interpreted and the study completed, the documents and recordings were destroyed. In the event that additional clarification was needed from the data during analysis, the researcher contacted the respondent by phone or e-mail to clarify his or her statements.

School Artifacts

School artifacts were requested of the respondent to provide evidence that distributing leadership tasks to others was practiced in the school. Artifacts are used to "influence the practice of others" and may include meeting agendas, school organizational charts, and leadership meeting minutes used to shape instructional practice (Halverson, 2005, p. 7). The artifacts were analyzed by type and the degree to which they promoted distributed leadership tasks in the school.

<div align="center">**Research Sensitivity**</div>

Due to its contact with human subjects, qualitative research must employ sensitivity when collecting data (Merriam, 1998). The study was approved by the

Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Northern Colorado before data

were collected. Included in the IRB approval was a copy of the consent form to be

signed by the respondents, an outline of the study, and a list of interview questions. Each

respondent was given full disclosure of the study and the intent of the data prior to

collection. Each interview was conducted with confidentiality so as not to identify

individuals and their schools. The data collected were kept in a locked drawer in the

office of the researcher and the researcher's advisor.

During the interviews, the researcher was attentive to the personality and

demeanor of the respondent. Even though these questions were not highly sensitive or

personal in nature, it was necessary to gauge the respondent's outward expression for any

questions that might cause discomfort and harm. If this occurred, the researcher

immediately ended the question and proceeded to another question. If he or she was still

uncomfortable, the researcher asked if the respondent wished to be excluded from the

study.

Data Analysis

According to Punch (1998), "there is no single right way to do qualitative data

analysis" (p. 199). For purposes of this study, the researcher employed a framework

designed by Miles and Huberman (1994). The components of the analysis framework

included (a) data reduction, (b) data display, and (c) drawing and verifying conclusions

(p. 12). To begin data reduction, the researcher utilized basic or descriptive coding (Miles

& Huberman, 1994; Punch, 1998). Descriptive coding limited inferential interpretation

of the data and was a starting point for data reduction. The researcher began the analysis

"to get a 'feel' for the data" (Punch, 1998, p. 205). This was accomplished through labels

or descriptive names to attach meaning to the data. This process augmented the data

analysis by providing a system for indexing as well as creating a process for storage and

retrieval of the data (Punch, 1998). From the descriptive coding, the data were analyzed

through inferential or advanced coding (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Punch, 1998) to draw

a deeper inferential meaning from the data of principal perception as it pertained to

distributed leadership practice.

Inferential coding defined pattern codes using inferences from the data (Punch,

1998). The pattern codes were categorized and compared using Spillane et al.'s (2004)

framework:

1. Leadership tasks and functions

2. Enacting leadership tasks

3. Social distribution of task enactment

4. Situational distribution of leadership practice

In addition to a set of prescribed pattern codes, this researcher also analyzed the data for

other patterns or themes that emerged.

Once descriptive and inferential coding was complete, the researcher attempted to

display the data in a visual format. According to Miles and Huberman (1994), the design

of the display is part of the process of analyzing the data: "The creation of displays is not

separate from the analysis; it is *part* of the process" (p. 11). The advantage to this

component of the framework is to compress the data for drawing and verifying

conclusions.

To draw and verify conclusions, the researcher attempted to describe in narrative

context the meaning of the data from the respondents or "social actors" (Coffey &

Atkinson, 1996, p. 56). From the narrative, the researcher's intent was to identify a

social perspective in examining the complexity of distributed leadership as perceived by

elementary principals. The Miles and Huberman (1994) "transcendental realism" (p. 4),

framework design--described as data reduction, data display, and drawing and verifying

conclusions-- provided guidance to accurately analyze the data from this study.

Dependability

Qualitative research by design is used to explain the world through the subjects

and phenomena being researched (Merriam, 1998). Dependability in this study was

controlled by the interview process, collection of school artifacts, and analysis of data.

Unlike quantitative research where reliability rests with the ability to repeat a study to

receive similar results, qualitative research in this study rested with the dependability and

consistency of the results obtained (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In qualitative methods,

replicating the study may not yield the same results due to the highly contextual nature of

the phenomena (Merriam, 1998).

The following methods were used to ensure dependability of the study: presenting

the investigator's position, triangulation of data, and completion of an audit trail

(Merriam, 1998). These methods augmented the dependability of this study in an attempt

to connect the data to the results. A further explanation follows.

The Investigator's Position

To increase the dependability of the data, the researcher presented his

assumptions and theory of the study, clarified the relationship between the researcher and

the participants, and provided the basis and social context for making participant

selection when writing the conclusions to the data findings found in Chapter IV of this study (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993).

Triangulation

Triangulation was used to strengthen the dependability of this study (Merriam, 1998). Data were collected mainly from interviews and school artifacts, thereby limiting the number of types of data collection. In addition, the researcher looked for cases of outliers to determine if the responses were accurate. An outlier is a response that does not match closely with the responses from the other respondents. If this occurred, the researcher contacted the respondent and verified that they understood the question and intent of the study. This was conducted through an email or phone call to verify such anomalies (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Once the data were transcribed, the researcher conducted a member check and e-mailed a draft of the interview to the respondent to determine if the data accurately described the respondent's responses to the interview questions. Unlike quantitative studies that view triangulation in terms of "technical solution," qualitative studies focus triangulation on the "holistic understanding" (Mathison, 1988, p. 17) of the situation to construct the explanation about the phenomena being studied. The collection of data from interviews, member checks, and school artifacts helped triangulate the data in this study.

Audit Trail

An audit trail is necessary in research of this type to increase the possibility of replicating this study (Merriam, 1998). In this study, the researcher kept a detailed account of scheduled interview dates and times. In addition, notes were taken during the

interviews along with digital recordings to record respondent data. Finally, all interview transcripts and field notes were compiled within two days of each interview to maintain a *freshness* of the interview climate and to follow up immediately with the respondent to clarify any data from the interview. All parameters of the data were transparent for other researchers to replicate this study.

Credibility

The researcher attempted to accurately define the meaning of reality through the inquiry results to increase the credibility of this study (Miles & Huberman, 1994). To address credibility, the researcher made every effort to maintain the internal logic and consistency of the research (Punch, 1998). The researcher employed two basic strategies: member checks and an assumption of the researcher's bias at the onset of the study.

Member Check

The researcher used member check to increase internal consistency through a review of the transcribed data. The researcher e-mailed the transcribed data to the respondent to clarify the respondent's thoughts and considerations at the time of the interview. This process reaffirmed that the data were a reflection of the respondent's intent (Punch, 1998).

Assumptions of the Study

The second strategy was for the researcher to "clarify the researcher's assumption, worldview, and theoretical orientation at the outset of the study" (Merriam, 1998, p. 205). Qualitative studies have a human effect wherein human's values and perspectives filter the data that are collected (Merriam, 1998). In this study, the researcher admitted to a certain bias. The researcher had a certain degree of knowledge of distributed leadership

and hoped to reveal current practices as well as new ideas germane to this concept.

Having served as an elementary principal for four years in a mid-western community

with a student population of 500, this researcher understood the complexity of school

leadership. This researcher also believed that leadership is complex; methods or models

to help in leadership must be explored to help determine transferability to current

practices.

Therefore, this researcher brought a "construction of reality" (Merriam, 1998, p.

22) to the study that interacted with other elementary principals' construction of

distributed leadership. The researcher's intent for this study was to gain first-hand

knowledge from practicing elementary principals on distributed leadership. This theory

has shown promise in research studies as a means to maintain leadership sustainability

and increased student achievement. My personal belief is that leadership is needed to

accomplish the goals set by society; I have a strong belief in public education and the

need for a well-educated society. Public schools were chosen exclusively for this study

due to the current pressures of No Child Left Behind (2002).

Transferability

The ability to transfer the findings of this study to other situations "is often

preferred to generalizability in qualitative studies" (Punch, 1998, p. 261). Qualitative

studies are difficult to generalize to larger populations due to small samples and the type

of data sought (Merriam, 1998). Qualitative methods search for a deeper understanding

of a particular phenomenon rather than generalize a theory across a much larger

population (Merriam, 1998). This researcher attempted to ensure that the sample size and

responses provided adequate information to describe the perceptions of practicing

elementary principals concerning distributed leadership.

Work Plan

The data sample was collected during the winter months of the 2010 school year.

It took approximately six weeks to gather all data from the respondents. Data were

transcribed into written text for review within a two-day window of each interview.

The notes were reviewed in multiple time settings to gather a deeper

understanding of the respondent's responses. If questions arose, the researcher contacted

the elementary principal for clarification through e-mail. When data were transcribed,

the researcher returned a copy of the data to the respondent to check for accuracy. The

researcher gave the respondent a one-week time frame in which to respond and make any

changes as necessary.

The written data were coded based on Spillane et al.'s (2004) distributed

leadership framework and by emerging patterns and themes from the elementary

principals' responses. The data were then formalized in the narrative found in Chapter

IV of this study. Final conclusions were formulated according to procedure and delivered

to the researcher's doctoral committee during the summer 2010.

Summary

Qualitative research method best explores data found at the heart of this

phenomenon called distributed leadership. Merriam (1998) states, "I believe that research

focused on discovery, insight, and understanding from the perspectives of those being

studied offers the greatest promise of making significant contributions to the knowledge

base and practice of education" (p. 1). By focusing on elementary principals, this

researcher hoped to shed light on their perceptions of distributed leadership to increase

leadership sustainability and school success. This theory has challenged the best

researchers in the field to define and describe its practice in schools. This researcher's

intent was to gather more evidence from elementary principals to add to the growing

body of literature on distributed leadership. Chapter IV will discuss the results of this

study.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

This chapter reports the findings of this study by discussing the themes that emerged from participant interview responses. Themes are discussed in terms of demographics of participants and their relationship to the following three research questions that guided this study:

Q1   What are elementary principals' perceptions on the practice of distributing leadership?

Q2   What are elementary principals' perceptions on the barriers of distributing leadership?

Q3   What are elementary principals' perceptions on the impact of distributed leadership on student achievement?

Demographic Description of Participants

This study was conducted with nine elementary principals serving in six Front Range school districts in Colorado. Representing various elementary school sizes ranging from small (less than 250 students), medium (250-500 students), and large schools (over 501 students) and various years of experience ranging from 1-3 years, 4-9 years, and 10 or years of leadership experience, elementary principals were selected as having a high propensity to practice distributed leadership in their respective buildings.

Superintendents serving Front Range school districts were initially contacted to inquire about elementary principals that fit the above criteria. Superintendents or a

superintendents' designee identified elementary principals for this study. All elementary principals were contacted and all agreed to participate. The data were collected over a six-week period--February and March of 2010.

School district student size varied in this sampling. School district sizes ranged from 300 or less students to 25,000 students. School district student population designation was based on information from the Colorado Department of Education (St. Hilaire, 2010). Four elementary principals served in a school district with between 6001-25,000 students and four elementary principals served in a school district with between 1,201-6,000 students. One elementary principal served in a district of less than 300 students; this elementary principal also served as the high school principal and the superintendent in this district. This researcher believes that utilizing six school districts with various student populations across Front Range Colorado gave an adequate sampling of school districts. This sampling allowed the researcher to examine an individual elementary principal's perceptions of distributed leadership practice rather than one individual district promoting a philosophical expectation to distribute leadership.

Elementary principals were selected for this study derived from a matrix of school size based on student population and years of leadership experience. Three elementary principals were classified into the small school category--a student population size that ranged from 65 students to 230 students--and had between 1 and 19 years of school leadership experience. Three elementary principals were classified into the medium-sized school category--a student population that ranged from 325 students to 500 students--and had between 3 and 14 years of school leadership experience. Three

elementary principals were classified into the large schools category--a student population size that ranged from 503 students to 760 students--and had between 3 and 14 years of school leadership experience.

Six demographic questions were asked in the interview, in addition to school student population size and years of leadership experience, to help describe and create a better understanding of the elementary principals and the schools they represent. All nine of the elementary principals considered themselves from a Caucasian or White ethnic background. Of the nine elementary principals, seven were male and two were female. Participating elementary principals indicated that they served a student population with a poverty level between 4% and 74% based on the school's free and reduced lunch criterion. Six of the nine principals indicated their school served students from pre-school through fifth grade; three elementary principals indicated that their school served only kindergarten through fifth grade and did not support a pre-school (see Table 1).

All elementary principals answered the interview questions asked during the interview with no principal abstaining from any question. Six out of the nine elementary principals also provided the researcher with school artifacts that supported their practice of distributing leadership. Three elementary principals did not have artifacts available at the time of the interview; however, all agreed to send artifacts at a later date. The school artifacts varied according to the amount and type of documents used to promote distributed leadership.

Table 1

The Demographics of Interviewed Elementary Principals

School Type	Years Experience	Experience in Years	Gender	Ethnicity	School Size	Free/ Reduced	Grade Levels
Small <250	1-3	1	Male	White	230	74%	K-5
	4-9	7	Male	Caucasian	194	22%	K-5
	10 or more	19	Male	White	65	43%	PK-5
Medium 250-500	1-3	3	Female	White	368	69%	PK-5
	4-9	5	Male	White	325	62%	PK-5
	10 or more	14	Male	Caucasian	500	10%	PK-5
Large 501+	1-3	3	Male	White	547	17%	PK-5
	4-9	6	Male	White	503	30%	PK-5
	10 or more	14	Female	Caucasian	760	4%	PK-5

All data were transcribed as outlined in Chapter III of this study. The next section

will attempt to answer the research questions guiding this study.

Research Question 1

Q1   What are elementary principals' perceptions on the practice of distributing
        leadership?

To better understand the practice of distributed leadership, this researcher used as

a guideline the framework created by Spillane et al. (2004). The framework consisted of

the following four constructs to better interpret the practice of distributed leadership.

1. Leadership tasks and functions

2. Enacting leadership tasks

3. Social distribution of task enactment

4. Situational distribution of leadership practice

All four constructs were used during the coding process to determine how elementary principals from small, medium, and large schools, along with varying years of school leadership experiences, practiced distributed leadership. According to Spillane et al., "We need to observe from within a conceptual framework if we are to understand the internal dynamics of leadership practice" (p. 4). Due to the complexity of distributed leadership, it was difficult to categorize themes across clean lines; therefore, some themes have crossed over into other constructs.

Leadership Task and Functions

In distributed leadership, the educational leader takes on the difficult task of identifying the various tasks and functions necessary to lead a school. Spillane et al. (2004) have identified leadership tasks and functions as a guideline to discover what tasks and functions are distributed to others. This study discovered from practicing elementary principals the tasks and functions they distribute to others. Four sub-themes emerged from the data: macro and micro tasks, administrative and instructional tasks, task accountability, and peer influence on tasks.

Macro and micro tasks. Elementary principals identified distributed tasks as being either macro or micro tasks. Macro tasks require multiple subtasks or micro tasks for completion; whereas a micro task is a subtask of a much larger macro task. Spillane et al. (2004) identified macro tasks as tasks that create a school vision, build an inviting

school climate, or establish school-wide goals. Micro tasks could include classroom observations to support a macro task of improving teacher growth or it could include facilitating a literacy program with the macro tasks being improving reading growth for all students in the school (Spillane et al., 2004). Both macro and micro tasks were identified in this study.

Macro tasks were distributed through the school goal setting process, helping keep a school open, and through the visioning process. One elementary principal from a medium-sized school with five years of experience responded to goal setting in his school: "We set our goals in early fall and our goals are basically centered around student achievement and so by distributing leadership it put those goals into perspective. They become real and they understand them."

Another principal from a small elementary school with 19 years of experience commented, "They come right in and work and they split into their groups and they get a lot done. A lot of times it is their own plan or own system that they are working it through and what their goals should be."

Other principals identified similar goal setting tasks as a distributed task to where teacher leaders and elementary principals co-led to complete the macro task of goal setting.

An elementary principal from a small school with seven years of experience distributed a macro task to a parent group. The task in this case was to help stave off possible school closure due to small student population size. The principal commented,

Our parents stepped up in a parent cultivation committee and found us grants, speakers, and they have done amazing things. They are doing things that if they did not take on that role it simply would not get done. I do not have the time to do it. It has been great publicity for our school. They have been reaching out to

board members. They have been doing a ton. I have parent leaders who are spending a lot of time in our building because it is a place they value and they are able to do it.

Another elementary principal from a large school and with six years of experience responded, "I have a group of parents who are pushing that [technology focused school] and helping me communicate that vision to other parents and the community."

Macro tasks were identified in this study around school goal setting, staving off school closure, and selling a vision to the community. The tasks were large and required the accomplishment of many micro tasks before the entire macro task was completed. Macro tasks were distributed equally across all school sizes and all years of leadership experiences with no perceptual differences emerging in the data. Micro tasks were also identified in this study.

During the interviews, elementary principals predominately identified distributing micro tasks to others. For example, five of the nine elementary principals distributed the micro task of leading a specific instructional program. The instructional programs identified included implementing a Response-to-Intervention (RTI) program, implementing a behavioral model, piloting a reading program, implementing a new math program, and creating a new tutoring program. These tasks were considered micro tasks because they were part of a much larger school goal for improving student performance in either academics or behavior.

For example, one small school elementary principal with 19 years of experience commented that he wanted to implement a tutoring program at his school to help with struggling learners. He stated, "We wanted to do something for the kids that needed

some additional help." He began with a framework in mind but turned the task over to a teacher whom he believed could increase the effectiveness of the program.

Another distributed micro task distributed was the implementation of a Response-to-Intervention program in an elementary school. The elementary principal in a medium-sized school with 14 years of experience commented that the directive came from the district level; each building had to create a Response-to-Intervention plan. The elementary principal sought out teachers to gather informal input into creating the plan. He stated, "I try to use the information structure first to feel out staff to see how they are really going to grab onto it."

Elementary principals also distributed smaller micro tasks to teachers. For example, one elementary principal in a large elementary school with three years of experience distributed the task of creating an assessment schedule for the upcoming state assessment. This task was deemed important to create the best testing environment in which to measure academic performance. The elementary principal distributed this task to two head teachers in the building. This task was considered micro since it was part of a much large goal of improving student achievement.

Another micro task distributed by a small school elementary principal with one year of experience was to a classified person in the area of student attendance. The elementary principal was implementing an attendance initiative that would reform the current attendance policy in the school. He asked the person closely associated with attendance to perform a task that would help provide valuable information for this initiative. This task was connected to a much larger macro task on school-wide student attendance.

Although many of these tasks were considered micro tasks, each micro task was different in the size and scope of accomplishing the goal of the task. For example, creating a Response-to-Intervention program may have had many more associated tasks than that of a new math program. The new tutoring program may have had more tasks than creating a new schedule for assessment. In either case, the tasks were considered micro because they were a smaller subtask of the larger school goal in improving student achievement. Micro tasks were identified by elementary principals representing all school sizes and years of leadership experiences with no perceptual differences emerging from the data.

All macro and micro tasks appeared to serve a valuable and important function in the school as described by the elementary principals. In identifying tasks, the principal also described the task complexity in context of distribution. Many of these micro tasks were distributed to teacher leaders in leading administrative and instructional programs.

Administrative and instructional tasks. Elementary principals identified several tasks that they had distributed to teachers. The principals were asked in the interview to describe a time when they distributed a task to others. The question revealed nine tasks identified by elementary principals. Six of the nine tasks related directly to instructional programs while three identified administrative tasks. Instructional tasks were considered tasks related to the curriculum or teacher instructional practices; whereas administrative tasks were considered operating and maintaining school structures and procedures.

Instructional tasks identified by elementary principals included distributing leadership for a new reading program (two principals responded), the new Response-to-

Invention program (two principals responded), a new writing program, and a new math program. The three other elementary principals identified administrative tasks for distribution to others: hiring of a teacher, creating schedules for all teachers to follow for assessment purposes, and facilitating a process change for a new parent-teacher conference schedule.

This information was only based on the above question in the interview where both instructional and administrative tasks were distributed to others (mainly teachers). Other tasks were discussed as examples throughout the interviews; however, there were inconsistencies in the data because not all principals mentioned additional tasks and may have based responses on just one particular task. There were no perceptual differences between school sizes and years of leadership experience (see Table 2).

Table 2

Type of Task Distributed to Teachers as Identified by Elementary Principals

School Type	Years Experience	Administrative Task	Instructional Task
Small <250	1-3	Hiring a teacher	
	4-9		Math program
	10 or more		Reading program
Medium 250-500	1-3		Writing program
	4-9	Parent/Teacher conferences	
	10 or more		RTI program
Large 501+	1-3	Scheduling	
	4-9		RTI program
	10 or more		Reading program

Task accountability. In addition to administrative and instructional tasks, elementary principals responded that assigning tasks to other people (mainly teachers) increased the level of task accountability. With increased accountability, principals believed tasks were completed at a higher rate and with more efficacy. One elementary principal from a small school and with seven years of experience noted, "I have observed evidence that once teachers are put into the leadership role, it is important that what they are doing is successful so they are willing to make it work." This elementary principal believed that the distribution of leadership increased teacher confidence, task

accountability, and the success rate of task completion. Another principal in a small school with 19 years of experience echoed this belief by explaining, "When they are going to do this or that, it becomes more important to them and in turn it becomes more important to the kids."

An elementary principal in a medium-sized school with five years of experience revealed, "I think that it adds accountability to them so they know, if I am going to be asking for something, then that this person has the accountability placed on them to get it. That helps with student achievement by adding more accountability…"

Two elementary principals from large schools also identified the importance of task accountability. One principal with six years of experience stated, "I hope it makes teachers more invested." Another elementary principal from a large school with 14 years of experience explained,

> I had one grade level that really came together nicely and immediately I had a natural leader that everybody looked to right away. And, I had time the summer before we opened to have a conversation with her about flexible grouping because she was very interested and curious.

This principal utilized the dynamics of the group and the micro task (flexible reading group) to improve reading in her school. In this example, the principal allowed the group to lead, but she also created the environment for cultivating the group's ambition. Ultimately, the school goal was to accomplish the macro task of increasing reading for all students.

Elementary principals identified task accountability as an important step to increase the rate of task completion and increase teacher efficacy. Czubaj (1996) supports this statement; she writes, "Teacher efficacy means teachers believe their actions and beliefs directly affect students" (p. 372). By increasing the teacher's leadership

function through tasks, elementary principals were able to use tasks combined with teacher ambition as a tool to achieve desired results. When teachers are given leadership tasks, they are given more control over the outcome of the task.

Peer influence on tasks. Elementary principals also identified peer influence on tasks as a reason for distributing tasks. When identifying tasks, elementary principals described the relationship with those leaders assigned to the task for completion and improved results.

One elementary principal serving a small school with seven years of experience chose a teacher who was not convinced that the new math program would give students an advantage over the existing math program. Although this principal came from a math background and his staff knew he "loved math," he chose a teacher who was not as convinced. He described his reasoning,

> I looked specifically for somebody who was not where I was at, but who was open to it. I had teachers who were completely opposed to it and they were not the ones I wanted to send. As she went and she heard more about it and she presented it to the staff about the ideas and took the questions. From my opinion, it was much better by the staff, the questions were less top down that I have to do this and I am willing to give it a try.

He went on to say, "I needed somebody to approach it [the task] from a different way and she was willing to take that leadership on and it ended up being a lot of time and responsibility for her."

Another principal from a medium-sized school with 14 years of experience had a similar situation with a teacher on his staff. He stated, "One of my most reluctant people became a big push in helping us in planning and by using the informal instruction first and levels of interest and would this person really grab onto it and go." In this example, the principal needed to implement the district-directed task of Response-to-Intervention.

Realizing the difficult nature of the task, both elementary principals used a different method to connect task and function for task success.

Other elementary principals also identified peer influence when thinking about tasks and functions of leadership. A principal serving a medium-sized school with three years of experience stated, "I strongly believe that so many times they [teachers] respond even better to their peers than maybe their superior." Another principal from a medium-sized school with five years of experience echoed, "You share that leadership and that creates the buy-in that you need to get things done." Another principal serving a small school with seven years of experience commented,

> Through distributed leadership having teachers also leading other teachers it is just accepted much differently because it is from their peers. And from that perspective as well, I have been able to see some changes in the way that the staff responds to the direction we are trying to go. It is something that I think is incredibly important.

Elementary principals identified the importance of peer influence on tasks as the rate of completion and task success. Some principals chose different strategies for this process to occur; however, it was evident that the principals used the tools of distribution through tasks and functions to achieve the desired results.

There appeared to be no perceptual differences in elementary principals based on school size and years of experience when analyzing leadership task and functions. Elementary principals, as an aggregate, identified tasks and functions equally and proportionately from within all school sizes and years of experiences with no definitive patterns to suggest otherwise. The next section discusses how elementary principals enacted the leadership tasks.

Enacting Leadership Tasks

In distributing leadership, leaders must also make decisions for task distribution. The enactment of leadership tasks construct creates a framework for developing an understanding of how school leaders define, present, and carry out tasks (Spillane et al., 2004). Tasks that are distributed rely heavily on the leader's perception of the task, what they perceive about the task, and its effect on the overall impact on school goals. Three sub-themes emerged when coding the data: beliefs and views of distributed leadership; teacher leadership training; and support, encouragement, and feedback.

Beliefs and views of distributed leadership. Elementary principals in this study shared their professional beliefs and views on distributed leadership. Four out of nine elementary principals described distributed leadership as *shared leadership* with all four of them having between one and five years of experience. In the literature, this description was also supported where the term *distributed leadership* can be confused with the term *shared leadership* (Harris, 2008; Spillane, 2006). Shared leadership is often considered to be a component of distributed leadership but does not actually describe the complexity of the phenomenon (Spillane, 2006). Although distributed leadership was defined narrowly, it was apparent that elementary principals who defined distributed leadership as shared leadership also possessed a more complex view that was synonymous with the definition of distributed leadership.

For example, a principal from a small school with one year of experience defined distributed leadership as shared leadership. He stated, "When a task hits my desk or initiative or idea, then I will often think about who has the knowledge based to deal with it or skill level to deal with issue, problem, or challenge." This explanation defines

distributed leadership in broader terms that includes leaders, followers, practice, and situation.

All elementary principals interviewed consistently acknowledged that distributing leadership tasks to others was an important step to successfully leading a building. One principal in a large school with six years of experience commented,

> It is key to running a building. In this day and age, top down leadership, ordering a change or ordering something to happen, descriptive types of leadership; direct leadership is not well received. What you need to do is build coalitions and build change movements. I try to distribute as much leadership in the building as I can.

Another elementary principal from a large school with three years of experience stated, "Sharing the decisions-making process has been a positive factor for me."

Another principal in a small school with one year of experience echoed,

> My perspective is that it needs to be distributed because there is a lot of help that resides within the building a lot of talent and skills and leadership opportunities that need to be relied upon amongst the staff in the building whether that be certified or classified. There is just too much work to do effectively as one person.

This principal went on to say, "I see my role as orchestrating leadership!"

An elementary principal from a medium-sized school and with five years of experience stated, "My view is that it is important and wouldn't want to lead any other way and if you want things to get done with fidelity then you share that leadership and that creates buy-in that you need to get things done."

Another elementary principal serving a small school and with seven years of experience agreed and responded, "It is something that I think is incredibly important. It is something that I see as a way to really get a lot more accomplished because there are so many different people helping you get there instead of feeling like the only one."

All elementary principals agreed that distributing leadership tasks to others was of great value to the success of their schools. There was no significant difference in perceptual views based on the size of schools or years of experience. Although some elementary principals tried to label it as shared leadership, the perceptual understanding of distributed leadership was evident in their description of the complexity of the concept. With each principal agreeing to the importance of distributing leadership for their school's success, they often distributed it in varying methods.

Teacher leadership training. Elementary principals interviewed distributed leadership according to what they perceived as a plan of success for the school and for their students. To allow for success, elementary principals described a leadership training process for presenting and carrying out their distribution of tasks. Some principals provided formal training while others provided informal leadership training.

Two elementary principals, from a medium-sized and large school respectively, offered formal leadership-training opportunities for their teacher leaders. The principal from a medium-sized school with five years of experience, in the midst of a large change process for parent-teacher conferences, trained his teachers to become facilitators of the change process. He stated, "I think it is important to get their peers to facilitate so they don't feel that it is one sided. There is training, and I was trained and another teacher was trained and she trained another teacher, so those two ran it." The principal from a large school with 14 years of experience commented on her leadership training,

> I am in the process of taking my leadership team to the [in-state training]. This will be my impetus for me to select these people at each grade level and I can take them to that training together where we will have four days together talking about teacher leadership and making plans for next year.

She also prepared her teacher leaders through book studies and professional development

presentations. She stated,

> We did professional reading. I did presentation work with them and they had time
> to talk and collaborate and reflect. They felt empowered to do that. One of the
> first things to do as a principal is give them the skills they need in order to be the
> leader.

Both principals serving large schools believed that training teachers in leadership gave

teachers a better advantage when leading others in the building.

Another elementary principal from a large school with three years of experience

provided informal training by presenting a document for decision-making for his staff.

The introduction to the document read,

> Our school pledges to make informed decisions based on input form stakeholders.
> Stakeholders include certified and classified staff, PTAC, administration,
> students, and community members. We acknowledge that we must consider how
> decisions affect those directly involved as well as the school as a whole. This
> document is intended to serve as a guideline for our discussions at [elementary
> school] and will be reviewed annually.

The document went on to explain different scenarios for decision-making and what type

of input was required for each decision. This document was reviewed with staff and was

used as an on-going model for decision–making in this elementary principal's building.

This principal also attempted to role model most tasks within the school building to

demonstrate his support and willingness to practice following others. He stated,

> I do think there are people who do appreciate me willing to roll up my sleeves and
> chip in and there are others who say, "I should be delegating that job to someone
> else. You need to be in here making the big money decision and getting more
> organized paperwork wise."

Three elementary principals participating in this study described offering training

and decision-making documents as a part of the complex structural component of their

practice on distributed leadership. Six other elementary principals stated that they

practiced their distribution of tasks through daily interactions between leaders and followers for task completion. The elementary principals also enacted leadership tasks through support, encouragement, and feedback

Support, encouragement, and feedback. Although all nine elementary principals offered support throughout the distributed process, six of the nine elementary principals identified support, feedback and encouragement as key indicators in developing the process of distributed leadership and improving the skills of their individual leaders.

One principal from a medium-sized school with three years of experience stated, "I try to encourage as much as a I can and really open it up to all staff." She went on to say, "I just try to support it and encourage them and give feedback, just not set them out on an island all by themselves."

Another elementary principal from a medium-sized school with 14 years of experience stated, "I try to meet with them during the team meetings. That is when I encourage conversation. I say, 'Have you talked about this issue?' He went on to say, "I try to keep things going forward with these groups. I will give input and they will have questions. I give feedback as well."

Another elementary principal from a large school with six years of experience stated, "I needed to check back with her to give her some feedback about being stronger in the face of people who are trying to take the conversation in a different direction." He went on to say, "It was a coachable moment to mention, and here are some observations. Don't get buffaloed. You are the expert and lead things."

By providing support, feedback, and encouragement, six elementary principals believed they were assisting their teacher's growth as stronger leaders for the building. The distributed leadership practice also provided an opportunity for elementary principals to stay connected to the various tasks being led by others in their respective buildings.

Enactment of task implies that distributed leadership is defined, presented, and carried out amongst people across various situations (Spillane et al., 2004). The elementary principals in this study had strong beliefs about the importance of distributed leadership and its effects on schools. It was evident that all elementary principals in this study provided support for the process of distributing tasks to others. Two elementary principals offered formal training opportunities; one created a systemic protocol document for decision-making; and six offered a system for support, encouragement, and feedback. There was no perceptual difference between small schools and years of experience when enacting leadership tasks. In all, elementary principals had varying methods for presenting and carrying out their distribution of task to others.

Social Distribution of
Task Enactment

Enacting tasks in a distributed sense across informal and formal leaders signifies the social distribution of tasks. Elementary principals identified various groups of people and the roles each played when distributing leadership tasks. All nine principals had groups serving in an informal capacity within their school. Informal groups were designated as groups not paid or recognized as a leadership position. Two of the nine principals serving large elementary schools identified people who served in formal capacities within their school. They were considered formal due to the people occupying

the position were paid a salary and the positions were formally recognized by the staff.

The title of the positions included head teacher and assistant principal.

Leadership groups. All nine elementary principals identified informal groups of

people who served in a leadership capacity within his or her building. The most informal

group of people identified as providing leadership was teachers. The teacher group

included classroom teachers, resource teachers, specialty teachers, literacy teachers, and

teachers on special assignment. One elementary principal from a small school with one

year of experience responded,

> We have one key mechanism of leadership within our school. We have a group
> of people called specialist; a group of non-classroom teachers that serve special
> needs in the building. … They actually provide quite a substantial role in
> leadership because of scheduling.

Another principal from a large school with six years of experience stated,

> Teachers are involved in design team that teachers are a big part of, student study
> team, which is defining the RTI [Response-to-Intervention] process and running
> the RTI process and making that go smoothly. This is a big change for the
> moment. Building accountability committee, safety committee, and I have a PBS
> [Positive Behavioral Support] team and teachers are all active parts of those
> pieces.

Teachers were identified eight out of nine times as being the elementary principal's first

group choice that provided leadership in his or her school.

Another group of people identified by the principal was classified personnel. Five

of the nine elementary principals identified classified staff as providing leadership in his

or her school. In addition to identifying classified staff, two elementary principals from

large schools identified sub-groups of classified personnel as providing leadership:

custodians, paraprofessional, secretaries, and front office staff. One elementary principal

from a large school with six years of experience stated, "My custodian is in charge of our

Green Star program, which is our recycling program." Another principal serving a large

school with 14 years of experience responded, " I see our school secretary as being the

leader of that area and I work with her to be a leader."

Other groups identified by elementary principals included school counselors,

school psychologists, students, and parents. School counselors, school psychologists, and

students were identified by three elementary school principals in this study as providing

leadership in his or her school. Parents were identified by five out of the nine elementary

school principals as providing leadership tasks in the elementary school setting.

One principal from a large school with 14 years of experience stated, "Our school

psychologist and counselor are viewed as building leaders because they are experts with

special education laws." Another principal in a small school with seven years of

experience responded, "We have parents who take a leadership role as well, and we

ultimately try to bring it down to our students as well."

Overall, elementary principals in larger schools, and with more years of

experience, identified more groups of people who provided leadership in their school.

For example, an elementary principal serving in a large size school with 14 years of

experience identified six groups of people in her school: teachers, classified, parents,

students, counselors, and assistant principal. An elementary principal serving a small

school with one year of experience identified two informal groups--teachers and

classified personnel.

Elementary principals who served smaller schools and had fewer years of

experience identified between one and four groups who provided leadership. In addition,

principals from smaller schools identified fewer groups of people who provided

leadership in their schools than did elementary principals serving large schools. Additionally, elementary principals with less than three years of experience identified fewer groups of people than did elementary principals with 10 or more years of experience

Two of the nine elementary principals identified formal groups while all nine identified informal groups who provided leadership in their respective schools (see Table 3). This social distribution identified the *social actors* who were involved in distributing leadership. To further understand how principals practiced social distribution, a look at the roles that the "social actors" perform is necessary (Spillane et al., 2004, p. 22).

Table 3

Groups Providing Leadership in Elementary Schools as Reported by Elementary Principals

Elementary Principals	1-3 years experience	4-9 years experience	10 or more years experience
Small school <250	Teachers Classified (2)	Teachers Classified staff Students Parents (4)	Teachers (1)
Medium school 250-500	Teacher Counselor Psychologist (3)	Students Teachers Classified staff Parents (4)	Teachers Classified Parents Counselor (4)
Large school 501+	Teachers *Head teachers Psychologist, Counselor (4)	Teachers Parents Classified staff Sub groups Custodian Paraprofessionals (3)	Teachers *Assistant principal Parents Students Counselor Classified staff Sub groups Support staff (6)
Total Groups Identified	9	11	11

*Formal group

Leadership roles. Another aspect of social distribution of task enactment was identified by the leadership roles the leaders assumed when the task was distributed. Spillane et al. (2004) states "that the role of the followers in leadership practice involves more than influencing the action taken by formal leaders or the effects of formal leadership." (p. 19). Spillane goes on to define three role arrangements for distributing

leadership: division of labor, co-performance, and parallel performance (2006). This study explored the roles elementary principals identified as they practiced distributed leadership.

Division of labor. Division of labor is considered a separation of tasks (Gronn, 2000; Spillane, 2006) and is not a common occurrence in schools due to the overlap of duties (Spillane, 2006). In this study, elementary principals who had formal positions in their building indicated that labor was slightly divided along task lines. One of the principals serving a large school with three years of experience stated, "They [head-teachers] schedule the recess and drop-off/pick-up duties and, when I am out of the building, it is their responsibility to handle the office referrals."

Another principal serving a large school with 14 years of experience stated that her assistant principal shared many duties and believed that student attendance was the only role considered the assistant principal's duty. Formal groups were the only groups identified as having a division of labor in this study.

Co-performance. Co-performance leadership is defined as two or more leaders working in collaboration to complete a leadership task (Spillane, 2006). Elementary principals in this study indicated that they collaborated on leadership responsibilities with different groups associated with the school in which they served. One elementary principal serving a small school with seven years of experience stated,

> We also, especially with my instructional coach… I then also have an interventionist, meet on a weekly basis and we talk about what needs to be done around the school. The time we delegate to each there. We try to keep the kids a number one priority so we look at data to see what the data tells us what we need. Between the three of us we can work the plan of how is this going to address the need and how are we going to do it, one-on-one meetings with teachers, whole group, is this a hour and half Wednesday meeting, is it a 20 minute meeting with all of them together and a lot of conversations.

Another principal serving a medium-sized school with three years of experience was having difficulty promoting a program and had to change roles with a teacher leader. She commented,

> I have to take a shared role with her because no matter what she says sometime, sadly enough, some of them don't care because there is no respect. That has been hard so I do more of a shared thing. She maybe does more behind the scenes, more of the collaborating with those that will listen.

In this particular instance, the elementary principal saw a need for a leadership shift to a more collaborative style in order to save the success of the program and integrity of the individual leader.

Another elementary principal in a small school with one year of experience asked a teacher leader to help lead the hiring of a replacement staff member. The principal gave the teacher the leadership role while the principal became a member of the group. He stated, "I was a part of it, but I let her lead, come up with the questions, and pick her team." This process was observed as being co-performed.

Co-performance was also present in a formal leadership role. For example, one elementary principal from a large school with three years of experience commented on his formal positions, "They [head teachers] also are then required to be on the building's leadership committee referred to as the Steering Committee." The overlap of formal roles between co-performing leadership and the division of labor roles was evident in his building.

Co-performance occurred with both formal and informal groups. An elementary principal in a large school with 14 years of experience indicated that she and her assistant principal co-performed many of the formal leadership roles. Together they led student

discipline, planned professional development, were involved in the school behavior

program, and worked on scheduling.

Parallel performance. Elementary principals who distributed leadership tasks to

teacher leaders also described their roles as being parallel. Parallel performance is

defined as working separately while promoting the same goals or vision (Spillane, 2006).

One elementary principal in a large school with 14 years of experience stated,

> When I am looking to develop leadership in the building and choose somebody to lead an effort, what I am looking for is somebody I can go to and explain a vision and know that they are on board and see essentially the same vision, not necessarily the details because the details will iron out in the process of the change happening or the new program coming on.

This principal was vigilant in finding someone who would share the same vision so that

he could communicate the goals of the program to others.

Another elementary principal from a medium-sized school with 14 years of

experience commented,

> With the Response-to-Intervention team, they made the decision as a team that they wanted one person to be the chair for that group and someone to be their support back up unless they were unable to do something. They went through the whole process of who would be the leader of that team.

This principal gave complete autonomy to a group of individuals to lead this program and

share the vision with the school staff.

Elementary principals described the roles of their group leaders in three distinct

arrangements: division of labor, co-performance, and parallel performance. One

elementary principal from a small school with one year of experience stated,

> In most of the circumstance, they either come up with an objective or goal themselves, or I have been a part of that, or maybe I have given them an objective. As much as I can, I fully give over full leadership to that person so they can have the responsibilities and the rewards of taking that task on.

He indicated that he used the task and the situation to help him decide on how he viewed and distributed the roles of his leaders in his building but distributed with full autonomy when possible.

In many examples given by participating principals, there was no clear evidence of the role type that would fit with a particular task. The decision to divide the labor, co-perform, or parallel perform the leadership task was left to the expertise of the leader [teacher leader], the task involved, and ultimately to the decision of the building principal. It appeared in most cases that elementary principals believed in giving greater autonomy to leaders when leading a particular task. For example, an elementary principal from a small school with one year of experience stated, "I really try to be hands off as much as possible." Another principal from a larger school with 14 years of experience agreed and said, "The other thing that I need to do, to practice it, is make sure that I am thinking about not taking back things that can be their decisions."

In some cases, leadership roles were blurred depending on the task and success of the program. In one example, the elementary principal had to intervene to redirect the course of the program outcome. In another case, the task was too large and required input from the elementary principal with information with regard to funding and transportation allocation. Informal groups' roles were identified by the elementary principals as either co-performed or parallel performed. The only groups in this study who were divided along task roles were formal groups who included the head teachers and assistant principal found in large elementary schools (see Table 4).

Table 4

Roles of Leaders in Elementary Schools as Identified by Elementary Principals

School Type	Years Experience	Informal Role	Formal Role
Small <250	1-3	Co-performance	
	4-9	Co-performance Parallel performance	
	10 or more	Parallel performance	
Medium 250-500	1-3	Parallel performance	
	4-9	Parallel performance	
	10 or more	Parallel performance	
Large 501+	1-3	Parallel performance	Division of Labor Co-performance Parallel performance
	4-9	Parallel performance	
	10 or more	Parallel performance	Division of Labor Co-performance Parallel performance

There was only one identified difference between school size and years of leadership in the social distribution of tasks. Larger schools and leaders with more experience identified a greater number of groups than did principals from smaller school and fewer years of experience. Otherwise, there were no perceptual differences between schools size and years of experience on how principals carried out the social distribution of tasks. The next section will explore the situations in which the leader and follower practice the task of leadership.

Situational Distribution of Leadership Practice

Situational distribution of tasks explores "the sociocultural context that can embody the stable practices… in work such as leadership" (Spillane et al., 2004, p. 21). Salient to this construct is a leader's ability to use "inventions" (p. 21) of the system to effectively distribute leadership tasks to others. In this study, several "inventions" were identified as having significant influences on distributed leadership practice of elementary principals: the use of school artifacts, the ability to establish trust, and the recognition of expert knowledge as mediating factors for task distribution.

School artifacts. In addition to the interview data, each elementary principal was asked to provide school artifacts that supported their practice of distributed leadership. Six of the nine elementary principals provided documents they believed were evidence that supported their situational distribution of leadership tasks. Three elementary principals did not provide the researcher with any documents at the time of the interview.

School artifacts collected varied in amount and type. In all, 44 documents were collected from the six elementary principals. Only one of three elementary principals with 10 or more years of experience submitted school artifacts, two of three elementary principals with four and nine years of experience submitted school artifacts, and all three elementary principals with less than three years of experience submitted school artifacts. One elementary principal from a small school with one year of experience provided one document identifying the leadership teams in his school; whereas an elementary principal in a large school with six years of experience submitted 24 pages of documents that he believed supported his practice of distributing leadership tasks to others.

The researcher left the decision for amount and type of documentation to each elementary principal so as not to influence their decision-making on how they used school artifacts to distribute leadership tasks. Documents submitted were identified with common themes: decision-making protocols, leadership organizational charts, and documents for communication purposes.

Three elementary principals provided school artifacts that described decision-making protocols for either their entire building staff or individual teams. An elementary principal in a large school with three years of experience used a decision-making protocol document as a guide with his entire staff to determine the level at which decisions were to be made and to what degree to seek input. The two other elementary principals, representing a medium-sized with 14 year of experience and a large school with six years experience respectively, used decision-making documents with their Response-to-Intervention teams as a guide to determine the course of action for student academic interventions. The decision-making protocols established a collective expectation for all leaders and followers in the building and individual teams.

Three elementary principals provided school artifacts that outlined the leadership structure of the school. Two documents were in linear form; a third was displayed as an advanced organizer that gave a visual representation of how leadership teams interacted with one another. These three elementary principals recognized between 8 and 10 teams each that provided leadership in their respective schools. Teams identified included student intervention teams, school climate teams, school accountability teams, advisory teams, instructional teams, technology committee, parent teacher organization, student/teacher advisory team, reading incentive team, student council, literacy teams,

and social committees. One elementary principal from a medium-sized school with 14 years of experience provided a document that described the function of each team; the other two principals only identified teams and individual identities of those who served on the team.

Other school artifacts that were provided by elementary principals were communicative in nature and included documents such as leadership team agendas, team meeting minutes, data collection tools, informational emails, and yearly goal outlines. An elementary principal from a medium-sized school with three years of experience provided school artifacts that outlined the process that her teacher leader used in promoting writing development. The documents included an agenda, classroom observational feedback, informational update for both primary and intermediate grade levels, as well as an email for the next scheduled meeting. The school artifacts in this example implied an understanding of the concepts of distributed leadership through leaders, followers, practice, and the situation.

In addition, other school artifacts submitted by elementary principals communicated completed tasks by the designated leadership team. One elementary principal from a medium-sized school with five years of experience communicated to his staff the new process for completing parent teacher conferences. This document was created as a result of a task assigned to teachers by the principal. Another elementary principal from a large school with six years of experience used school artifacts to identify the safety and emergency procedures for his school while providing role and responsibilities for his staff under adverse conditions. A team of staff members whose task was distributed by the building principal created this document.

School artifacts provided by six elementary principals in this study provided physical documentation of established decision-making processes, leadership structures, and the process of communicating task progress and completion in their respective schools. The school artifacts provided in this study assisted the researcher in understanding how the leader utilized school artifacts as tools to practice distributed leadership. In addition to school artifacts defining the situation, elementary principals identified the importance of other factors in task distribution (see Table 5).

Table 5

Type and Amount of School Artifacts Provided by Elementary Principals

School Type	Years Experience	Type of Artifact	Total Artifacts
Small <250	1-3	Linear school leadership organizational structure	1
	4-9		0
	10 or more		0
Medium 250-500	1-3	RTI, decision making, flow chart, SMART, goal decision making, protocol, communication from team leader in writing and PBS, emails, agendas, lesson feedback	12
	4-9	Parent/Teacher conferences new plan Linear school leadership organizational structure Leadership agenda, goals & vision Advanced organizer leadership structure	4
	10 or more	Linear school leadership team structure	1
Large 501+	1-3	Decision making protocol Staff agenda – operational items	2
	4-9	PBS team yearly goals, minutes, expectations, data collection tool, design team yearly goals, safety & emergency procedural document – Role & Responsibilities Flow chart on decision making SST referral process (24)	24
	10 or more		0

Established trust. A common theme that emerged from the data was the level of established trust between the leader and the follower. This became evident in the data as being a situational factor required before successful distribution took place. One elementary principal from a small school with seven years of experience stated,

> The first thing is I trust my teachers. We are working towards a common goal. My first couple of years here, I didn't have those relationships built. It was the principal's responsibility and I also knew as a principal I had to have experience. I don't want to say it was a lack of trust, but earlier on in my career it was more of this got to get done. The only way I am sure it gets done is that I do it. As I have gotten to know my staff and we trust each other and as I talk to them and they let me know what they want and need. The first practice is trusting that you are all working towards a common goal.

In this situation, distributing leadership tasks earlier in his career was not as successful as it was in his later leadership years. This was due in part to his ongoing relationship development and an increased trust level with his staff. Another elementary principal from small school with 19 years of experience responded,

> For my leadership style, I trust them. If I pick something up at a meeting and get information about what is coming down, if there is something missing or we need to throw in there I will come in at that time to say, "Here is some things to do or think about it."

This principal had an established trust with his teachers and felt comfortable handing over tasks.

Another elementary principal in a large school with 14 years of experience recognized the importance of trust and was building relationships with her teachers so as to begin distributing tasks where she felt comfortable. She stated,

> It is getting to know one another; it's team building, and being patient with the jockeying. I found that I hired a lot of leaders and so there is a little bit of a whole group conversation about those pieces rather than me having already selected [the leaders].

Another elementary principal in a medium-sized school with five years of experience also identified establishing trust as important. He responded, "They have to have a good relationship with me and feel comfortable to share ideas so they won't feel like they won't be in trouble." Another elementary principal in a medium-sized school with 14 years of experience commented, "I kind of look at my staff in terms of what they are comfortable with. For a lot of these people, I have been with them for 14 years."

During the interviews, elementary principals consistently commented on trust between the leader and the follower as a key situational factor in distributing tasks and key to successful distribution. In one example, the elementary principal from a medium-sized school with three years of experience recognized that trust was lost during a distributed task and she worked hard to regain the trust of the followers. She stated,

> People are on edge right now. Our [teacher] was the leader in this and it didn't come out how I had hoped, or how I would have presented it. She knows her stuff and the presentation. I learned my lesson there. I was shocked to be honest. Respect on one hand and presentation on the other.

This elementary principal worked with the teacher leader to help restore trust between the teacher and the staff. She reflected, "Just knowing that maybe that is not the best person next time and being honest with person was important." The relationship between elementary principal and teacher leader, along with the relationship between teacher leader and staff, could have caused a task failure if it were not for the intervention of the elementary principal.

Another element of trust identified by two elementary principals from small schools was finding the internal trust to distribute leadership tasks to others. A principal with one year of experience stated, "My nature is to do it by myself, but when I sit down and think about it that is not the most effective way to proceed."

Another with seven years echoed, "I don't want to say it was a lack of trust, but earlier in my career, it was more of this has to get done. The only way I am sure it gets done is that I do it." Both principals at different years of experience realized that trusting in themselves to let go of the tasks is a situational factor in distributing leadership to others.

Elementary principals identified trust as a situational factor for distributing leadership tasks to other successfully. Some described the trust between teacher leader and staff while two elementary principals discussed the need to trust themselves in order to distribute task to others.

Expert knowledge of task. Expert knowledge was identified by elementary principals as a factor for distributing leadership tasks. Elementary principals discussed how they used expert knowledge to distribute leadership.

One elementary principal serving a large school with 14 years of experience identified situational expertise as a factor for distributing the task of literacy instruction. She stated, "Coming from the middle school and not being an expert in teaching kids how to read, I immediately knew I would not be the best leader for task." She went on to state,

> I generally act under the philosophy of the practitioners that are in the classroom and in the counselor offices are the experts. It is my job to support them. For the work of the school it is important to have those experts in those areas leading the work that needs to be done. Who are your go to people who really understand reading and wiring instruction and putting them out there at the fore front of being the leader in the work and moving our school forward.

Being in her third year as an elementary principal with only previous middle school leadership experience required her to rely on the experts to help lead the school in literacy instruction.

Another elementary principal from a medium–sized school with three years of experience made a similar observation regarding a teacher leading the writing program. She stated, "I know she is doing it a heck of a lot better than I would because she is the expert in that area."

An elementary principal serving a small school with one year of experience also commented on the importance of expert knowledge when distributing tasks. He stated,

> I hope that it is always the case that I am relying on people from my building to be a part of the leadership because, honestly, when I look at the whole building there is a lot of expertise and I am very rarely the one with the most, or very rarely think that I have the most expertise and can be the most effective if I do it by myself.

An elementary principal serving a large school with six years of experience echoed,

> My Response-to-Intervention (RTI) movement is really working well. I hired my school psychologist to be my RTI consultant and she is somebody who is very bright and knows the tricks and she also knows the special education angle. So she knows both the general education and special education pieces. That hire was really important and key to making the whole process move along smoothly. She has the skills in terms of practical skills, she has the people skills, and she and I communicate well together.

Elementary principals consistently relied on situational expert knowledge to distribute tasks. Rarely did elementary principals distribute a task to someone who was not the expert in a particular area. For example, an elementary principal in a medium-sized school with three years of experience commented, "Don't put people in a leadership roles that they are not comfortable with." Another elementary principal in a medium-sized school with five years of experience echoed, "I would never put a first or second year teacher on that role [leadership role]." Elementary principals appeared aware of the importance of expert knowledge and the potential success of the program being distributed.

Situational distribution of leadership tasks revealed the context in which elementary principals used "inventions" of the system to distribute leadership tasks (Spillane et al., 2004, p. 21). Elementary principals provided school artifacts that were tools in distributed decision-making protocols, leadership organizational charts, and documents for communication purposes. Principals identified trust and recognition of expert knowledge as additional factors for situational distribution of tasks. There were no perceptual differences between school size and years of experience in situational distribution of leadership tasks.

Overall, principals' perceptions on the practice of distributing leadership task to others revealed a complex understanding of leadership. The use of Spillane et al.'s (2004) conceptual framework of leadership tasks and functions, enactment of tasks, social distribution of task enactment, and situational distribution of leadership asks allowed the researcher to analyze the practice of distributed leadership. The next section attempts to review the findings from the second research question.

Research Question 2

Q2   What are elementary principals' perceptions on the barriers of distributing leadership?

Elementary principals were asked to define barriers that existed in their schools which impeded the opportunity to distribute leadership tasks. In addition, elementary principals were also asked to identify instances where individuals were not be able to complete a distributed task successfully. In coding the data, this researcher identified two major themes that emerged from the data: school-level factors and individual factors. School-level factors included structural barriers, lack of resources, and communication barriers. Individual factors included teacher leader perceptions and staff conflict.

School-Level Factors

Barriers were identified as school-level factors due to the size and scope of the barrier. School-level factors were used to identify barriers that involved school or building level issues and involved more than one individual. Three sub-themes emerged: structural barriers, lack of resources, and communication barriers.

Structural barriers. Four elementary principals interviewed identified three structural barriers associated with elementary schools that impeded distribution of leadership tasks: school location and size, job title and description, and community perceptions.

Due to the isolated location of a small school, one elementary principal with seven years of experience believed location was a barrier to distributing leadership tasks. Since all of his 194 students were bussed by the school district or provided transportation by parents, the elementary principal believed this limited his ability to distribute leadership to others. He responded,

> Our school is 100% bus riding or parents bring their kids. We are surrounded by two major roads and the students must ride the bus. Because we are not a neighborhood school it limits some of the things we can do with the kids. Ultimately our goal even through all of this leadership is to work with the kids and train them and help them become better life choosers and participant and because the fact that they come on the bus, we lose some leadership opportunities there.

This principal believed he could distribute more leadership tasks to others for the success of his students if his building was more like a neighborhood school. He also believed the size of school caused a barrier to task distribution.

The small population size of his elementary school restricted the development of task distribution. He explained that his school did not distribute leadership in a balanced way. The principal stated,

> The size of our school certainly [is a barrier]. Part of that is because, when you are school this size, everybody has to take on some additional responsibilities without me asking them to do a leadership role. They have to take on more duties whereas other schools they may only have to sit on one committee. Here they are asked to sit on two or three committees because we want to have good representation and when you don't have a lot of representation but you want good representation you have to sit on more.

Another elementary principal representing a large school with 14 years of experience stated that distributing leadership tasks to others have been difficult due to the size of her new school. She stated,

> Some barriers that we had is opening up [the school] so large. The teachers not knowing each other and me not knowing them well enough to be able to [distribute leadership]. It prevented me from knowing who to know and who to put in any leadership [role].

Both elementary principals representing small and large schools, respectively, found the school size to be a barrier for effective task distribution. The elementary principal from the small school believed that his school was too small while the other principal from the large school believed that her school was too large. No other elementary principal identified school size as a barrier to distributing leadership; however, other barriers were identified.

Two elementary principals from small and large schools, respectively, identified job title and description as barriers to distributing leadership. An elementary principal serving in a small school with seven years of experience stated, "Teachers are typically overworked and underpaid and that whole mentality leads them to say, 'I am just going to do what is in my job description and call it good.' There is a mentality that needs to

massaged as well." The principal in the large school with three years of experience

echoed, "One of the natural [thoughts] is the title. [A teacher would say,] 'I am a

classroom teacher, this in not my job I have enough to do without being a school leader.''

Both examples provided evidence that the structure of individual job title and description

were perceived as barriers to distributing leadership.

The final structural barrier identified by an elementary principal serving in a small

school with 19 years of experience was based on the community's perception of how the

school should be structured and what types of programs it should offer its students. The

elementary principal explained that the small community surrounding the school had

deep historical roots and change was difficult to sell. He commented,

> The other part that would impede us here is the big picture of what is out there.
> Being a small school a lot of people and I have had dads who have graduated and
> their children are graduating, a complete generation. They want school to be like
> it was when they were here. To get the bond passed for the new building, it was
> more of an eye opener getting the people back into the building. It takes a little
> longer for the leadership idea. We move a little slower.

The community was hesitant to bring in a new physical structure, as well as a new

leadership style, to assist in facilitating the program changes.

Structural barriers, whether physical or ideological, were barriers that four

elementary principals representing small and large school sizes and all years of

experience believed impeded the process for distributing leadership tasks. Elementary

principals from medium-sized schools did not identify structural barriers that impeded

distributed leadership opportunities. Other barriers, however, were identified and are

explored in the next section.

Lack of resources. Four elementary principals identified the lack of resources as a barrier to distributing leadership tasks. Time and money were identified as resources. Time was considered a resource barrier because it impeded opportunities for leaders and followers to effectively distribute leadership.

Two elementary principals serving in medium-sized schools indicated that time used for teacher leadership collaboration was in short supply. One principal with five years of experience commented,

> It would be nice to meet more, but then you are putting a strain on teachers meeting so much. The district requires them to meet now more than ever as teams we are limited on how many times we can meet. What we should be doing in our school is jumping into that leadership role and training the rest of the staff, but what we have time for now basically is getting together and talking about management issues.

The other principal serving a medium-sized school with 14 years of experience stated, "Time is the big issue. We have been fortunate that I have been able to pull in subs for release days for teams to meet. I have built in the schedule team planning; group team planning, so they don't have to create new time for it."

Another elementary principal serving a small school with one year of experience echoed,

> They [teachers] spend a lot of time with their kids and very little time with anybody else on the staff. Aside from staff meetings and formal opportunities, there is not a lot of time that is dedicated to professional dialogue and informal opportunities for leadership.

Three elementary principals believed time was a barrier to leadership distribution. It was also apparent that these three principals were working around this barrier with schedule changes, release time, and providing other opportunities for teachers to gather for collaborative purposes.

The fourth elementary principal serving a small school with 19 years of experience indicated lack of money as a barrier in distributing leadership. He believed that being in a small district limited the number of personnel available to accomplish all the tasks. He stated,

> This is a tough time, but obviously money would be one of your first things. And, that is not the whole answer. The money piece is sad but true statement and has a bigger picture for us than what people realize. We can teach 65 kids. Our student ratio is 11 to 1, [but] when you get bogged down with the state requirements and all the little stuff that goes on and it sucks away from the education side.

This principal believed that additional money in his district would increase the number of personnel to whom tasks could be distributed.

This principal also explained that being in a small school has been difficult in recruiting and hiring teachers outside of the local area due to lack of money. He believed strongly in his teachers' current abilities but he wanted to bring in teachers from other areas to increase the skill level of his entire staff. When he first began as an elementary principal, the district was unable to hire teachers from outside the area. Things have changed and there has been an increase in the skill of all of his teachers due to a resurgence of outside talent. He commented,

> I inherited three or four teachers in residency where people were hired because they lived in the community and they got a college degree, but now they are going back for two years and to do all of this. With some changes with the building, now we have a pool of teachers that are not local people anymore. That talent level or the people in your building limit that.

This elementary principal wanted to hire teachers from outside the community to help increase the skills of his staff so as to increase the effectiveness of distributing leadership tasks.

Elementary principals, representing small- and medium-sized schools along with all years of experience, believed that the lack of time and money were barriers to distributing leadership to others. Elementary principals representing large schools did not identify lack of resources as a barrier to distributing leadership. Another barrier identified by elementary principals was communication.

Communication barriers. Elementary principals identified communication as a barrier to effective distribution of leadership tasks. Communication took the form of direct and indirect communication. Direct communication focused on the leader's ability to communicate the necessary goals to the follower directly. Indirect communication focused on a perceived misunderstanding of the interpreted message. In both cases, communication was cited as a barrier to leadership distribution.

An elementary principal serving a small school with one year of experience was frustrated with the failure of a distributed leadership task. He stated, "I thought I communicated that pretty clearly on numerous occasions and we are still really struggling in our office as far as an effective response." In this instance, this appeared to be an indirect communication example where the followers and leaders failed to effectively understand each other's expectations and the steps necessary for the desired outcome.

Another elementary principal serving a small school with seven years of experience witnessed an indirect communication break down with his parents. He responded,

> Lack of understanding in our roles from parents is another thing. We have lots of parents with fabulous ideas and think it should be really easy to make that happen in school and they don't understand the big picture. We don't have a lot of time to do this great thing and it would be a great thing and kids could benefit from it.

He also identified direct communication with his teachers as a barrier as well. He stated,

> Sometimes I get bogged down in with the paperwork and the discipline side that I forget to communicate. I have lots of teachers willing to be the leaders, but they want to be clear on what they are doing… There are instances that I am not clear that keeps them from being able to do some things.

Another elementary principal from a medium-sized school with 14 years of experience also identified communication as a barrier. He commented,

> Another is consistent communication. Someone has to start it and make sure that it is followed through with. We get busy, we forget and when you have a communication break down that hinders the decision-making process. It has happened to us and it is the reality of being in a school.

This direct communication example was a barrier because the leaders and followers failed to establish consistent communication patterns throughout the practice of leadership distribution.

Communication was considered a barrier by three elementary principals serving small and medium schools and representing all years of experience. Direct and indirect communication patterns were revealed as types of communication barriers to distributing leadership tasks to others. Elementary principals from large schools identified lack of resources and structural barriers; however, they did not identify communication as a barrier to distributing leadership.

Barriers at the school-level impeded the opportunity to distribute leadership tasks to others. School-level barriers were identified as structural barriers, lack of resources, and communication barriers. The findings revealed that elementary principals from small and large schools identified school structures (school location and size, job title and description, and community perceptions) as barriers. Elementary principals from small and medium-sized school identified lack of resources (time and money) as barriers.

Elementary principals representing small- and medium-sized schools identified

communication (direct and indirect) as a barrier to distributing leadership. There was no

perceptual difference in years of experience from any school-level barrier identified (see

Table 6).

Table 6

*School-Level Barriers Identified by Elementary Principals That Impede the Opportunity
to Distribute Leadership*

	1-3 years experience	4-9 years experience	10 or more years experience	Total Barriers
Small school <250	Structural—School size Lack of Resources--Time Communication--Indirect	Structural--School size Communication--Indirect	Structural--Community perceptions Lack of Resources--Money	Structural--3 Lack of Resources--2 Communication--2
Medium school 250-500	*Staff Conflict	Lack of Resources--Time	Lack of Resources--Time Communication--Direct	Lack of Resources--2 Communication--1
Large school 501+	Structural--Job title and description	*Teacher Leadership Perception	Structural--School size	Structural--2

* Not school level

Individual Factors

　　Individual factors were a second major theme that emerged as a barrier to

distributing leadership since they focused on the situation or person associated with the

distributed leadership task. Two sub-themes emerged as factors: teacher leadership

perceptions and staff conflict.

Teacher leadership perceptions. Four elementary principals identified teacher leadership perceptions as a barrier to distributing leadership tasks to others. Leadership perceptions were identified as a teacher's perceptual views towards leadership, e.g., teachers perceiving leadership as being too stressful, teacher educational views were incongruent with the elementary principal, and teachers avoiding the responsibility for decision-making.

One elementary principal representing a large school with three years of experience commented on teacher leadership stress by stating,

> People view leadership as more stressful. If you are going to ask someone to take that on you need to… I hate to say this because it is kind of tough. They need to know what is in it for them. People are feeling the normal stress as a teacher so in distributing leadership it distributes more decision-making, which is stressful for a lot of teachers.

This elementary principal believed his role was to balance the distribution of leadership so as not to *over tax* them so they could function with enthusiasm toward teaching.

Another elementary principal serving a small school with seven years of experience identified individual stress coming from outside of the school environment as a barrier to distributing leadership tasks. He stated,

> I do have some teachers who outside of school life keep them from being leaders in school. It is because they have young kids; maybe they don't have a very good marriage, going through some rough times relationship wise. I have had some teachers, who said, 'yes' and tried to be that leader, but because of outside issues could not meet the timelines.

Both elementary principals identified stress both inside and outside of school as being a barrier for effective distribution of leadership tasks.

Another teacher leadership perception identified by an elementary principal serving a large school with six years of experience was based on the leaders' and

followers' incongruent educational philosophy toward educating children. The

elementary principal noted,

> This particular case it is really more about a difference in educational philosophy and honestly, if I interviewed her today, I would not hire her and I see some very clear shortcoming in the way she approaches her classroom and her philosophy in teaching.

In addition, this principal also identified educational philosophy differences with the

follower and organization. He commented, "There are plenty of places where people are

personally involved, if there is an individual agenda that is not in line with where the

organization needs to go." Both examples highlight examples of differences in

educational philosophy between the leaders and followers, between followers and the

organization, and were identified as potential barriers in distributing leadership tasks to

others.

An elementary principal serving in a medium-sized school with 14 years of

experience identified that on occasion teachers may not want the responsibility to make

decisions. He stated, "Some things I have talked about [with teachers]. 'Do you want this

to go to leadership or another committee or do you want me to make the decisions?'

Sometimes they don't want the responsibility for the decision." This is an example of

how this principal communicates with his staff to determine what tasks to distribute, but

he also identified it as a barrier to distributing tasks.

Teacher leadership perceptions were identified by four elementary principals

serving all size school and all years of experience. Elementary principals viewed

teachers' leadership perceptions as too stressful, as having incongruent philosophical

views as the principal, and the avoidance of responsibility on certain decisions.

Staff conflict. Four elementary principals also noted staff conflict as a barrier. The elementary principals responded in this study that teacher leaders perceived or encountered staff conflict when leadership tasks were distributed.

Four elementary principals representing all size schools and years of experience identified staff conflict between leaders and followers as barriers. One elementary principal from a small school with one year of experience explained his thoughts based on his teachers' perceived staff conflict. He commented, "Leadership often times involves leading adults in our setting and they're real keyed into kids and a lot of them get nervous, reluctant, hesitant when asked to lead adults especially surrounding any kind of potential conflict."

An elementary principal representing a medium-sized school with three years of experience identified an encountered staff conflict. She stated,

> Our teacher is amazing. She knows data better than anyone I have ever seen. She is one of those statistic gurus, but there is some conflict between her and other staff members and they don't necessarily get along. That respect thing is there and has been really hard in that piece of the distributed [leadership].

Another elementary principal representing a medium-sized school with five years of experience echoed, "I had somebody a couple of years ago that was very bright, probably knew more about reading strategies than anyone I had ever worked with." He went on to say,

> She was a little shy and people didn't come to her like they should. She is so bright, but I thought it would be a great idea if I would ask her to be the facilitator of that group. She would gain more respect from the staff and it backfired on me. She was not strong enough to run it.

An elementary principal serving a large school with 14 years of experience identified an example based on strong competition amongst a leadership team as being a barrier for

effectively distributing leadership. She explained the competition of the team by

commenting,

> If I have said to one teacher, "Would you work with your team on looking at your data to do flexible grouping for math?" It became too convoluted because too many of the other people have strong opinions and philosophies in a way they wanted to do it and that one person was not able to… It ended up being someone, it had to be our [specialty] teacher who had to go in and facilitate that and do it because no one from within that group was able to keep the role. Everyone kept taking the role.

Competitive personalities in the team dynamics were considered barriers to the effective

distribution and completion of leadership tasks.

These four elementary principals identified staff conflict between leaders and

followers as a barrier to effective leadership distribution. Elementary principals identified

staff conflict as a barrier based on a teacher's perceived or encountered conflict with

other staff members during task distribution. There was no perceptual difference based on

school size or an elementary principal's years of experience with staff conflict (see Table

7).

The barriers identified by participants were at both the school and individual

level. School-level barriers included structural barriers, lack of resources, and

communication issues. Barriers at the individual level were based on a teacher leadership

perception; they included perceiving stress in leadership both inside and outside of the

school environment, differences in educational philosophies, and not accepting

responsibility for decision-making. Staff conflict was identified as perceived or

encountered conflict when distributing leadership tasks. The elementary principals in this

study described the school-level and individual barriers as challenges in their schools.

Table 7

Individual Factors Identified by Elementary Principals That Impede the Opportunity to Distribute Leadership

School Type	Years Experience	Staff Conflict	Teacher Leadership Perception
Small <250	1-3	Perceived	
	4-9		Stress outside school
	10 or more	*Lack of resources	
Medium 250-500	1-3	Encountered	
	4-9	Encountered	
	10 or more		Responsibility avoidance
Large 501+	1-3		Perceived leadership stress
	4-9		Differences in educational philosophy
	10 or more	Group competition	

*Not Individual Factor

Research Question 3

Q3   What are elementary principals' perceptions on the impact of distributing leadership on student achievement?

All nine elementary principals gave their perceptions on the impact of distributing

leadership on student achievement. In coding the data, each elementary principal

identified school-specific evidence that supported a positive impact of distributing

leadership on student achievement. Six of the nine elementary principals initially

indicated that distributed leadership had a positive impact on student achievement in their respective schools. Three elementary principals, representing two small schools and one medium-sized school, respectively, initially indicated they were not aware of evidence that distributed leadership impacted student achievement in a positive way. However, they later discussed the impact of distribution of leadership tasks and how it helped students achieve a positive outlook on education, increased academic in writing, and created more opportunities for students. There was no indication by any of the elementary principals that distributed leadership had a negative impact on student achievement. Three themes emerged from the data supporting the assertions of elementary principals in this study: program effectiveness, student assessment gains, and increased opportunities for students.

Program Effectiveness

Elementary principals identified program effectiveness as a positive impact of distributed leadership on student achievement. Principals presented snapshots of their program successes. One elementary principal serving a medium-sized school with three years of experience indicated that they were making gains in both their behavior program and writing program due to distributed leadership. In referring to the school's behavior program that had been distributed to a teacher leader, she stated, "We are achieving our goal so far, so we are on track." As far as the writing program also being distributed to another teacher leader, she commented, "She [teacher leader] has been really the driving force behind it all. We are definitely closing the gap." This principal was initially unsure of evidence that distributed leadership supported an impact on student achievement, but

she later provided examples of program effectiveness based on two programs that had

been distributed to teacher leaders.

Another elementary principal serving a large school with three years of

experience indicated he too had experienced a gain in his school's behavior program due

to distributing this task to teachers. He stated,

> Here again you have this team of folks that are making ideas for instructing kids
> what their behavioral expectation for the school are and if you are spending less
> time redirecting kids because you have real positive way of teaching them how to
> behave in different areas then you are spending less time on those interactions and
> more time on instruction.

Another principal in a large school with 14 years of experience reflected on a teacher

leader on her staff. This teacher was serving with a team of teachers on a distributed task

involving flexible reading groups. The principal commented,

> A teacher who has taught for a number of years came to me and said, "For many
> years I have taught and always thought there were kids that I am missing and kids
> who have fallen through the cracks, kids who I felt that I never felt like I have
> really addressed their needs. This is one of the first years in teaching that I have
> felt like that every student we [taught], we met them where they were and moved
> them forward."

The principal was proud of this teacher and the team's success in increasing students'

reading levels in the school. She later asked this team to present their reading program to

the rest of the staff.

Another principal serving a small school with one year of experience discussed

the impact that distributed leadership had on increasing student motivation towards

academics. He recognized the problem of low student motivation towards academics and

the upcoming Colorado Student Assessment Program (CSAP); he called on his teachers

to assist in creating a new perception and motivation plan for the students. He began, "It

happened because we analyzed the system." He went on to discuss how the existing

method for motivating students did not work and stated, "What could we put in place that is a motivator?" Then his team discovered another method to increase motivation. He explained,

> We think we now have something in place. If we can follow through, that will impact student achievement and maybe not only on this one measure [CSAP], but it will by the nature of the reward it will provide an opportunity for our whole school to get together and celebrate and bring this notion of academic achievement is a kind of a cool thing.

The elementary principals above identified academic and behavioral program effectiveness as positive progress in distributing leadership. Other principals identified gains in student assessments that supported distributed leadership practices.

Student Assessment Gains

Three elementary principals identified gains in student assessment data. Principals referred to the student's academic growth through the Colorado Student Assessment Program. An elementary principal serving a small school with 19 years of experience indicated that his school was a low performing school and had not met its Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) when he arrived. He stated, "When I came here, this was a low achieving elementary, not because of the teaching staff but because of the previous administration." He went on to explain how he worked with teachers to create a system of leadership distribution and explained,

> I just brought my experiences and gave them ideas so they could create their own ideas. So they could create their own system inside of their ideas. That would be where I would feel very comfortable that there would be evidence. It was their thoughts, their guidance, and their choice…

Another principal serving a medium-sized school with 14 years of experience echoed with similar results,

> We did not make AYP [Annual Yearly Progress] and fell short in a couple of areas. Our CSAP scores were below the state in probably half of them. This was our first case of sitting down and goal setting and trying to decide the intervention process. These committees really worked hard the next year in setting stuff up and the following school year we were at or above the state in all areas and we have done that in the past four years.

Both elementary principals attributed distributing leadership tasks to others as having an impact on the CSAP assessment for increased student achievement.

Another elementary principal serving a large school with three years of experience believed that distributed leadership provided a scheduling foundation for students to perform better on the CSAP assessment. He explained how he distributed the task of scheduling to teachers. His goal was to use his teacher leaders to create a plan that would best meet the needs of all students taking the CSAP assessment. He reflected on the importance of this task by saying, "Giving those kids the best opportunity to take that test you are going to get the most accurate data. Then you take the most accurate data and it helps you drive your instruction for next year. That is how it impacts student achievement." This principal was relying on teachers to create a scheduled environment where students could accurately reflect their learning results to the staff.

All three elementary principals identified the impact of distributed leadership on student achievement through gains in student assessment data. Other indicators of increase student achievement were found through increased opportunities for students.

Increased Opportunities for Students

The final theme emerging from the data on the impact of distributing leadership on student achievement was increased opportunities for students. Elementary principals identified that academic programs increased opportunities for students as a result of tasks

being distributed. Three elementary principals identified specific programs that

demonstrated that students were increasing in academic areas.

One elementary principal serving a small school with seven years of experience

explained that his teachers were instrumental in creating additional opportunities for

students. He stated,

> I had teachers who asked if they could start an after school tutor program, and if they could do a summer library program for our kids who are not good readers. We wanted to make sure they had access to books. If I had not been willing to let them [teachers] do that it would not have gotten done. It was not on my list of priorities. I was not going to arrange it, organize it, or figure out the funding. Because of that we had kids utilize the library year round and we haven't seen some of that summer drop in their beginning of the year literacy scores because we made sure they had access to the library.

He went on to reflect, "I know that kids are getting more opportunities for help and more

opportunities to resources that they were getting. Does that directly relate to student

achievement? I hope so."

Another principal serving a large school with six years of experience also

explained an increase in student academic opportunities. He stated,

> When I first got here, we had a half-time literacy teacher that saw 20 kids and that was about the extent of our support. We had a special education teacher who saw 15 kids. That is all that qualified. We had about 35 kids out of 500 that were getting support and now we got 40 kids in structured literacy program, we got teachers doing the reading program in their rooms as a Tier One or actually be a Tier Two piece of support. We got pull out for interventions that the specialist teachers are doing. We got parents helping with kids doing computerized Lexia interventions that are happening everyday. An RTI coordinator who is doing Systems-44 interventions and social group interventions for behavior kids, and I look around at the number of kids getting support is more like a 100 to 120 kids are now getting support and when I first got here there were about 40 kids getting support. Just the amount that we can do for kids is so much more than what we could do in the past. That piece we can quantify.

He explained how all of this was accomplished through the creation of teams and the

distribution of leadership to those teams. He concluded by saying, "All of that has come

out of student study teams and the Response-to-Intervention process and getting teachers

involved in that and getting teacher involved in our professional learning community

work."

All elementary principals interviewed for this study gave detailed responses to

address the positive impact of distributed leadership on student achievement. Some

elementary principals provided program results as evidence of ongoing student growth

while others directed their comments toward a gain in student assessment data as

measured by the Colorado State Assessment Program assessment. Other elementary

principals believed that distributing leadership to others impacted their student's

academic achievement through the increase of instructional programs, both during and

after school hours. There was no perceptual difference between school size and years of

service based on the information given by elementary principals (see Table 8).

Table 8

The Identified Results by Elementary Principals on the Impact of Distributed Leadership on Student Achievement

	1-3 years experience	4-9 years experience	10 or more years experience
Small school <250	Gains in student assessment--CSAP	Increased opportunities for students	Increased opportunities for students
Medium school 250-500	Program effectiveness--Behavior program and writing program	Program effectiveness--Grade-level teams	Gains in student assessment--CSAP
Large school 501+	Gains in student assessment--CSAP	Increased opportunities for students	Program effectiveness--Reading program

Summary

The findings of this study were a reflection of nine elementary principals' perceptions on the practice of distributing leadership, the barriers of distributing leadership, and the impact of distributing leadership on student achievement. Data collected in this study were only a small sample representation of elementary principals serving small, medium, and large elementary schools and representing 1 to 19 years of experience in the state of Colorado. This study does not attempt to speak for all principals in the state of Colorado or the United States but is a snapshot of current practicing elementary principal in Colorado. The next chapter summarizes the findings, provides recommendations, draws conclusions, and highlights additional areas of study.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine elementary principals' perceptions of distributed leadership to determine if this is a viable leadership framework that leaders of elementary schools can utilize to educate all children to current educational standards. Distributed leadership has been explored in the literature; it has been found to have a positive impact on schools in the area of increased teacher capacity (Leithwood et al., 2007) and increased student achievement (Spillane, 2006; Timperley, 2005). Also in the literature, distributed leadership has been challenged as nothing more than sharing leadership task with others (Harris, 2008; Spillane). However, this study revealed a more complex description of distributed leadership in practice as perceived by elementary principals than has been described in the literature.

This chapter will provide a summary of findings, discussion of the summary findings, recommendations, implications for practice, suggestions for further research, and concluding comments.

Summary of Findings

Representing six Front-Range school districts in Colorado, nine elementary principals offered their perceptions of distributed leadership in their respective schools.

The principals were classified in this study based on school size (small, medium, and large) and total years of leadership experience (1-3 years, 4-9 years, and 10 or more years). This was purposeful in design to determine if school size and years of leadership experience provided different perceptions on distributed leadership.

Even though some elementary principals in this study defined distributed leadership in common terms such as shared or collaborative, the evidence presented in the interviews and through the school artifacts painted a much more complex picture of leadership and how principals distributed it to others. For example, elementary principals would often define the tasks, realize the potential in others, and distribute leadership based on set criteria (teacher expertise, peer influence on task, trust in others, task completion, and success rate of task).

It was apparent in the manner in which principals discussed the criteria that their thoughts and strategies had been defined and shaped through leadership experience. It was intriguing to observe during the interviews the thoughtful deliberations each principal presented as evidence of the practice he or she utilized to distribute leadership in his or her building. All elementary principals interviewed presented information that revealed a strong belief in distributed leadership as a fundamentally sound practice of leadership; all were eager to learn more about this phenomenon. The summary of findings will review each research question individually.

Research Question 1

      Q1   What are elementary principals' perceptions on the practice of distributing leadership?

Seven of the nine interview questions were directly related to the practice of distributed leadership. The following questions focused on exploring elementary principals' perceptions of distributed leadership practice.

- What are your views on distributed leadership?

- What groups of people provide leadership in your school?

- What are the roles of those that provide distributed leadership?

- What do you do as a principal to practice distributed leadership?

- Describe a time when you distributed a leadership task. How did you select the person or persons to lead and why did you decide to distribute this task?

- How does distributing leadership tasks to others impact the goals of your school?

- How does distributing leadership tasks to others help meet the demands of the principal position?

The seven questions attempted to elicit principals' perceptions of the complex practice of distributing leadership in elementary schools. Using the conceptual framework created by Spillane et al. (2004) made the task of exploring distributed leadership practice manageable. The framework's four constructs--leadership task and function, enacting leadership tasks, social distribution of task enactment, and situational distribution of leadership practice--allowed this researcher to identify important perceptions regarding the practice of distributed leadership as expressed by the nine elementary principals in Front Range school districts in Colorado participating in this study. The summary of findings is highlighted under the four framework constructs.

Leadership tasks and function. Elementary principals identified tasks and functions that were distributed to others in their respective school buildings. Both macro and micro tasks were distributed. Macro tasks were distributed relating to goal setting,

preventing school closure, and assisting with selling a vision to the community in technology. Micro tasks were distributed in instructional areas to teacher leaders. The tasks were considered micro tasks because they were a part of a larger goal related to increased student achievement. Other micro tasks distributed by principals were administrative tasks that assisted in school operations.

The study revealed that elementary principals identified more instructional micro tasks than administrative micro tasks as being distributed. When asked to describe a time when a task was distributed, six of the nine elementary principals identified instructional tasks: leading writing, math, reading, and Response-to-Intervention programs. Whereas, administrative tasks were identified by three of the nine principals, e.g., hiring a teacher, redesigning parent/teacher conferences, and scheduling (see Table 2).

Elementary principals also indicated that tasks had significant accountability values when distributed to teachers. For example, when a task was performed closest to the source of implementation, that person leading the task brought added accountability for the completion and success of that task. One principal serving a large school with 14 years of experience stated, "I think in general it's by distributing those tasks, there is more of a chance to get things done."

In addition, elementary principals also identified peer influence as increasing the task success rate. Several elementary principals commented that when teachers deliver the message, the staff reacts differently and the outcome is better. A principal serving a large school with three years of experience commented, "If they have the background information and can help share the building vision or my thoughts with their peers, it takes away some of the 'us versus them' mentality."

There were no perceptual differences between school size and years of leadership experience when analyzing leadership tasks and functions. The analysis of leadership tasks and functions revealed the importance of the elementary principal or building leader to reflect on the task they intended to distribute to others. Through reflection, it allowed the elementary principal to begin formalizing the process of distributing the tasks through enacting leadership tasks.

Enacting leadership tasks. All nine elementary principals in this study believed strongly in the concept of distributing leadership tasks to others. Although all believed distributed leadership was a positive step in leading their respective buildings, they practiced distributing leadership using different strategies for enacting leadership tasks.

Three elementary principals used formal training to increase the leadership capacity of their teachers. One principal in a large school with 14 years of experience planned to send her teacher leaders to leadership training development while another principal in a large school created "in house" training within the school on decision-making. Another principal serving a medium school with five years of experience also provided training on a specific group processes model to assist in facilitating a new parent-teacher conference process.

Instead of formalizing training, six other principals defined their practice as support, encouragement, and feedback. This process was recognized as on-the-job training toward better leadership. Each of the six principals had their own unique style when distributing tasks to others; however, all provided the ongoing support needed for the tasks to succeed. For example, one principal serving a large school with six years of experience provided feedback after meetings, while a principal serving a medium-sized

school with 14 years of experience provided direction during meetings. Both of these principals practiced support, encouragement, and feedback but used different methods.

When analyzing enacting leadership tasks, no perceptual differences were found based on school size or years of experience. Enacting tasks appeared to be another reflective portion of distributing leadership. Elementary principals recognized the importance of distributing leadership to their staff and others connected to the school. They also recognized the importance of not setting their leaders up for failure and, in turn, provided formal and informal leadership training opportunities for success.

Social distribution of enacted tasks. Elementary principals identified the groups of people to whom they distributed tasks as both informal and formal. Informal groups were identified as teachers, classified personnel, school psychologist, school counselors, parents, and students. Two principals also identified subgroups of classified personnel such as custodians and office staff. Two elementary principals serving larger schools identified formal groups of people serving in their schools such as head teachers and assistant principals (see Table 3).

Elementary principals also identified the roles of the groups. Role types were categorized as division of labor, co-performance, and parallel performance (Spillane, 2006). Informal groups were identified more often in co-performance and parallel performance roles; whereas formal groups--head teachers and assistant principals--were identified in division of labor and co-performance roles. The type of role decision was left to the discretion of the leader, follower's abilities, and the desired outcome (see Table 4).

In this study, elementary principals serving larger schools identified more informal and formal groups than did elementary principals serving smaller schools. In addition, elementary principals with more years of experience identified a large number of groups of people than those representing fewer years of experience. Social distribution of task enactment was identified differently based on school size and years of experience.

Situational distribution of leadership practice. The elementary principals also created "inventions" of the situation to assist in distributing leadership tasks (Spillane et al., 2004, p. 21). Elementary principals provided inventions with school artifacts, establishing trust, and relying on expert knowledge to distribute leadership to others.

Six of the nine elementary principals provided school artifacts that added a dimension to their practice of distributed leadership. Elementary principals used school artifacts as protocols or tools for decision-making, to identify the school's leadership structure, and as a communication tool for others on the staff. School artifacts were a blend of documents that supported the practice of distributed leadership for each elementary principal (see Table 5).

In addition to school artifacts, elementary principals consistently identified the situational distribution of tasks by using the word *trust*. Elementary principals identified trust as a strong factor for distributed leadership. Trust was considered a factor between the principal and the teacher. It was also found that principals had to develop trust in themselves in order to empower others in distributed decision-making. Trust was something elementary principals identified as taking time to build within their respective buildings. One principal serving a small school with seven years of experience stated,

"My first couple of years here, I didn't have those relationship built." He admitted it took time to for him to establish relationship and trust with his staff.

Another situational factor was the selection of teachers or others based on expert knowledge. Elementary principals consistently identified seeking out teachers to lead based on an area of expertise. One principal serving a medium-sized school stated, " [I like] going to them and saying, 'I know this is your expertise.'" Principals rarely distributed leadership to others without that individual having competency in that area. Although elementary principals distributed leadership based on content area expertise, some tasks did fail. This was due to conflict between the teacher leader and the staff. One principal from a medium-sized school with five years of experience commented, "[I thought] she would gain more respect from the staff and it backfired on me." This teacher leader had expertise in this area of distribution but failed to connect with staff.

There were no perceptual differences based on school size and years of experience when analyzing situational distribution of tasks. Elementary principals identified "inventions" of the school as factors for distributing leadership successfully. School artifacts, established trust, and expert knowledge of task were discussed as important factors in the distribution of leadership.

The results revealed that elementary principals viewed distributed leadership as a positive framework for school success. When analyzing the data, minor perceptual differences were acknowledged by the researcher between school size and years of experience. The only salient difference became apparent in the social distribution of tasks. Principals in larger schools identified more groups of people than did principals in smaller schools. Principals representing larger schools might have had more identified

tasks required to accomplish school goals or they had additional staff with more expertise available to complete tasks. In addition, principals with more years of experience identified more groups of people than did those with fewer years of experience. This might have occurred due to the time needed to build extended relationships, leadership expertise, and trust for task distribution. However, most practices among elementary principals were not due to school size or years of experience. The next section reviews the second research question.

Research Question 2

      Q2   What are elementary principals perceptions on the barriers of distributing leadership?

Two themes were identified as barriers that impeded the opportunities for elementary principals to distribute leadership tasks to others: school-level factors and individual factors. School-level factors included structural barriers, lack of resources, and communication barriers. Individual factors included teacher leadership perceptions and staff conflict.

      School-level factors. Structural barriers were identified by three subthemes: school location and size, job title and description, and community perceptions. Structural barriers that impeded the opportunity to distributing leadership were identified by elementary principals serving in both small and large schools and all years of experience.

      Time and money were identified as lack of resources. Time was considered a barrier in distributed practice because teachers had very little opportunity to meet for collaborative purposes with each other and the elementary principal. Money was considered a barrier due to a principal's inability to recruit new talent to his school.

Elementary principals serving both small and medium-sized schools with all years of experience identified lack of resources as a barrier.

Another barrier identified by elementary principals was communication barriers--direct or indirect. Direct communication was the principal's inability to communicate directly with a follower. Indirect communication was a misinterpreted message between principal and follower. Principals serving in small and medium-sized schools with all years of experience identified both direct and indirect communication as barriers. Elementary principals in large schools did not identify communication as a barrier.

School-level barriers impeded the opportunity to distribute leadership to others. Elementary principals in this study identified structural barriers, lack of resources, and communication as barriers. Principals serving small school identified all three school-level factors as barriers. Principals serving medium-sized schools identified lack of resources and communication as barriers and principals serving large school identified only structural barriers. There was no perceptual difference in years of experience (see Table 6).

Individual factors. Elementary principals identified individual factors as barriers to distributing leadership. Two sub-themes emerged from the data: teacher leadership perception and staff conflict. Principals identified the following teacher leadership perceptions: teachers viewed leadership as too stressful, teacher's educational views were not congruent with those of the elementary principals, and teachers avoided the responsibility for decision-making.

Two elementary principals (one serving a small school with seven years of experience and one serving a large school with three years of experience, respectively)

indicated that teachers viewed leadership as too stressful and was a factor that impeded task distribution. One principal serving a large school with six years of experience stated that teachers who possessed incongruent education philosophies with the principal would impede task distribution. Another principal serving in a medium-sized school with 14 years of experience revealed that at times teachers did not want the responsibility of making decisions.

Four elementary principals also identified staff conflict as a barrier to distributing leadership. Staff conflict was both perceived and encountered by teachers when leading task that were distributed. A principal serving a small school identified perceived staff conflict as a barrier to distributing tasks. Three other principals actually encountered staff conflicts that either failed or diminished the success of the distributed task.

Eight of the nine elementary principals identified individual factors that impeded distributing tasks to others. Four principals identified teacher leadership perceptions as barriers while four others identified staff conflicts. The remaining principal did not identify an individual factor but focused on school-level factors. There were no perceptual differences between school size and years of experience in identifying individual factors as barriers to task distribution (see Table 7).

Barriers to task distribution were identified as either school-level factors or individual factors in this study. School level factors were identified as structural barriers, lack of resources, and communication barriers. Individual factors were identified as teacher leadership perceptions and staff conflict. Perceptual differences existed on school-level factors only in school size and not on years of experience. There were no differences in school size or years of experience on individual factors.

Research Question 3

      Q3   What are elementary principals perceptions on the impact of distributed
              leadership on student achievement?

All nine elementary principals perceived a positive impact of distributed

leadership on student achievement. Three themes emerged from the data: perceived

program effectiveness, student assessment gains, and increased opportunities for students.

Perceived program effectiveness was identified by three elementary principals as

snapshots of ongoing instructional programs being led by teachers. Elementary

principals in this study distributed instructional tasks to teachers in the area of writing,

reading, math, and Response-to-Intervention. One elementary principal from a medium-

sized school with three years of experience stated, " She has been the driving force of it

all. We are definitely closing the gap." Principals serving a small school and large school

had similar responses to the impact of distributed leadership on student achievement.

The principal from the small school with one year of experience stated, "It happened

because we analyzed the system." Other principals identified student assessment gains as

evidence.

Three elementary principals identified student assessment gains as measured by

the Colorado State Assessment Program (CSAP). Principals in small, medium, and large

schools identified the gain in student CSAP scores as evidence of the positive impact of

distributed leadership on student achievement. One principal serving a medium-sized

school with 14 years of experience claimed that his school did not make AYP when they

opened the school. However, after establishing distributed leadership structures in his

building, the school has made AYP. Another principal serving a small school with 19

years of experience had a similar response when he arrived at the school. All three principals identified student assessment gains.

Three elementary principals in this study identified increased program opportunities for students as evidence of the impact of distributed leadership on student achievement. Increased opportunities were based on instructional programs created for students in the area of reading, writing, math, and Response-to-Intervention. Teacher leaders provided the expertise to lead the programs. One principal explained how his teachers wanted to start a summer library program for the students of the school. Another principal from a large school with six years of experience discussed the increase in student interventions programs. A third principal serving a small school with 19 years of experience concluded that his school created a tutor reading program to assist struggling readers.

Elementary principals identified program effectiveness, student assessment gains, and increased opportunities for students as having an impact on student achievement in their schools. Elementary principals with 10 or more years of experience and those serving large schools identified all three themes as evidence of a positive impact of distributed leadership on student achievement. Small and medium schools and principals with less than nine years of experience varied in identifying themes, but had no conclusive pattern. Elementary principals viewed distributed leadership as a positive framework for increasing the level of student achievement.

Discussion of Summary Findings

The findings revealed several connections to the literature on distributing leadership. Each connection is reviewed in terms of distributed leadership practice, the

barriers of distributed leadership, and the impact of distributed leadership on student achievement.

Distributed Leadership Practice

Distributed leadership is a complex activity that requires a thoughtful approach to the tasks that are distributed, to whom the tasks are distributed, and how to practice the distribution of those tasks. With the assistance of a conceptual framework, this study highlighted many essential components of distributed leadership. Leadership task and functions, enacting leadership tasks, social distribution of enacted task, and situational distribution of leadership practice were the major constructs in analyzing the data.

Elementary principals in this study identified instructional tasks as being distributed more often than administrative tasks. They also discussed the distribution in terms of co-performing or parallel performing the leadership task with the teacher leader. This distribution of task was also found in the literature. Spillane et al.'s (2007) study found that both instructional and administrative tasks were distributed to both formal and informal groups. Instructional tasks were distributed 30% of the time and administrative tasks were distributed 35% of the time. The tasks were also co-performed about 30% of the time. In this study, instructional tasks were reflected upon as being distributed at a higher rate and tasks were considered to be both co-performed and parallel performed among formal and informal roles. One caveat was that formal roles had a minor division of labor roles in this study.

Another connection to the literature in the area of situation leadership tasks was in the use of expert knowledge to distribute tasks. Leithwood et al. (2007) also discovered in their study that distributed patterns relied more heavily on expert power than positional

power. Elementary principals in this study identified expert knowledge as a situational

factor that increased the success of the distributed tasks. Timperley (2005) also found

this to be true in her study--schools that distributed leadership tasks based on expertise

rather than formal positions had higher achievement scores.

Distributed leadership practice is a complex web of interactions between leaders,

followers, and the situation. The elementary principal is a key component for the success

of distributed leadership (Murphy et al., 2009). Teachers were also identified in this

study as another important aspect of distributed leadership. Without the two working

together, distributed leadership would fail or be relegated to simple delegation (Spillane,

2006).

Barriers to Distributed Leadership

Elementary principals in this study identified school-level and individual level

factors as barriers to distributed leadership. School-level barriers were structural barriers,

lack of resources, and communication barriers. Individual factors were teacher

leadership perceptions and staff conflict. Similar barriers were found in the literature.

From the literature, Murphy et al. (2009) identified structural barriers as providing

resistance to distributing leadership tasks. The resistance was based on (a) changing a

system that already educates a diverse student population; (b) benefits some people,

thereby creating resistance with those who were advantaged by the system; (c) people are

familiar with schools structures; and (d) schools are not easily changed due to external

pressures placed on them at the state level through accountability and financial structures.

This was also found to be true in this study with school physical structures, job title and

description, and community perceptions on how school should look and operate

constraining leadership distribution.

Individual factors identified in this study were also present in the literature. This

study revealed that teacher leadership perceptions and staff conflict were barriers to

distributing leadership. Timperley (2005) discovered that teachers might experience

unforeseen consequences when being asked to take on a leadership role. She identified

such issues as principal favoritism or the appearance of teachers moving too close to

administration. Whitaker (1997) also concluded that teacher-leaders felt uncomfortable

at times when interacting with others in a role between teacher and administration. Both

examples in the literature were similar to this study where principals identified teacher

perceptions of leadership as being too stressful or creating staff conflict.

Barriers to distribute leadership were identified in both the literature and in this

study. Elementary principals in this study believed that distributed leadership was an

important aspect of their leadership practice and, therefore, were willing to address

barriers as they arose. Fullan (2001) agreed that leaders must be willing to move barriers

in order to accomplish a culture of collaboration and reward those who do.

Student Achievement

Distributed leadership has a positive impact on student achievement according to

the perceptions of elementary principals in this study. Principals identified perceived

program effectiveness, gains in student assessment, and increased opportunities for

students as a positive impact of distributed leadership on student achievement. The

literature also revealed that distributing leadership to others increased student

achievement.

In Timperly's (2005) three-year study, she concluded that when one school adopted the distributed leadership framework from another school, they experienced increased student academic gains. She also discussed that when the staff reframed the methods on how they analyzed data, answers to the problems emerged. She stated,

> By externalizing the reference point for the meetings from teachers' beliefs and preference about a generalized problem of under-achievement to concerns about the achievement of individual students in their classes, solutions to the problem became manageable. (p. 417)

Timperley was referring to teachers meeting collaboratively to analyze, design, and implement a strategy for student success.

This was also identified in this study as well. One principal from large school with three years of experience stated,

> With our CSAP test coming up what I had to have happen is our literacy, our resource person, and classroom teacher create the schedule for that testing and classroom teachers want to build a schedule that best meets the needs of their kids. That is great, that's fine, but we have to think these are all of our kids and we need to look at a set up that is going to meet the needs as many as possible for putting them in the best position for success.

This principal was trying to get his staff focused on all students in the building instead of the student in each individual classroom.

Spillane (2006) also identified a school in Chicago called Adams School. This was a school that had seen a turn around in student achievement based on distributed practice. The principal, literacy coordinator, teachers, and African American heritage coordinator met every five weeks to co-perform leadership tasks to improve the success of all students in the building.

In this study, an elementary principal from a small school with seven years of experience also explained how he used a similar approach. He stated,

> Our ultimate goal is our kid's success. We are working with kids. We have a little more flexibility in our schedule so the three of us meet on a weekly basis and talk about what needs to be done to meet the kids' needs. We try to keep the kids a number one priority so we look at data to see what the data tells us what we need. Between the three of us, we can work the plan of who is going to address the need and how are we going to do it one-on-one meetings with teachers, whole group. Is this an hour and half Wednesday meeting? Is it a 20-minute meeting with all of them together and a lot of conversations?

This principal met with his instructional coach and literacy teacher on a regular basis to discuss the success of the student in his school, similar to Adams School discussed by Spillane (2006).

The impact of distributed leadership on student achievement yielded positive results in both the literature and this study. Elementary principals in this study were confident that distributing leadership tasks to others was necessary for school and student success while meeting the demand of the principal position.

Recommendations

All elementary principals in this study were recognized by their superintendent or superintendent's designee as having a high propensity to distribute leadership in their school. This collective group, who practiced distributed leadership on a regular basis, gave insightful perceptions on the success of distributed leadership for their school. Based on the responses of principals in this study, the following are recommendations for elementary principals and higher education officials; they include a complex view of leadership, building trust, leadership training, peer influence, expert knowledge, and system redesign.

Complex View of Leadership

In the interviews conducted with elementary principals, it was evident that each principal viewed school leadership as an overwhelming position. Principals just starting

their professional careers in educational leadership and those veteran principals of almost

two decades revealed the complexities of school-level leadership and the number of tasks

they had to complete in order to feel accomplished with the demands of the position.

Leadership, therefore, should be viewed as a complex activity. However, we are

not taught this way nor are the school structures designed this way; we are taught to

separate leadership into manageable parts and schools are designed to divide tasks.

Senge (2006) supported this by stating,

> From a very early age, we are taught to break apart problems, to fragment the
> world. This apparently makes complex tasks and subjects more manageable, but
> we pay a hidden, enormous price. We can no longer see the consequences of our
> actions; we lose our intrinsic sense of connection to a larger whole. (p. 3)

Distributed leadership offers a framework to view leadership in broader terms and from a

larger perspective. Spillane (2006) commented, "A distributed perspective on leadership

is best thought of as a framework for thinking and analyzing leadership" (p. 10).

Building Trust

Elementary principals in this study identified trust as a situational factor for

distributing leadership tasks. In the study, elementary principals appeared more

comfortable with distributing tasks to others when there was a strong level of trust

between the leaders and follower. In order to establish trust amongst the leaders and

followers, elementary principals should employ strategies to build trust within and among

staff members.

Macbeath (2009) offered suggestions for building trust based on his work in

distributed leadership. He stated,

> So, while working to generate trust, at the same time senior leaders tried to
> convey the message that holding staff to account through monitoring, scrutiny of
> data and performance management could build, as opposed to erode trust. To

accomplish this, however, implied creating opportunities for lateral learning and collegial exchange, peer monitoring and evaluation and a greater openness to critique and challenge, modeled by those in senior and middle leadership positions. (p. 56)

Trust is not an attribute that is developed overnight but through many interactions of it members. Building strong relationships with people connected to and within the school is vital for successful leadership distribution.

Leadership Training

Two elementary principals in this study provided formal leadership training for their teacher leaders. Another principal provided "in-house" training to assist teachers in decision-making. Other principals provided ongoing teacher training while practicing distributed leadership. Due to the complexity of distributed leadership, it was apparent through elementary principal interviews that teachers would benefit from additional leadership training to enhance the process of distributed leadership. Leithwood et al. (2007) agreed that developing people is a major leadership function and is required when practicing distributed leadership. Elementary principals should be aware of this developmental need that must be addressed when distributing tasks to others to increase the teacher's ability to lead successfully.

Peer Influence

Elementary principals in this study also indicated that peer groups had considerable influence for task completion and the overall success of the task. This was not recognized formally in the literature but was recognized in this study by the elementary principals. They believed that teacher leaders had sufficient positive impact on their peer group, especially when they possessed both expertise and relational skills. This was beneficial when determining the person to lead a task.

Expert Knowledge

In this study, elementary principals identified the importance of distributing tasks to others who possessed expert knowledge of the task. Expertise was found in the literature (Leithwood et al., 2007; Spillane et al., 2004; Timperley, 2005) as a factor for positive distribution of tasks. At times, expert knowledge might not be the only factor for tasks success. One principal serving a medium-sized school selected a teacher based on her expertise in a particular area but she failed to get the proper response from the staff. In this scenario, distributed leadership based on expert knowledge did not end in task success.

System Redesign

Elementary principals in this study discussed lack of time and money as resources that impeded the opportunity to distribute leadership tasks to others. Elementary principals who identified time and money also appeared to provide new opportunities for their staff. One elementary principal from a medium-sized school with 14 years of experience provided collaboration time within the current schedule. Another elementary principal from a small school with 19 years of experience who identified money as a lack of resource found a new method for promoting community life in a small district and through the upgrade of new facilities. Both principals reframed their challenges to overcome their structural barriers. According to Murphy et al. (2009), internal and external challenges make it difficult for distributed leadership success. Therefore, principals have to be creative in redesigning their systems to accommodate successful distributed leadership.

Implications for Practice

Distributed leadership is often confused with terms such as shared, collaborative, participative, or democratic leadership (Harris, 2008; Spillane, 2006). This confusion creates a difficult situation for accurately identifying distributed leadership. If it is difficult to define, then it may be difficult to implement. Four elementary principals in this study defined distributed leadership as "shared leadership." Although their description of "shared leadership" was more in line with distributed leadership, there was confusion. The research in the literature and this study failed to unveil a model elementary principals could utilize to implement distributed leadership in their building. However, this study, along with the research from the literature, revealed certain characteristics that are necessary when distributing leadership tasks to others.

For example, principals must believe it is important to empower others to make decisions in their building. All nine principals in this study believed that distributing leadership to others was needed for the success of the students and the school. Second, principals distributed tasks based on their knowledge of a teacher leader to have peer influence over task completion and success. Third, elementary principals in this study recognized the importance of expert knowledge when distributing tasks. Finally, elementary principals were willing to redesign their school structure to allow teachers time to collaborate with others for effective decision-making.

Another implication for distributed leadership practice is the bureaucratic design of our schools. As much as elementary principals in this study were willing to work around structural barriers, they were still constrained with a system design they could not change. With outside and inside forces holding on to the status quo in schools (Murphy

et al., 2009), elementary principals may find it difficult to implement distributed leadership to its fullest due to system structural constraints.

A final implication lies in the role of the teacher. In the literature (Lieberman & Miller, 2004) and in this study, teachers were identified as a leadership resource. However, the job title and description may constrain the individual teacher in leadership duties. Two principals serving in a small school and a large school recognized this as a barrier to distributing leadership tasks and were working to overcome this barrier. The principal serving the large school modeled the role of follower to his teachers. The principal serving the small school utilized specialty teachers who were not constrained by rigid classroom schedules. Scheduling time for teacher to teach and lead can be a cause for concern.

Suggestions for Further Research

Research in the area of distributed leadership is still emerging to define and explain this phenomenon. Additional research is still needed to further advance the conceptual understanding and practical implementation of distributed leadership in schools. Additional research should be conducted at the individual teacher level, secondary level, and district level.

This study focused on the elementary principal exclusively to provide information about this phenomenon. It would be beneficial for research to be conducted at the teacher level to determine if teachers view distributed leadership as a positive factor in school success. Research on teacher leadership has shown great promise in the role of school leadership (Lieberman & Miller, 2004) and in this study. It would be of interest to

determine if teachers believe that distributing leadership is a viable system for school improvement.

This researcher chose the elementary school because of the lack of formal leadership roles at the elementary school level. Some schools have assistant principals and head teachers, but a majority of them do not. Elementary principals in this study had positive views about distributed leadership. However, it would be equally valuable if secondary principals discovered the same benefit with distributed leadership within formal roles often associated with secondary schools. More research focused at the middle and high school level would add another dimension to distributed leadership.

Finally, research focused at the district level would be of interest to determine if district leadership supports the process of distributed leadership and if they are willing to allow structural changes at the building level to accommodate distributed leadership development and implementation. Research at all levels would be of great benefit in understanding the complexity of this phenomenon.

Conclusion

To meet the demands of current school-related pressures, a new framework is needed. The current model found in schools has struggled to meet the growing demands of educating all students to the standard of 100% proficiency. In this study, elementary principals identified distributed leadership as framework for leadership change at the school-level. Although the structure of the school environment has been reluctant to change over time, the elementary principals in this study embraced the concept of distributing leadership tasks to others for student and building success. This was accomplished by restructuring their leadership practice to include the assistance of others.

Principals in this study were willing to release the decision-making power to those who held the expertise to make changes happen for their schools.

Practicing elementary principals understand the complexities and commitments of the position they hold and recognize that they must acquire new methods for solving the increasing external pressures being placed on themselves and the schools they lead. According to elementary principals in this study, this framework has moved their schools closer to meeting the demands of the standards-based movement, but they know more must be done. Principals supported distributed leadership by identifying positive program effectiveness, student assessment gains, and increased academic opportunities for students. Principals in this study practiced distributed leadership for their schools and students' success.

In this study, principals described their leadership practice through the distribution of complex leadership activities; few discussed it made the principal job easier. In fact, one principal from a large school with six years of experience stated, "It is a lot harder to build coalitions and to touch base, keep relationships up, work through problems, support [teachers], and be a coach." He was describing the amount of time and effort it took to distribute leadership; however, in the end, it was worth the effort. He stated, "All of those things would not be possible without distributing leadership and getting this idea out to teachers." Other principals' sentiments were echoed throughout this study as well. They believed that their distributed effort increased the value or efficacy of the principalship position.

Leadership that is distributed begins to define leadership under new terms. Although our schools are still in a bureaucratic model of top down design, leaders in

today's schools are using their creativity to redefine what leadership should look like, even if the structure is not changing. According to this study, distributed leadership gives promise to school leaders as a new framework to redesign the practice of leadership for school and student success. This is not an easy transformation but may be necessary to make the position of building principal more inviting for newcomers to the profession and palatable for veterans serving in schools. More must be done to continue to move schools toward a learning system structure where leadership and structure can concomitantly work together for the betterment of our children and our world.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interview Questions
Elementary Principal

- How many years have you been in educational leadership?

- What is your gender?

- What is your ethnicity?

- What is the size of your school?

- What is the poverty level (percentage of Free/Reduced) of your school?

- What grade levels are represented in your school?

- What are your views on distributed leadership?

- What groups of people provide leadership in your school?

- What are the roles of those that provide distributed leadership?

- What do you do as a principal to practice distributed leadership?

- Describe a time when you distributed a leadership task. How did you select the person or persons to lead and why did you decide to distribute this task?

- What barriers exist in your school that reduce or impede the opportunity to distribute leadership tasks successfully? Are their situations or instances where people are not able to successfully complete leadership tasks? If so, please explain.

- How does distributing leadership tasks to others impact the goals of your school?

- How does distributing leadership tasks to others help meet the demands of the principal position?

- Do you have evidence that distributing leadership tasks to others increases student achievement? If so, please explain?

APPENDIX B

DEFINITION OF DISTRIBUTED LEADERSHIP

Distributed Leadership

Distributed leadership is viewed as leadership practice distributed over leaders, followers, and their situation where it incorporates the activities of multiple groups of individuals (Spillane, 2006). His theory includes three important elements:

1. Leadership practice is the central and anchoring concern

2. Leadership practice is generated in the interactions of leaders, followers, and their situation; each element is essential for leadership practice

3. The situation both defines leadership practice and is defined through leadership practice (p. 4).

Spillane, J. (2006). *Distributed leadership*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

APPENDIX C

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
APPLICATION AND APPROVAL

University of Northern Colorado
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

Narrative UNC IRB Application

A. Purpose

(1) School leaders are faced with increasing demands to meet the requirements of No Child Left Behind whereas all children must meet 100 percent proficiency in the areas of reading and math by the year 2014. Unfortunately, due to the challenge of this task, school principals are choosing to leave the profession and school districts are having difficulty finding adequate replacements (Copeland, 2001). It is important to continue to explore new leadership theories to help improve the current educational crisis. A new theory has emerged called "distributed leadership" that presents a comprehensive way in which to view school leadership (Spillane, 2006). Recent studies have been conducted to establish evidence that distributing leadership can have a positive effect in schools (Spillane et al. 2007) by building teacher capacity (Leithwood et al. 2007), and increasing student achievement (Timperley, 2005); however, few studies have interviewed principals exclusively on the practice of distributing leadership. The purpose of this study is to collect elementary principals' perceptions on the practice of distributing leadership, identify barriers that exist in distributing leadership, and explore the impact of distributing leadership on student achievement. The result of this study may assist current practicing principals and higher education officials who design administrative training courses. The study is led by three research questions.

Research Questions:

  1. What are elementary principals' perceptions on the practice of distributing leadership?

  2. What are elementary principals' perceptions on the barriers of distributing leadership?

  3. What are elementary principals' perceptions on the impact of sustained academic achievement of distributing leadership?

(2) This study qualifies for exemption because the participants are adults, no identifiers will link individuals to their responses, and the data will be collected in a normal educational setting. Because of the permissions that will obtained, accidental disclosure will not place the participants at risk. The data sensitivity will be low, and every effort will be expended to insure confidentiality and to provide security for the data that is collected. The study further qualifies for exemption because it does not include any of the following:

(1) Research involving the use of educational tests;
(2) Research involving observation of public behavior;
(3) Research involving documents, records, pathological or diagnostic specimens;
(4) Research involving public benefit or service programs; or
(5) Research involving taste and food quality programs.

Section B – Methods

(1) Participants

The researcher will be collecting qualitative data from nine elementary principals in Colorado through general interview questions and related school artifacts (i.e meeting agendas, school organizational charts, leadership meeting minutes, etc.). Elementary principals will be identified by his or her superintendent as having practiced distributed leadership in schools. Criteria will be based on Spillane's (2006) definition of distributed leadership whereas leadership practice is distributed over leaders, followers, and their situation where it incorporates the activities of multiple groups of individuals. Once identified, the elementary principals will be categorically selected based on his or her years of experience (1-3 years; 4-9 years; & 10 or more years) and school size (small <250, medium 251-500, large 501 or more students). Common questions will be asked of each of the nine elementary principals to collect principal perceptions on the practice of distributing leadership tasks to others. In addition to the interview, the researcher will request school artifacts from each elementary principal that he or she believes best supports his or her practice of distributed leadership.

(2) Data Collection Procedures

School district superintendents serving Front Range school districts in Colorado will be sent an initial letter requesting participation. The letter will then be followed by a phone call or an email to determine if they are willing to assist in the study. Principals will be identified by their district's superintendent as having an established practice of distributing leadership in his or her school. The identified principal will be contacted by phone or email and will be given details of the study to determine if they would be interested in participating. The researcher will request in advance school artifacts that best support the elementary principal's practice of distributing leadership. Requesting artifacts in advance will allow the principal time to select the documents that fit the criteria. To assist the principal, the researcher will give examples of school artifacts. The researcher will also request that school artifacts identifying people be altered to reveal position (i.e. teacher, literacy coach, etc.) rather than by individual name. The researcher will allow the elementary principal to select the amount and type of his or her own artifacts. The artifacts will be collected at the time of the interview. Each elementary principal will be given a written consent form to sign prior to the interview process and school artifact collection. The research process will include interviews with nine elementary building principals. Interview questions and consent form will be sent in advance to give the participant time to review the

documents. The interview data will be gathered through the use of written notes and a digital recording device. It is anticipated that the interviews will be conducted at the schools selected. The interviews will be conducted during the normal school day, unless the principal would prefer a different time that is mutually agreeable to both parties. One interview will be conducted with each participant, and it is anticipated that the interviews will last 45 minutes including school artifact collection.

(3) Data Analysis Procedures

The researcher will transcribe the interview data within two days of each interview. The data will then be sent back by email to the participant as a *member check* to determine if the data was accurately collected from the participant. Once the participant agrees to its accuracy, the data will be coded using descriptive coding to begin data reduction. The data will then be further coded inferentially to gather a deeper understanding of the data. Once all data is coded, a visual representation of the data will be drawn to further help with clarifying conclusions. School artifact data will be attached to the transcribed notes of each interview. The data will be compared to the transcribed notes and analyzed to the degree and type in which it defines the principal's practice of distributing leadership in his or her school. It will also assist in triangulating the interview data on leadership distribution. Chapter Four of the dissertation document will include conclusions drawn from the data.

(4) Data Handling Procedures

The interview data (written notes and digital recordings) and school artifacts will be stored in a secured desk drawer within the researcher's home until all interviews are complete and all data has been transcribed to written form. Once data are transcribed the digital voice recordings will be destroyed. The written notes, transcribed data and school artifacts will be labeled according to the size of school and years of experience (e.g. L10, M6, etc.) to protect the identity of the participants. Once the study is complete, the written notes, transcribed notes, and school artifacts will be destroyed promptly. All signed human consent forms will be retained with my Research Advisor for a period of three years.

Section C – Risks, Discomforts and Benefits

Only the researcher and the researcher's advisor will have knowledge of the elementary principals and the schools they represent in this study. Each participant will be given written assurances of confidentiality and data will be handled with utmost care (see Data Handling Procedures above). No names will be used to label the interview written data, digital recordings, or school artifacts. Elementary principals will be asked to alter individual names to reveal position (i.e. teacher, literacy coach, etc.) on all school artifacts. The study format will be designed so that the individual source of the research information provides no foreseeable risks to the participants. The intention of this study will be to report the data as a reflection of current practicing elementary principals in similar positions based on years of experience (1-3 years; 4-9 years; & 10 or more years)

and school size (small, <250; medium, 251-500; large, 501 or more) and not the particular individuals being interviewed or the schools they represent. The participants may benefit from the study by reflecting on their current practice of distributed leadership and how it relates to other principals in their elementary principal peer group. They will also be offered a copy of the study at the conclusion. This information may benefit them in their practice as principals.

Section D – Costs and Compensations

The cost of this study will be minimal and will be covered by the researcher. The cost will include travel costs to and from the participant's site of work for the interview. Cost will also be associated with purchasing a digital recording device to transcribe interview data. Written results of the study will be offered as compensation to each participant and school district upon completion of study.

Section E – Grant Information

This study will not be funded by any grants, either public or private. Flyers and other advertisements will not be used to recruit participants. The following documents are attached:

    (1) Application Cover page
    (2) Copy of human consent form with UNC logo
    (3) Copy of standardized interview questions
    (4) Copy of letter sent to school district superintendents

UNIVERSITY of
NORTHERN COLORADO
Institutional Review Board (IRB)

January 14, 2010

TO: Megan Babkes Stellino
           School of Sport and Exercise Science

FROM: The Office of Sponsored Programs

RE: Exempt Review of *Principals' Perceptions on Distributing Leadership in
           an Elementary School Setting* submitted by David D. Eggen (Research
           Advisor: Linda Vogel)

The above proposal is being submitted to you for exemption review. When approved,
return the proposal to Sherry May in the Office of Sponsored Programs.

I recommend approval.

_____   1/22/2010
Signature of Co-Chair   Date

The above referenced prospectus has been reviewed for compliance with HHS guidelines
for ethical principles in human subjects research. The decision of the Institutional
Review Board is that the project is exempt from further review.

IT IS THE ADVISOR'S RESPONSIBILITY TO NOTIFY THE STUDENT OF THIS
STATUS.

Comments: *Note revised application, consent form
           and district approval letter*

25 Kepner Hall ~ Campus Box #143
Greeley, Colorado 80639
Ph: 970.351.1907 ~ Fax: 970.351.1934

APPENDIX D

DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS LETTER

December 11, 2009

Superintendent
Superintendent of Schools
School District
City, State Zip

Dear Superintendent:

My name is David Eggen and I am a graduate student completing my doctoral degree in Educational Leadership at the University of Northern Colorado. I am finishing my degree with a dissertation project on distributed leadership in elementary schools. The main data collection method in my qualitative study is to interview elementary principals on their perceptions of distributed leadership practice, the existing barriers of distributing leadership tasks, and impact of distributing leadership on student achievement.

I am writing to request the opportunity to interview elementary school principals in your school district. To identify elementary principals, I would like your opinion on which elementary principals have an increased propensity to distribute leadership whereas leadership practice is distributed over leaders, followers, and their situation where it incorporates the activities of multiple groups of individuals. In addition to the interview data, I would also request from elementary principals school artifacts (i.e., copies of meeting agendas, school organizational charts, leadership meeting minutes, etc.) that best support his or her practice of distributing leadership.

The interviews will last approximately 45 minutes. I have enclosed a copy of the questions for your review. The identities of the principals, elementary schools, and school district will be held in strict confidence and will not be revealed in this study. In addition, information contained in school artifacts will be held in strict confidence and will be used only to support the principals' practice of distributed leadership. In the next few days, I will be contacting you by phone or email to determine if you have interest in assisting in my study on distributed leadership in elementary schools.

If you decide to participate, I would make available a copy of the study to you upon completion. This information may be of value to the principals serving your district. If you have any questions about this study or would like additional information, please feel free to contact me at (303) 834-8460 or email me at david_eggen@yahoo.com. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

David Eggen
cc: copy of interview questions

APPENDIX E

SUBJECT CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPATION OF
HUMAN SUBJECTS IN RESEARCH

UNIVERSITY *of*
NORTHERN COLORADO

CONSENT FORM FOR HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH
UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Project Title: Principals' Perceptions on Distributing Leadership in an Elementary School
          Setting
Researcher: David D. Eggen,   College of Education and Behavioral Sciences
Phone: (303) 834-8460   Email: egge0823@bears.unco.edu
Researcher's Advisor: Dr. Linda Vogel   Phone (970) 351-2119

Purpose and Description: The purpose of this study is to gather elementary school principals' perceptions on the practices of distributing leadership to determine if this framework provides additional resources for elementary principals in leading schools. Perceptions will be analyzed by school size and years of experience. Participation will require one interview session, approximately 45 minutes in length, to answer questions developed by the researcher (see attached interview questions). In addition, school artifacts (i.e., meeting agendas, school organizational charts, leadership meeting minutes, etc.) will be requested to help support your practice of distributing leadership. If permission is granted, the interview session will be digitally recorded to provide accuracy in the transcription of the collected data.

Data collected during the interview and information contained in the school artifacts will be kept strictly confidential. Only my research advisor and I will have access to the raw data. The written notes, digital recording and school artifacts will be secured in my home office in a locked desk drawer until all interviews and transcribed notes are complete. Once data are transcribed, the digital voice recordings will be destroyed. Written and transcribed notes along with school artifacts will be labeled with size of school and level of experience (e.g., L10, M6, etc.). When the study is complete, all written notes, transcribed notes, and school artifacts will be destroyed. Written drafts and final editions will not identify you as a participant by name, your school, or school district you may represent. Your participation in this study will add valuable information to the growing body of literature regarding distributed leadership in schools.

There are no foreseeable risks inherent in this study. The interview questions are not sensitive in nature and ask for only current perceptions on the topic of distributed leadership as identified by you as an elementary principal. School artifacts should reveal school structures and leadership practice that supports distributed leadership in your school. The intention of this study will be to report the data as a collective reflection of perceptions of elementary principals based on school leadership experience (1-3 years, 4-9 years, & 10 or more years) and school size (small, <250; medium, 251-500; large, 501

or more) and not particular individual's identity of those being interviewed or the schools they represent.

Participation is voluntary. You may decide not to participate in this study and, if you begin participation, you may still decide to stop and withdraw at any time. Your decision will be respected and will not result in loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Having read the above and having had an opportunity to ask any questions, please sign below if you would like to participate in this research. A copy of this form will be given to you to retain for future reference. If you have any concerns about your selection or treatment as a research participant, please contact the Sponsored Programs and Academic Research Center, Kepner Hall, University of Northern Colorado Greeley, CO 80639; 970-351-1907.

_____   _____

Subject's Signature   Date

_____   _____

Researcher's Signature   Date

APPENDIX F

PERMISSION LETTERS

Re: request
...
Fri, October 30, 2009 2:36:05 AM
From: Yrjö Engeström <yrjo.engestrom@helsinki.fi>
To: David Eggen <david_eggen@yahoo.com>

Dear David, permission granted, but please refer to the original source of the diagram (Engeström, 1987, p. 78). You'll find the reference at the end of my 1999 article.

Best regards,

Yrjö Engeström

David Eggen kirjoitti 29.10.2009 kello 21.14:

Dr. Engestrom,

My name is David Eggen and I am I doctoral candidate at the University of Northern Colorado completing my degree in educational leadership. I would like to add your diagram of the mediational structure of an activity system from your work entitled, " Expansive Visibilization of work: An Activity-Theoretical Perspective - 1999 p. 66 to my dissertation. I would like to use your diagram to visually reference the structure of activity theory to reference Peter Gronn's work in distributed leadership. My dissertation topic is on distributed leadership in an educational setting. I will give proper citation to your work in my dissertation.

Thank you for considering my request!

David Eggen

Doctoral Student

University of Northern Colorado

Greeley, CO, 80639

Re: diagram request

...

Thu, October 29, 2009 4:08:54 PM

From: Jim Spillane <j-spillane@northwestern.edu>

To: David Eggen <david_eggen@yahoo.com>

Hi David
you have my permission to use the diagram
good luck with the work
best
jim
On Oct 29, 2009, at 2:35 PM, David Eggen wrote:

Dr. Spillane,

My name is David Eggen and I am doctoral candidate at the University of Northern Colorado. I am in the process completing my degree in Educational Leadership. My dissertation topic is on Distributed Leadership. I am writing to request permission to use your diagram from your book *Distributed Leadership* copyright 2006 on page 3. The figure is entitled "Leadership Practice from a Distributed Perspective." I have referenced your work in my literature review as a major contributor to this topic. If granted, I will cite appropriately.

Thank you for your consideration.

David Eggen

Doctoral candidate

University of Northern Colorado

Greeley, CO 80639