THE MICROPOLITICAL PERSPECTIVES OF TEACHER LEADERS IN AN
ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

by

FENGNING DU

(Under the Direction of Joseph Blase)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to describe the micropolitical perspectives of teacher leaders in a shared-governance elementary school. Symbolic interactionism guided the overall research design and interpretation of findings. The grounded theory method was employed for purposes of data collection and analysis. Data sources were face-to-face interviews, observations, and school document collection.

Interpersonal team-building was identified as the core category that characterized teacher leaders’ experiences of political interactions and their derived meanings. Teacher leaders used four strategies to influence peers and the principals: (a) team building, (b) non-directive leading, (c) fostering team ownership of change, and (d) approaching administrators. They also used four strategies to protect self and the work group: (a) trust building, (b) organizational analysis, (c) resolving conflicts, and (d) managing the grey area. Finally, political interactions generated both positive and negative effects on teacher leaders.

Based on the findings, this study presents a discussion of four theoretical meta-themes. First, teacher leaders’ experiences of school politics and the meanings they gave to it primarily occurred at the work group level. The primary goal of teacher leaders’ political interactions was to transform a physical, haphazard work group into a social, adhesive, trusting, and collaborative work team. Second, in political interactions, teacher leaders primarily relied on personal power and power from access to information in influencing others and protecting self and the work group. For teacher leaders, personal power came from expertise, emotional qualities, interpersonal skills, and dedication. Third, teacher leaders’ political interactions were influenced by a range of internal and external factors. Principal leadership proved to be a critical index of teacher leadership at this school. Fourth, regardless of the motivations of different political interactions, teacher leaders utilized team-building and interpersonal interaction as the foundations for all types of political interactions.

The interrelationships between findings of this study and other salient educational issues are expatiated, for example, teacher collaboration and group development. Implications for future research, school practitioners, and policy makers are also discussed.
INDEX WORDS: Teacher Leadership, Organizational Politics, Teacher Empowerment, Group Development, Teacher Collaboration, Use of Power
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by

FENGNING DU

B.A., Yangzhou University, China, 1994
M.A., Jilin University of Technology, China, 1997

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by

FENGNING DU

Major Professor: Joseph Blase
Committee: Jo Blase
Kenneth Tanner

Electronic Version Approved:
Maureen Grasso
Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
August 2005
DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to the ancient city of Nanjing, China-- the city of my birth, youth, and growth. With a history of 2400 years of glories and tragedies, the spirit of Nanjing and its people will always survive, flourish, and triumph.
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On August 11, 2000, I was on board a plane for the maiden trip to United States to embark on a personal and academic journey. Looking down at the Pacific Ocean, with my past behind and an uncertain future ahead, I was overcome with excitement, expectation, anxiety, and fear. A total stranger without a support network of friends and family in a foreign county, I was about to experience the most confusing, challenging, and satisfying episode of my life. Fortunately, I have found mentors, advisers, and friends in Dr. Joe Blase, Dr. Jo Blase, and Dr. Tanner. As this phase of journey draws to an end, I have confidence that I have become a better scholar, and more importantly, a better person.

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

In recent years, the concept of teacher leadership has become a key element of the initiatives aimed at reforming schools and professionalizing teaching (Sergiovanni & Starratt, 1998; Smylie, 1995; Wasley, 1991). The notion of teachers serving in leadership positions is intricately linked with the waves of educational reform movements in the United States for the past decades.

Efforts to reform American schools surfaced as early as 1960s with the passage of The National Defense Education Act in response to the Soviet Union’s superiority in space technology. Since then, reports of American students’ inferiority in math, science and global competitiveness have fueled public discontent with American educational system and in turn have led to repeated urgent calls for educational reform (Murphy, 1991).

Initial reform movements treated teachers and schools as part of the problem. The National Commission on Excellence in Education published a report, *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* (1983), in which it launched a scathing attack on teachers for their lack of subject knowledge and preparation, poor motivation, and performance. This watershed report led to the first wave of reform initiatives aimed at improving the quality of teaching through top-down regulation, prescription, and standardization (Smylie & Denny, 1990; Wasley, 1991). In this wave of reform, external authorities intruded upon local autonomy and expertise by enforcing standardized curricular, mandated standardized tests, and teacher evaluation
procedures. The underlying assumption of these initiatives was that schools were rational and bureaucratic organizations functioning on a factory model. Therefore, the changes in inputs and procedures would supposedly lead to better outputs, such as student learning (Smylie & Denny, 1990). Critics of the first-wave reform efforts have charged that change can not occur and take hold with legislation, regulation, and uniform prescription (Darling-Hammond & Wise, 1985; Lieberman & Miller, 1986). They argued that teaching is a dynamic, individual, and intellectual activity that defies standardization. Furthermore, schools have a higher degree of structural looseness that set them apart from the factory model.

The publication of two reports in 1986, *Time for Results* (National Governors’ Association, 1986) and *A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21st Century* (Carnegie Forum, 1986), heralded the arrival of the second wave of reform efforts. Both of these reports reinstated teachers as the solution to American educational problems. *Time for Results* criticized the standards-based approach to reform and advocated for placing authority and responsibility for decision making in the hands of school districts and teachers. *A Nation Prepared* called for shared governance and decentralization of authority in schools and advocated a greater voice for the teachers.

Central to the second wave reform efforts are a set of approaches dramatically different from the first wave (Darling-Hammond, 1988; Smylie & Denny, 1990): (a) reform must encourage local variation and be responsive to the local needs and contexts, (b) reform must be grounded in decision making that involves the participation of teachers, (c) reform must focus on enhancing teachers’ ability to adapt knowledge and skills in changing classroom contexts, and (d) school environments must encourage the ongoing learning and development of teachers and the development of innovations.
The second-wave reform has led to a series of new initiatives across the United States to restructure schools, to decentralize decision-making, and to enhance local autonomy and accountability. The reform efforts in the area of school leadership have brought about the emergence and the convergence of three concepts of leadership: instructional leadership, shared governance, and teacher leadership (Smylie & Denny, 1990).

To date three approaches to teacher leadership have surfaced in schools (Silva, Gimbert, & Nolan, 2000). Initially, the design of teacher leadership positions was concentrated on the maintenance of the efficiency of educational systems; consequently, roles like department chair and union representative were created in this period (Evans, 1996). In a sharp departure, the second approach to teacher leadership asserted the roles of teachers as instructional leaders and sought to tap teachers’ instructional expertise (Silva, Gimbert, & Nolan, 2000). Therefore, positions like lead teacher, master teacher, mentors, and peer coaches were created. Additionally, teachers were involved in decision making at the school level; they participated in school governance councils and various task force committees. The third approach to teacher leadership recognizes the need to shift from a focus on first-order change to the second-order change for the aim of restructuring and reculturing schools (Silva, Gimbert, & Nolan, 2000). Second-order changes are supposed to lead to fundamental changes in the goals, structures, roles, and norms of a school organization. The design of new teacher leadership roles accentuates the values of collegiality and professionalism (Devaney, 1987; Lieberman, 1988; Little, 1988).

Goals associated with teacher leadership include: (a) enhancing the quality of teacher work force by expanding teachers’ work and by attracting and retaining qualified teachers, (b) enhancing school effectiveness by placing teachers in positions of influence and authority so that these initiatives can reduce teacher isolation and tap the expertise of teachers, (c) generating
new opportunities of professional development for the new and veteran teachers alike, (d) reconnecting the separate worlds of teaching and administration that have long plagued the schools, and (e) bringing people together in solving classroom problems and improving instruction through collaboration and collegiality (Datnow & Castellano, 2001; Mertens & Yarger, 1988; Smylie, 1997; Smylie & Denny, 1990; Wasley, 1991; Whitaker, 1997).

Clearly, conceptions of teacher leadership initiatives have undergone a dramatic change from a few isolated positions to a broad spectrum of leadership positions that are at the forefront of educational restructuring and reform. Teacher leadership is linked with most of the educational reform initiatives such as instructional leadership, participative decision-making, teacher professionalism, teacher empowerment, and school restructuring. Not surprisingly, the number and scope of studies on teacher leadership have increased dramatically in recent years (Smylie, 1997).

Statement of the Research Problem

The emergence and the expansion of teacher leadership initiatives were accompanied by a corresponding increase in the literature on teacher leadership programs and practices (Smylie, 1995). Current studies on formal teacher leadership are mostly descriptive in nature and the majority of the studies are limited to several major aspects of teacher leadership programs: the characteristics of teacher leaders, teacher leadership role development, definitions, goals, influencing factors, outcomes, and obstacles (Smylie, 1995). Meanwhile, there are a few organizational studies of teacher leadership in, for example, the areas of teachers’ view of teacher leadership, teacher interactions with teacher leaders, the development of new working relationships among teacher leaders, teachers, and principals, and role ambiguities and
uncertainties of teacher leadership (Datnow & Castellano, 2001; Sabatini, 2002; Smylie & Denny, 1990; Smylie & Brownlee-Conyers, 1992).

Smylie (1995) discussed three major drawbacks of the literature on teacher leadership: (a) most of the studies on teacher leadership were primarily descriptive in nature and lacked formal theory, (b) the studies on teacher leadership were narrowly situated in isolation from other aspects of teachers’ work and from the broader contexts and functions of school, especially the structural, social, political, and cultural dimensions of school organizations, and (c) the powerful conserving forces inherent in school organizations that worked against teacher leadership were often left unexplored. Indeed, Smylie (1995) regarded teacher leadership as an organizational phenomenon and advocated for more organizational studies of teacher leadership.

One major aspect of school organizational contexts that has received little attention in the literature is the political aspect of teacher leadership. Pfeffer (1981) defined organizational politics as “involves those activities taken within organizations to acquire, develop, and use power and other resources to obtain one’s preferred outcomes in which there is uncertainty or dissensus about choices” (p. 7). There is strong evidence to suggest that the introduction of teacher leadership positions changes power relationships and power dynamics in school organizations (e.g., Evans, 1996; Datnow & Castellano, 2001; Smylie & Brownlee-Conyers, 1992). Furthermore, studying informal influence and power in organizations is increasingly important as changes in organizational structures have made lateral and non-hierarchical influence more important and the exercise of formal and hierarchical control less consistent with the stated organizational values (Pfeffer, 2003).

Presently, there are limited political studies on teacher leadership in current teacher leadership literature. Furthermore, studies of how teacher leaders themselves experience school
organizational politics are extremely rare. In fact, research has consistently demonstrated that traditional authority and organizational structures in schools constitute one major obstacle to teacher leadership development (Datnow & Castellano, 2001; Silva, Gimbert, & Nolan, 2000; Smylie & Brownlee-Conyers, 1992). As a result, there is still a significant gap in knowledge of strategies, goals, influencing factors, and consequences of teacher leaders’ political interactions with principals and teachers. In addition, despite the fact that the development of micropolitical perspective in education (e.g., Ball, 1987; Blase, 1991; Iannaccone, 1975; Hoyle, 1986) has brought about seminal studies on school organizational life, this perspective in education is infrequently used to study individual and group interactions and behaviors in school settings (Blase, 1991, Smylie & Brownlee-Conyers, 1992). And, only a few studies of cooperative/consensual political relationships between teachers and school principals have appeared in the micropolitical literature (Blase & Anderson, 1995).

This study bridges the aforementioned gap by describing teacher leaders’ experiences of school-based politics using a micropolitical perspective. The results of this study include description and theory about how teacher leadership influences and is influenced by the broader organizational contexts of the school, specifically, the politics of cooperation and conflict in the performance of teacher leadership functions. This study suggests that the key to the success of teacher leadership initiatives in the school resides in organizational contexts rather than the programmatic features of teacher leadership initiatives.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the micropolitical perspectives of teacher leaders in an elementary school. This study sought to describe the experiences of school organizational politics from the perspectives of teacher leaders as they performed leadership
functions. Using multiple data sources — interviews, observations, and document collection—and the grounded theory methodology, this study produced a substantive theory of micropolitics of teacher leadership in the elementary school.

Research Questions

The broad research question in this study was: “What are the teacher leaders’ experiences of school-based politics and the meanings they derive from these experiences?”

The broad research question was guided by the following specific research questions:

1. What are the goals of political interactions by teacher leaders?
2. What are the strategies of political interactions by teacher leaders?
3. What are the influencing factors of political interactions by teacher leaders?
4. What are the consequences of political interactions on teacher leaders both personally and professionally?

Significances of the Study

The results of this study have both theoretical and practical significances. Theoretically, the results of this study contribute to the existing knowledge base of both the micropolitical perspective and teacher leadership. The application of the micropolitical perspective in education has led to the studies on the use of power, authority, and influence in school organizations with principal and teacher as the two major key players (e.g., Blase, 1991; Blase & Anderson, 1995; Blase & Roberts, 1994; Hoyle, 1986). Teacher leadership adds new dimensions to the configurations of traditional principal-teacher power relationships and dynamics in schools. The results of this study broaden the micropolitical perspective in school organizations by discovering how teacher leaders, as middle-level leaders, utilize authority and influence in schools. Furthermore, this study expands the knowledge base of teacher leadership by
describing the teacher leaders’ experiences of school politics and how these micropolitical experiences affected their leadership functions and ultimately the implementation of teacher leadership initiatives.

Practically, the results of this study have significances for both school practitioners and policymakers on the local and state levels. This study provides teachers, administrators, teacher leaders, and policymakers with an in-depth knowledge of the effects of school politics on the performance of teacher leadership functions and teacher leaders. Local and state policy makers can incorporate the findings of this study in the design of future organization-friendly teacher leadership positions that factor in organizational politics of schools. Additionally, this study also generates knowledge on the influencing factors of teacher leaders’ political interactions, which helps teachers, administrators, and teacher leaders jointly promote the effective performance of teacher leadership positions through the development of more facilitative organizational structures and processes.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework that guided the research design and the interpretation of the findings of this study was symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969). Symbolic interactionists assume that all organizations, cultures, and groups consist of actors who are in a constant process of interpreting the world around them, and it is the interpretation and the definition of the situations on the part of actors that determine their subsequent actions (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). This study regarded teacher leaders as organizational actors who constantly engaged in and interpreted their political interactions with principals and fellow teachers. From these political interactions teacher leaders assigned meanings to the school politics and these meanings in turn
shaped their political actions. Therefore, symbolic interactionism constitutes the most fitting theoretical framework for this study.

Strength and Limitation

The strength of this study lies in its holistic investigation of all avenues of teacher leadership positions in an elementary school and in the use of political models of organizational theory to guide the empirical inquiry. The limitation of this study concerns its representativeness. This study was conducted in a high-achieving suburban elementary school with membership in the League of Professional Schools in Georgia. The generated theory is context-specific; thus, only readers can determine the applicability of the generated theory to their own unique settings.

Definition of Terms

Based on the definitions of teacher leaders developed by Wasley (1991) and Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001), teacher leaders in this study are defined as teachers who take formal positions in the school to lead within and beyond the classroom and to work with others towards improved instructional practice on the classroom level and towards school improvement on the building level.

The micropolitical perspective in this study is defined as the use of formal and informal power by individuals and groups to achieve their goals in organizations (Blase, 1991).

Overview of Chapters

The remaining chapters include: Chapter 2, a literature review; Chapter 3, methodology; Chapter 4, a presentation of findings; and Chapter 5, the summary, discussions and implications. An overview of chapters ensues.

Chapter 2 presents a thorough review of the relevant literature on teacher leadership which includes a general review of teacher leadership, an overview of political models of
organization theory and the theoretical development of micropolitical perspective, and a review of significant political studies on teacher leadership.

Chapter 3 offers a description of the methodology for this study. Chapter 3 describes in detail the theoretical framework, the site and sample selection procedures, school contexts information, data collection methods, and grounded theory, the data analysis methods for this study. Chapter 3 also includes a researcher subjectivity statement and a discussion of the credibility-enhancing techniques for the findings of this study.

Chapter 4 provides a presentation of the findings for this study. The findings are illustrated in the sequence of the five themes: influencing strategies, protection strategies, influencing factors, goals, and effects. Chapter 4 uses extensive quotes and rich description to illustrate the generated categories. A visual model of the interrelationships of categories is also provided.

Finally, Chapter 5 discusses the findings of this study within the context of research and practice of teacher leadership. Chapter 5 describes and discusses the four generated theoretical ideas in the form of meta-themes about the micropolitical perspective of teacher leaders. Chapter 5 also elucidates directions for future research on teacher leadership as well as the implications for school practitioners and policy-makers.
CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this study was to examine the micropolitical perspectives of teacher leaders in an elementary school. Chapter 2 presents reviews and discussions of the relevant literature on the development of both teacher leadership and the micropolitical perspective in education and significant political studies of teacher leadership in current literature. Chapter 2 builds a foundation for the study of the politics of teacher leadership.

This chapter includes four sections. The first section presents a general review of teacher leadership and some significant studies on teacher leadership. The second section overviews the political models of organization and discusses the theoretical development of the micropolitical perspective in education. The third section reviews existing political studies that either explicitly or implicitly addressed teacher leadership. These political studies of teacher leadership constitute a limited knowledge base for the study of the politics of teacher leadership. The fourth section is a summary.

Teacher Leadership

*Historical Development of Teacher Leadership*

Teacher leadership has long been present in American educational landscape (e.g., Lortie, 1975; Waller, 1932). Nevertheless, it was not until in the mid-1980s that various levels of educational authority began to develop a wide variety of innovative and comprehensive teacher leadership positions (Smylie, 1997). Since the 1990s, the number of both published and unpublished studies on teacher leadership has grown at an extremely rapid pace (Smylie, 1997).
The changing trends in teacher leadership are inextricably linked with various waves of educational reform.

So far, three approaches to teacher leadership have surfaced in American public schools (Silva, Gimbert, & Nolan, 2000). Initially, teacher leadership programs were designed to maintain the efficiency of educational systems, accordingly, roles like department chair and union representative were created in this period (Evans, 1996). These leadership roles were the outgrowths of bureaucratic control and were more aligned with the demands of system effectiveness than with the practice of instructional leadership ((Silva, Gimbert, & Nolan, 2000).

In a sharp departure, the second approach to teacher leadership programs treated teachers as instructional leaders and strove to utilize their instructional expertise (Silva, Gimbert, & Nolan, 2000). Positions like team leader, lead teacher, and master teacher were created. Critics viewed these leadership positions as apart from rather than as a part of teachers’ daily work (Darling-Hammond, 1998; Wiggenton, 1992). Darling-Hammond (1998) argued that a negative outgrowth of the second wave of teacher leadership amounted to “remote controlling of teachers”. This critique of the second approach to teacher leadership highlighted the importance of teacher empowerment in teacher leadership programs.

The third approach to teacher leadership recognizes the need to move away from a focus on the first-order change to the second-order change for the express purpose of restructuring and reculturing schools (Silva, Gimbert, & Nolan, 2000). It is assumed that a focus on the second-order change will lead to fundamental changes in the goals, structures, roles, and norms of school organizations. The new teacher leadership roles should incorporate the values of collegiality and professionalism (Devaney, 1987; Lieberman, 1988; Little, 1988). In addition, Sergiovanni and Starratt (1998) insisted that teacher leadership should be grounded in teachers’ work with the
students. Instead of being construed as a separate leadership duty, the third wave of teacher leadership envisions leadership as a part of teachers’ daily work.

To summarize, the conception of teacher leadership has undergone a dramatic change from a few isolated “appoint and anoint” (Smylie, 1995) positions to the ones that are at the forefront of current educational restructuring and reform efforts. Teacher leadership is interconnected with most of the educational reform initiatives like instructional leadership, participative decision-making, teacher professionalism, teacher empowerment, and school restructuring.

Definitions and Goals of Teacher Leadership

The current literature includes two forms of teacher leadership: formal teacher leadership and informal or emergent teacher leadership. Smylie (1995) characterized formal teacher leadership positions as “appoint and anoint”, in which teachers are appointed by those higher up in the organizational hierarchy and are granted formal authority to perform pre-set duties. On the other hand, emergent teacher leaders have no formal authority; however, they lead from within and beyond the classroom to influence others to improve educational practice (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 1996). The literature review of this study is limited only to formal teacher leadership because of its direct relevance to this study. Current studies on formal teacher leadership are mostly descriptive in nature and are centered on several major aspects of teacher leadership: its roles, definitions, goals, outcomes, influencing factors, and obstacles.

Wasley (1991) viewed teacher leadership as “the ability to engage colleagues in experimentation then examination of more powerful instructional practices” (p. 170). Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001) defined teacher leaders as teachers who lead within and beyond the classroom to influence others towards improved educational practice. It is clear that both
definitions stressed the values of collegiality and collaboration among principals, teacher leaders, and teachers; it is evident that both definitions placed emphasis on the centrality of instructional practice in the design of teacher leadership functions.

Goals associated with teacher leadership include: (a) enhancing the quality of teacher work force by expanding teachers’ work and by attracting and retaining qualified teachers, (b) enhancing school effectiveness by placing teachers in positions of influence and authority so that these initiatives can reduce teacher isolation and tap the expertise of teachers, (c) generating new opportunities of professional development for the new and veteran teachers alike, (d) reconnecting the separate worlds of teaching and administration that have long plagued the schools, and (e) bringing people together in solving classroom problems and improving instruction through collaboration and collegiality (Datnow & Castellano, 2001; Mertens & Yarger, 1988; Smylie, 1997; Smylie & Denny, 1990; Wasley, 1991; Whitaker, 1997).

Roles, Performance, Influencing Factors, and Outcomes of Teacher Leadership

The majority of research on teacher leadership centered on the sources, roles, influencing factors, and outcomes of various teacher leadership initiatives. Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001) classified teacher leadership roles into three areas: leadership of students or other teachers, leadership of operational tasks, and leadership through decision making or partnerships. Smylie (1997) conducted a comprehensive review of research on formal teacher leadership and identified four areas of major teacher leadership roles: lead and master teachers, career ladders, teacher mentoring, and participative decision making. It is clear that teacher leadership roles reside in two major arenas: classroom instruction and school-wide decision making and improvement.
Lead and master teachers.

The goals of lead teacher or master teacher initiatives are the professional development of teachers and the promotion of classroom improvement through collegiality and collaboration. Smylie (1997) summarized two general research findings on lead and master teachers: (a) teachers in these positions usually spent their time in developing instructional programs and organizing staff development and in performing various administrative duties; little interactions took place between teachers and lead and master teachers, and (b) lead and master teachers adopted collaborative and facilitative approaches in their work; however, they had to negotiate with administrators and colleagues for the performance of leadership duties.

In terms of outcomes, Smylie (1997) reported consistent findings of strong personal benefits for lead and master teachers. Nevertheless, relatively little benefit was found for teachers. The personal benefits for lead and master teachers included leadership skill development, increased job satisfaction, and increased commitment to education and schools. On the other hand, lead and master teachers also experienced role ambiguities and conflicts when interacting with administrators and teachers.

Current literature on teacher leadership cited four influencing factors of lead and master teacher positions (Smylie, 1997). The first influencing factor was the role structures and the expectations for lead and master teacher positions (Smylie & Brownlee-Conyers 1992; Smylie & Denny, 1990; Wasley, 1991). The expectations that principals, teachers, and teacher leaders held for lead and master teacher roles influenced the performance of those positions; Moreover, teacher leaders had to adapt to the expectations of other players or had to attempt to shape the expectations of others in leadership functions. The second factor was the role ambiguities and the conflicts experienced by lead and master teachers. The third factor was additional work
overloads and time conflicts. The forth factor was the degree of support from teachers and principals. Several studies have found that lead and master teacher roles challenged the norms of equality prevalent in schools and these roles might directly challenge principals’ authority and domains of influence (e.g., Smylie, 1992b; Smylie & Brownlee-Conyers, 1992; Wasley, 1991).

**Career ladder.**

Reform proposals from think tanks and state legislatures have designed career ladder initiatives to recruit, renew, and retain talented teachers in the teacher workforce (Carnegie Forum on Education, 1986; Holmes Group, 1986). The common feature of various career ladder initiatives is the creation of hierarchical positions characterized by increased pay, expanded capacity to influence work life, greater authority over system-wide decisions, and continuous professional development (Malen & Hart, 1987). Career ladder initiatives generally introduced the work roles of mentor, curriculum developer, grade level team leadership, staff development specialist, and innovation project specialist to schools (Smylie, 1997).

Not surprisingly, career ladder reform has had its due share of controversies and criticisms. Studies of career ladder initiatives documented strong oppositions to career ladder initiatives on the part of teachers (Smylie, 1997). Teacher opposition to career ladder reform originated from the perceived fairness and validity of the evaluations used for the entry into and the ascendance of career ladder, from additional paperwork, administrative burdens, and the complexity and overload of new responsibilities, and from the possibility of generating adverse relationships among teacher leaders. Furthermore, career ladder positions might also take good teachers away from the classroom (Smylie & Denny, 1990).

The research on teacher support of career ladder positions documented that teacher support might come from the perceived opportunities for professional growth, the access to
additional compensation, and the connectedness of career ladder activities with student learning (Smylie, 1997). In addition, Hart (1990) found that the social order and the culture of individual schools also shaped the nature and the performance of career ladder roles.

*Teacher mentors.*

Mentors are experienced teachers who provide support and assistance to new and beginning teachers (Goldsberry, 1998). Mentor activities include information sharing, informal interactions, problem solving, and peer coaching (Gordon & Nicely, 1998). Smylie (1997) summarized that many studies of mentoring consistently reported infrequent contacts between mentors and their protégés, and that the time allocated for mentoring was frequently underutilized. Most of the studies found that mentoring relationships were primarily focused on non-instructional matters, such as providing emotional support (Smylie, 1997). Most contacts between mentors and protégés occurred outside the classroom and were mainly information-sharing in nature (Little, 1985).

In terms of outcomes, research generally reported positive benefits for mentor teachers, such as increased influence with administrators and increased knowledge of teaching through mentoring. However, mentoring also created stress, time demands, and role overloads for mentors (Smylie, 1997). Studies on the effect of mentoring on beginning teachers generated mixed findings at best. Most studies found some positive effects for the protégés, such as improvements in the areas of developing planning skills, handling discipline problems, preparing lesson plans, and increased knowledge of school organizations. In contrast, other findings found no significant effects of formal mentoring on the classroom performance of beginning teachers (Smylie, 1997).
Studies on the influencing factors of mentor performance reported three major findings (Smylie, 1997). The first influencing factor was the characteristics and preparations of mentors. Characteristics of successful mentors included deep knowledge of subject matter and pedagogy, the ability to have a shared language with protégés, and the values mentors placed on their roles (Bird & Alspaugh, 1986; Bird & Little, 1983; Butler, 1987). The second factor concerned the degree of support for teacher mentors and the program features of mentor positions. For example, training and workshops have been found to be beneficial in providing personal and professional assistance to mentor teachers (Krupp, 1984). A final set of factors related to the organizational contexts of schools which included physical distance, conflicting teaching schedules, and more importantly, the support from principals and the social and normative contexts of schools (Smylie, 1997).

**Participative decision making.**

Teacher leaders also serve on various shared-governance structures in schools to have a voice in school decision making and to improve instruction at the building level. Shared-governance initiatives espouse the belief that teachers are professionals with necessary experiences, knowledge, and abilities to make appropriate decisions in schools (Blase & Blase, 2001). Shared governance can also increase teachers’ commitment to and ownership of school decisions (Blase & Blase, 2001; Malen & Ogawa, 1988). The venues of leadership roles for teachers in participative decision making may include school improvement teams, shared-governance councils, and principal advisory councils.

Research on teachers’ interests in shared-governance demonstrated that teachers were more willing to participate in school decision making in the areas of curricular, instructional, and staff development than administrative or personnel decisions (Smyle, 1992a). Research also
suggested that participative groups usually started by dealing with simple and procedural subjects before transitioning to more fundamental and complex issues (Eaton & Storey, 1994).

There were differing levels of influence and authority for teacher leaders in participative decision-making structures. In some schools, principals still held traditional authority, whereas others boasted of more collaborative culture of participation, and, still some schools were plagued by antagonism (Smylie, 1997). Wallace and Hall (1994) conducted case studies of shared-governance schools and they found the presence of constant negotiations between teachers and administrators with regard to the boundary of influence and authority in shared-governance teams.

In terms of outcomes, participative decision-making predominantly affected teachers’ attitudes and work life, decision quality and acceptance, student achievement, and organizational politics of schools (Smylie, 1997). A large body of research dealt with the effects of participative decision-making on teachers’ professional attitudes and work life. Overall, these studies reported positive correlation between teacher participation in school decision-making and job satisfaction (Smylie, 1997). In terms of the organizational politics of schools, several studies found that with the emergence of numerous new committees and teams, participative decision-making augmented conflicts and disruptions in schools at least in the short term (Peterson & Warren, 1994; Short & Rinehart, 1992). These conflicts usually revolved around the issues of representation and status (Smylie, 1997). Finally, research on the linkage between participative decision-making and student achievement produced mixed finding with contradictory claims about the positive impacts of participative decision-making on student achievement.

Several factors were found to exert significant influences on the structures, functions, and outcomes of participative decision making (Smylie, 1997). First of all, the political contexts in
which participative policies were developed had a bearing on the structures and operating characteristics of participative decision making. A second factor was the influences from school administrators. Several studies have demonstrated that principals could dominate and constrain the participative process (e.g., Eaton & Storey, 1994; Malen & Ogawa, 1988). On the other hand, there was also evidence that principals could exert positive influence on teacher participation. These positive principal behaviors included delegation, facilitation, and providing a knowledge base that teachers may not possess (Smylie, 1997). In addition to administrators’ influence, a number of organizational factors also affected participative decision-making. For example, Dimmock and Wildy (1992) found that the loose linkages among departments and between departments and school administration could function as potential organizational constrains on teacher participation. Furthermore, district-level policies, activities, and support systems also affected teacher participation. Finally, the preparation of teachers for participative decision making and the characteristics of participative structures also influenced the results of participative decision making (Smylie, 1997).

Obstacles of Teacher Leadership Development

On the basis of a comprehensive review of literature, several factors are found to be the constraints of the development of teacher leadership positions. These factors range from school organizational contexts to teacher’s work lives.

1. The first and foremost set of obstacles is the organizational contexts of schools. These contexts include the traditional power relationships and the structural aspects of schools. Traditionally, teachers are expected to implement the decisions from school district and principal with limited power and influence of their own (Sirotnik & Ericson, 1996). Teacher leadership positions call for the development of a new working relationship between teachers and
administrators to replace the traditional superior-subordinate one, which causes considerable conflicts and ambiguities for both principals and teacher leaders. Forster (1997) asserted that the patriarchy in schools may lead principals to oppose power redistribution; she also doubted that teachers are willing to exert leadership roles beyond the classroom level. Other structural aspects of schools, for example, physical isolation, tight scheduling, classroom duties, and limited release time all act in concert to bottleneck the collegial interaction and leadership functions deemed crucial to the development of teacher leadership (e.g., Pellicer & Anderson, 1995; Smylie, 1992b; Urbanski & Nicholau, 1997).

2. The second obstacle is the norm of teachers’ working relationships. Professional equality, autonomy, and the notion of classroom as personal territory characterize teachers’ work lives (Smylie, 1992a). Teacher leadership positions directly challenge these norms by stressing differential status and team-oriented collaboration. Wasley (1991) found that teacher leaders often felt isolated from their colleagues since they took formal leadership positions.

3. The third set of obstacles is the ambiguities and uncertainties of teacher leadership positions. Many program features of newly formed teacher leadership positions lack clarity and definition. Administrators, teachers, and other school players have differing agendas, interests, and interpretations with regard to the implementation of teacher leadership roles, which produce tensions and uncertainties for teacher leaders in the performance of leadership functions (Wasley, 1991).

4. The final obstacle is the lack of training. Research has consistently found that teacher leaders need training in the following areas: educational change and innovation, conflict resolution, communication skills, and the diagnosis of school culture and politics (Pellicer & Anderson, 1995; Wasley, 1991).
It is clear from the above review that a variety of teacher leadership positions have taken root in American schools. More and more teacher leaders are making their presence known by exerting leadership both at the classrooms and at the schools. Current studies on teacher leadership have yielded both positive and negative findings in its roles, performances, and outcomes. Owing to the critical importance of teacher leadership in educational reforms, it is crucial to critically examine the current research so that the deficiencies could be assessed and new research areas could be identified.

**Critiques of Current Research on Teacher Leadership**

Despite their contributions to the knowledge base on teacher leadership, current literatures on teacher leadership need improvement in the following areas,

1. The majority of current research on teacher leadership is apolitical and is neglectful of the alternative views of school organization theory. Most of the studies were limited to the investigation of the goals, activities, program features, influencing factors, and outcomes of teacher leadership positions. There were a few studies which focused on the examination of obstacles to teacher leadership development, however, most of the studies were descriptive and the underlying explanatory variables were often left unexplored. Blase and Anderson (1995) critiqued that current leadership literature full of prescriptions for “empowering” approaches to leadership often overuse and abuse the term “empowerment”; conversely, only the micropolitical perspective places the notion of power at the center of its inquiries. Moreover, it is self-evident that new formal teacher leadership roles bring new dimension to school power relationships and organizational politics; however, current research rarely addresses this crucial issue.

The current literature on teacher leadership has its roots in the traditional Weberian views of organization theory which stress goal unity, consensus, organizational harmony, and order
(Bacharach & Mitchell, 1987). Traditional theories of school organization have failed to capture adequately the complicated and dynamic nature of school life (Blase, 1991). In contrast, political perspectives of school organizations seek to grapple with how individuals and groups tactically use formal and informal power to achieve their goals in organizations, and with how each actor in organizations use power to influence and protect (Blase, 1991).

2. Most of the studies in teacher leadership are not guided by formal theory. Formal theory is oriented towards understanding “why” a particular phenomenon takes place (Smylie, 1997). The defining hallmarks of a formal theory are prediction and explanation. The reach of formal theory extends well beyond policy logics and program features into the study of the underlying assumptions of a phenomenon and the identification of potential new variables for analysis (Smylie, 1997).

3. Most of the studies on teacher leadership are both isolated and idiosyncratic. These studies either centered on specific roles like lead and master teachers, shared-governance teams, or on one aspect of teacher leadership activities (e.g., principal-teacher leader interaction). Teacher leadership role is an organizational phenomenon (Smylie, 1995). Accordingly, this study sought to study teacher leadership holistically. This study selected an elementary school as the site of a case study and investigated all avenues of formal teacher leadership roles in the chosen school. This study also examined all interactions occurring among teacher leaders, teachers, principals, and other key players in the school.
Political Models of Organization Theory, Micropolitical Perspective, and
Theories of Power

Political Models of Organization Theory

Approaches to organization theory come from a wide range of intellectual origins and
disciplines. There was a convergence of intellectual traditions in the 1950s and the 1960s to
forge a mainstream cluster of organization theories. But this consensus was soon challenged by
alternative perspectives of organization theory from the mid-1970s (Hoyle, 1986).

Traditional organizational theories tend to be general and over-arching and assume to
have universal applications to all organizations (Bacharach & Mitchell, 1987). However, theorists have consistently asserted that the mainstream organization theories have failed to
capture and explain everyday realities of organizational life in general and school organization
life in particular (Bacharach & Mitchell, 1987; Ball, 1987; Blase, 1991; Hoyle, 1986).

Organizational scholars have challenged the traditional structural approach to
organizations (Bacharach, 1978; Bacharach & Lawler, 1980; Bacharach & Mitchell, 1987; Hoyle,
1986). Comparative structuralists (e.g., Blau & Schoenherr, 1971; Hage & Aiken, 1970) adopted
a causal model of organization with four component elements: external constraints, structure,
process, and output. Comparative structuralists treated an organization as the unit of analysis
and an organic entity subject to its own principles of operation (Wolin, 1969). Furthermore,
structuralists assumed that an organization is a rational system of interdependent units
functionally bonded together by common goals (Bacharach & Mitchell, 1987). Bacharach (1978)
criticized the structural approach to organizational theory as reifying and anthropomorphizing
organizations. Bacharach and Mitchell (1987) stated that one limitation of structural approach is
the neglect of nonpatterned behaviors of groups and actors within an organization. Furthermore,
Bacharach (1978) argued that structuralists tend to view an organization as a normatively integrated system immune from political conflicts and tensions. The holistic view of organization adopted by structuralists also sidelines organizational subunits, such as interest groups and coalitions (Bacharach, 1978).

Another approach that has significant impact on the development of organization theory is the system perspective (Hoyle, 1986). The basic assumption of the system perspective is that an organization has clear boundaries within which there are a range of subsystems functionally related to the whole (Hoyle, 1986). The systems perspective can be classified into the strong systems approach and the loose systems approach. The distinctive features of the strong systems approach are goals, functions, consensus, and socialization (Hoyle, 1986). It is apparent that the strong systems approach is structural-functional in nature. The loose system approach is derived particularly from the examination of educational organizations (Bacharach & Mitchell, 1987; Hoyle, 1986). The loosely-coupled system approach to school organizations was developed by Bidwell (1965) and Weick (1976). The basic premise of the loosely-coupled approach is that despite the presence of rules and procedures for school activities, school organizations still allow a high degree of autonomy for the actors and various organizational subunits in schools (Hoyle, 1986). Bacharach and Mitchell (1987) further added that students of the loosely-coupled approach take the individual rather than the organization as the unit of analysis. But it should be noted that no matter how loosely coupled the organization is, Weick (1976) affirmed the systematic relationships among the components of an organization.

A number of scholars have critiqued the loosely-coupled theory of school organizations (e.g., Bacharach & Mitchell, 1987; Ball, 1987). Bacharach and Mitchell (1987) charged that the loosely-coupled theory is still influenced by the same assumption of organizational unity as
adopted by the structuralists. The assumption of organizational unity treats organizations as harmonious and unified entities. In addition, Bacharach and Mitchell (1987) attacked the proponents of loosely-coupled system for their neglect of structural constraints affecting the action and cognition of individuals. Ball (1987) argued that the stultifying parameters of the systems approach tend to prefer prescription to description in the study of school organizations. He stated that “They [system theorists] prefer the abstract tidiness of conceptual debate to the concrete messiness of empirical research inside schools.” (p. 1).

Out of the dissatisfaction and the disillusionment with traditional organization theories, alternative political models of organizations in general and educational organizations in particular emerged in the 1970s and the 1980s (Bacharach & Lawler, 1980; Bacharach & Mitchell, 1987; Ball, 1987; Blase 1991; Hoyle, 1986; Mayes & Allen, 1977; Pfeffer, 1981). The emerging political models may have differing foci and may originate from different scholarly disciplines, but these models all share the same basic premises that organization life is dominated by political interactions, and the study of power and politics is fundamental for the analyses of organization lives and behaviors.

Bacharach and Lawler (1980) integrated the social psychology of politics with the structural analysis of organization to develop a new approach to organizational politics. For Bacharach and Lawler (1980), organization lives are in essence politically negotiated orders, and “Politics in organizations involve the tactical use of power to retain or obtain control of real and symbolic resources.”(p. 1). Power, coalitions, and bargaining constitute the three basic premises of the theory of organizational politics developed by Bacharach and Lawler. As for the unit of analysis, Bacharach and Lawler (1980) criticized the oversocialized notion of people; conversely,
they regarded the group as the viable unit of political actions for analysis. Of particular interest to Bacharach and Lawler are three types of groups: work groups, interest groups, and coalitions.

Adopting a Weberian action perspective, Bacharach and Mundell (1993) offered a definition of organizational politics with the core concept of *logics of action*. Expanding the Weberian view of social action, they defined logics of action as the implicit relationships between the means and the goals assumed by actors in organizations. For example, a school may have two logics of action in place: a bureaucratic logic of accountability and a professional logic of autonomy (Bacharach & Mundell, 1993). For Bacharach and Mundell (1993), organization politics is about the contest that takes place over different logics of action and their various manifestations in organizations.

Pfeffer (1981) was primarily concerned with the concept of power in organizations. Pfeffer (1981) studied power basically from a sociological standpoint. He regarded power as a fundamentally structural phenomenon which results from the division of labor and the performance of critical tasks in organizations. For Pfeffer (1981), organizational politics “involves those activities taken within organizations to acquire, develop, and use power and other resources to obtain one’s preferred outcomes in which there is uncertainty or dissensus about choices” (p. 7). It is obvious that for Pfeffer, political activity is in essence the acquisition and the use of power in organizations. Moreover, Pfeffer treated both the individual and group as the viable units of analysis in organizational studies.

Finally, Mayes and Allen (1977) developed another view of organizational politics from the field of management and introduced the politics of resource allocation. For Mayes and Allen (1977), organizational politics is “the management of influence to obtain ends not sanctioned by the organization or to obtain sanctioned ends through non-sanctioned influence means.” (p. 675).
Clearly, Mayes and Allen (1977) did not consider the formal organizational goals, rules and procedures, and the formal processes as relevant in their models of organization theory. The definition of organizational politics developed by Mayes and Allen rather presents a bleak Machiavellian view of organizational life.

To review, political models of organization theory come into being as critiques of traditional structuralist and systems approaches to organization theories. The political models of organization theory share the common premise that organizations are in essence arenas of political interactions, Mangham (1979) best summarized the political approaches to organization theory by stating “I consider nearly all behavior to be fundamentally political in the sense that when one individual interacts with another… because the encounter provides him with some benefit.” (p. xi). A review of political models of organization theories reveals that these theories originate from different scholarly disciplines (e.g., sociology, social psychology, management, and political science). Different political models of organization theory diverge on the ultimate ends of political interactions (e.g., power, logics of action, goals, and sanctioned or non-sanctioned ends). Political organizational theorists also disagree on whether to choose individual or group as units of analysis and whether to place emphasis on formal structures and processes or informal structures and processes in organizational studies.

Micropolitical Perspective in Educational Organizations

The application of political models of organizational theories in education organizations gives rise to the emergence of the micropolitical perspective in education (Bacharach & Mundell, 1993; Ball, 1987; Blase, 1991; Gronn, 1986; Hoyle, 1986; Iannaccone, 1975). Micropolitical perspective is the study of politics within an organization (Bacharach & Mundell, 1993). The boundary of micropolitical study of educational organizations is fluid; it can be a school district,
an individual school or a department within a school. Blase (1991) argued that micropolitical perspective is a valuable and potent approach to understand the woof and warp of the fabric of daily school life.

Iannaccone (1975) was the first scholar to use the term *micropolitics* and to apply micropolitics to an educational context. Iannaccone extrapolated micropolitics in schools in terms of two interdependent and interacting subsystems: the interaction of administrators, teachers and students within the school and the interaction between lay people and professionals at the schools. This version of micropolitics also connected both the macro world and micro world of organizational influences.

Hoyle (1986) viewed micropolitics as the strategies which individuals and groups in organizations employ to use authority and influence to advance their interests. Hoyle (1986) further stated that micropolitical perspective is a continuum ranging from the conventional management procedures to a separate organizational underworld of illegitimate and self-interested manipulation. Hoyle’s view of micropolitics addressed both the individual and group political activities in school organizations and encompassed both formal and informal use of power. But later works of Hoyle demonstrated that he did view the informal and dark side of organizational life as the real political domain (Blase, 1991).

Gronn’s (1986) contribution to the development of micropolitical perspective lies exclusively in the study of conflicts in organizations. For Gronn, conflicts range on an action-inaction continuum and include the following types: overt, covert, latent, inaction through self-censorship, and inaction due to an idea’s failure to enter consciousness. Gronn also made a distinction between consciously and unconsciously motivated micropolitical actions within organizations.
On the basis of data gathered in British schools, Ball (1987) contributed significantly to the theoretical development of the micropolitical perspective in educational organizations. Ball attached great importance to group-level analysis and conflict dynamics in school organizations. The key concepts in Ball’s theory consisted of control, goal diversity, ideology, and conflict. He asserted that the boundaries of control in organizations are the result of the constant struggles between principals and staff and that these boundaries are continually being drawn and redrawn by confrontations and interactions among individuals and groups within schools. Ball (1987) argued that the structural looseness of schools inevitably leads to dissensus and goal diversity. He further pointed out that almost all aspects of decision making in schools have strong ideological underpinnings which can lead to political and philosophical dissentions. Finally, Ball (1987) embraced the conflict perspective as central to the understanding of schools as organizations.

From above review, it is apparent that theorists of micropolitics in school organizations placed different emphasis on the following oppositions: individual versus group as unit of analysis, conflictive versus cooperative interactions, formal versus informal structures and processes, and the importance of external organizational factors. On the other hand, different approaches to the micropolitical perspective all affirmed the dialectical, interactive, multidirectional, strategic, conflictive, ideological, and interpretative aspects of organizations in relationship with power (Blase & Anderson, 1995).

On the basis of a comprehensive review of literature on the micropolitical perspective, Blase (1991) developed a broad-based working definition of micropolitics that integrated various micropolitical perspectives for the aim of generating new knowledge on school organizational life. The working definition developed by Blase (1991) is,
Micropolitics refers to the use of formal and informal power by individuals and groups to achieve their goals in organizations. In large part, political actions result from perceived difference between individuals and groups, coupled with the motivation to use power to influence and/or protect. Although such actions are consciously motivated, any action, consciously or unconsciously motivated, may have political “significance” in a given situation. Both cooperative and conflictive actions and processes are part of the realm of micropolitics. Moreover, macro- and micropolitical factors frequently interact (p. 11).

In this broad definition, Blase (1991) transcended the limitations of differing approaches to micropolitical perspective that are narrowly locked in the dispute of various oppositions (e.g., formal versus informal structure, legitimate versus illegitimate use of power, cooperation versus conflict, individual versus group). This comprehensive definition provides a magnifying lens through which every aspect of organizational politics can be discovered and studied.

This study adopted Blase’s definition of micropolitics as the conceptual framework. The micropolitics of teacher leadership are relatively unexplored in current literature; consequently, the comprehensiveness of Blase’s definition had the benefit of sensitizing the researcher to every aspect of the teacher leaders’ experiences of school organizational politics so that the possibility of generating well-rounded and in-depth knowledge was enhanced.

Relevant Theories of Power, Authority and Influence

Naturally, the concept of power is fundamental for the understanding of organizational politics (Bacharach & Lawler, 1980; Pfeffer, 1981). Although the study of power originate from different disciplines, most definitions of power have a common element indicating that power is
the capability of one social actor to overcome resistance in achieving a desired end or result (Pfeffer, 1981). The root of most consequential definitions of power was developed by Weber (1947), he stated that power is the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his/her own will, despite resistance, and regardless of the basis on which this probability rests.

Pfeffer (1992) enumerated a number of tactics for the exercise of power in organizations: (a) those having to do with timing, such as delay and waiting, (b) interpersonal influence strategies such as social proof, liking, commitment, and reciprocity, (c) strategic presentation of information and selective use of data to support one’s case, (d) reorganization to consolidate power or to break up the ability of one’s opponents to acquire power, (e) use of evocative language to mobilize support or to quiet opposition, and (f) use of task forces and committees to co-opt opposition.

In the literature, the concepts of power, authority, and influence are often treated as synonyms. This study adopted the differentiation among power, authority, and influence developed by Bacharach and Lawler (1980). Bacharach and Lawler regarded power as a sensitizing concept and that power is the basic and generic term underpinning authority and influence.

Bacharach and Lawler (1980) defined authority as the form of power which stems from the legal right to make decisions governing others, whereas influence as the form of power coming from the capacity to shape decisions by informal or non-authoritative means. For example, in schools, principals may have sole access to authority, whereas the staff and faculty may have a repertoire of influences. Bacharach and Lawler further explicated that authority is
static, structural, formal, top-down, and circumscribed, whereas influence is dynamic, informal, multi-directional, interpersonal, and uncircumcised.

Porter, Angle, and Allen (2003) delineated organizational influences in three directions: downward influence, lateral influence, and upward influence. Downward influence occurs when the influence agent is attempting to influence the behavior of another individual or groups of individuals at a lower end of the formal organizational hierarchy. With contemporary trends towards less hierarchical organizations and the use of groups to accomplish tasks, lateral influence is more prevalent in organizations among individuals and groups who have no differences in formal status or rank. Upward influence refers to influence attempts directed at individuals or groups higher in the formal hierarchy than the influence agent. Porter, Angle, and Allen argued that it is the absence of authority that sets lateral influence apart from upward and downward influences.

Porter, Angle, and Allen (2003) claimed that organization influence is a function of three critical factors: the influencer, the target, and then the nature of the situations surrounding specific influence attempts. The influencer and the target each bring respective skills and abilities to the influence process. Organizational situations surrounding the influence attempt include the nature of work being performed, the immediate and larger organizational context, and the specific circumstances occurring at the time of influence attempts. Porter, Angle, and Allen believed that organizational contexts include both the immediate work group and the larger organization. Furthermore, they recognized that organizational influence attempts pivot on the fundamental culture of an organization—its history, tradition, and norms.

Bacharach and Lawler (1980) elucidated the four sources of power: structure, personality, expertise, and opportunity. Structural source of power refers to a person’s official position.
Personality source originate from personal qualities, such as charisma. Expertise source of power come from specialized knowledge or access to information. Opportunity source refers to the occupancy of low-rank roles that can provide opportunities to exert power through control of information or key tasks. For example, secretaries in schools may possess power due to their easy access to information. Bacharach and Lawler (1980) then identified the four bases of power: coercive, the ability to apply the threat of sanctions; remunerative, the control of material resources and favors; normative, the control of symbolic rewards; knowledge, the access to information as a basis of power.

French and Raven (1959) proposed two major types of power bases, namely position power and personal power. According to French and Raven, position power consists of reward power and legitimate power, while personal power refers to referent power and expert power. French and Raven (1959) further elucidated that position power is the power that an individual obtains by occupying positions in an organization that provides access to, or control over resources that can be used for rewards and punishments. While coercive and reward power is self-evident, legitimate power is based on the target’s belief that the power holder has the right to issue orders which the target is obligated to accept.

French and Raven (1959) regarded personal power as entirely coming from individual attributes. Referent power resides in the psychological identification of the target with the agent of influence, such as the power dynamics in charismatic leadership. Expert power comes into being when an individual in an organization can acquire sufficient expertise or experience within an area of knowledge so that the target willingly yields to the influence of the individual.

On the basis of the sources and bases of power put forward by Bacharach and Lawler (1980), Hoyle (1986) discussed authority and influence in school organizations. He argued that
heads (i.e., principals) have access to all the four sources and bases of power. In contrast, teachers only have access to three sources of power: personality, expertise, and opportunity. For professionally-staffed organizations like schools, Hoyle (1986) made illuminating assertions that the bureaucratic-professional conflict is a useful heuristic starting point for the discussions of power and influence in schools and that the bureaucratic-professional conflicts translate into the struggles for the maintenance or disruption of the balance between control and autonomy.

Blase and Anderson (1995) summarized a tripartite structure of power relationships in school organizations in terms of power over, power through, and power with. “Power over” associates power with domination and control and that one enhances his/her power at the expense of others. In the “Power through” model, organizational goals are accomplished through motivating individuals and groups to foster a sense of ownership in organizations. “Power with” model empowers all organizational stakeholders to expect and exercise democratic participation in organizational structures and processes.

Review of Political Studies on Teacher Leadership

This section conducts a review of significant political studies of teacher leadership that used both the micropolitical perspective and other important political perspectives. Due to a limited pool of literature on the political studies of teacher leadership, this review encompasses both implicit and explicit political studies of teacher leadership in order to build a limited knowledge base for this study.

Under the guidance of the micropolitical perspective, Smylie and Brownlee-Conyers (1992) conducted an exploratory study explicitly pertaining to the development of a new working relationship between teacher leaders and principals. They investigated the newly
formed lead teacher programs in the K-8 grades of a Mid-western school district. The selected sample was seven pairs of leader teachers and principals.

Traditional working relationship between teachers and principal is brief, informal, and fragmented. Teachers and principals work at a distance and their relationship is characterized by accountability and control (Smylie & Brownlee-Conyers, 1992). Teacher leadership expands teacher leaders’ roles and responsibilities beyond classroom, which creates ambiguity and conflict for the development of a new working relationship between teacher leaders and their principals. Moreover, the development of the new working relationship is also mediated by workplace socialization and the organizational contexts of schools (Smylie & Brownlee-Conyers, 1992).

Smylie and Brownlee-Conyers (1992) found that the development of new working relationship between teacher leaders and principals was influenced by ambiguities and uncertainties, interests and prerogatives, expectations for teacher leadership, strategic interactions, and interpersonal obligations. Of particular relevance was the fact that both principals and teacher leaders employed a range of strategies to advance their respective interests and prerogatives. For principals, their prerogatives were the protection of traditional principal authority, general managerial and control functions, and role status. Teacher leaders’ prerogatives included the avoidance of conflict, protection of classroom work, and the maintenance of positive relationships with peers.

Smylie and Brownlee-Conyers (1992) also described the strategies used by the principals and the teacher leaders to advance their respective prerogatives. For principals, they attempted to manage the tasks and the pace of teacher leaders’ work and they also sought to improve the interpersonal dimensions of their relationships with the teacher leaders. For teacher leaders, they
strove to advance their ideas to principals indirectly and delicately and they tried to avoid conflict; likewise, they also put emphasis on the interpersonal aspect of the relationships with the principals.

In an investigation of teacher leadership roles in a metropolitan K-8 school district, Smylie and Denny (1990) studied the tensions and the ambiguities inherent in teacher leadership positions from an organizational perspective. Interestingly, Smylie and Denny found that despite the fact that teacher leaders consciously rejected the label of evaluator and administrator, they were still in a precarious position prone to the violation of the egalitarian norms in schools. The unique power relationship entailed in teacher leadership positions made them “play safe”--- to engage in activities with peers and principals within the acceptable patterns of practice and authority in the schools. Smylie and Denny argued that the patterns of practice, power, and belief in school organizations might shape teacher leadership roles and mediate their performances.

Datnow and Castellano (2001) studied the issues of leadership with respect to the roles of principals and teacher leaders in Success for All (SFA) schools. SFA is a research-based whole-school reform model designed to improve reading for students throughout elementary grades. SFA schools view leadership as critical to the reform success and specifically call for a full-time facilitator position from the pool of teachers in each SFA school to lead the reform.

Datnow and Castellano (2001) conducted a case study of the roles of SFA facilitators and the relationships between principals and facilitators in six SFA elementary schools in California. Their findings touched on the tensions, ambiguities, and power dynamics in the implementation of SFA reform. Datnow and Castellano found that principal leadership played leading roles in these schools. Although SFA facilitators had clearly specified functions, their leadership
functions were still plagued by tensions and role ambiguities. Lacking institutional position power in their interactions with teachers, SFA facilitators had to establish themselves as knowledgeable authority on SFA programs and maintain the identity as a teacher to build trust with fellow teachers. They also found that the working relationships between SFA facilitators and principals were influenced by how each party conceived of the boundaries of their roles and by the contexts for leadership in each SFA school. The power dynamics in these SFA schools resulted in considerable negotiation and role ambiguity for SFA facilitators in their performance of prescribed roles.

Peterson and Warren (1994) investigated the changes and the roles of principals in shared-governance initiatives. Although this study did not target teacher leadership directly, this study was still useful in illuminating the politics of shared-governance structures in which teacher leaders played a crucial role. Peterson and Warren (1994) found that shared-governance structures generated new jurisdictions for principals and teachers, changes in school power dynamics, and the emergence of conflicts. All schools in their study reported overall teacher empowerment; in addition, four lead teachers even formed a coalition of considerable power in one school. They found that traditional authority of principals was weakened and that the principals seemed less willing to use formal power in shared-governance structures.

With the proliferation of new roles, committees, and task forces in shared-governance schools, the school politics also underwent dramatic change (Peterson & Warren, 1994). In addition to the formal structures and processes, informal coalitions and interest groups have emerged in the schools to influence the internal micropolitical environment. Peterson and Warren (1994) reported heightened informal political activities in shared-governance teams.
where bargaining, negotiating, and coalition-building surged. Additionally, both the level and the type of conflicts in these schools also multiplied.

Hargreaves (1991) studied the micropolitics of teacher collaboration, specifically concerning the concept of collegiality which is professed to be a defining feature of teacher leadership (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001; Wasley, 1991). Hargreaves critiqued that most of the literature on collegiality were informed by the cultural perspective which emphasizes shared culture and the consensus-based aspects of human relationships. Adopting the micropolitical perspective, Hargreaves argued that collegiality might in fact result from the exercise of organizational power by control-conscious administrators.

Hargreaves (1991) studied how elementary school teachers used scheduled preparation time and how the use of preparation time related to teachers’ work commitments in two school boards in Ontario, Canada. Hargreaves found that during the scheduled planning time, teachers at the two school districts experienced mandated collaboration and joint planning, required consultation with special education resource teacher, and mandated participation in peer coaching program. Hargreaves (1991) argued that this form of mandated collegiality had degraded into a vehicle through which teachers were forced to shoulder the burden of implementing external mandates designed by control-conscious administrators.

On the basis of this study, Hargreaves (1991) coined the term *contrived collegiality* to describe the unauthentic form of collegiality that is administratively regulated, compulsory, implementation-oriented, and predictable. Hargreaves further contended that the inevitable consequences of contrived collegiality are inflexibility and inefficiency in school organizations.

Drawing on the micropolitical perspective and organizational theory, Achinstein (2002) conducted case studies of two urban public middles schools to examine how teachers in
community managed conflicts. Achinstein found that in practice, teachers engaged in collaborations often ran into conflicts over professional beliefs and practices. She argued that active engagements in conflict and a dialogue of differences were essential functions of teacher community; and that conflicts could create the contexts for learning and renewal of teacher professional communities.

From the two case studies, Achinstein (2002) identified conflict, border politics, and ideology as the micropolitical processes associated with conflicts in community. She found that in one school, teacher community avoided conflict by transferring problems to the under-achieving students and by defining challenging students as “other”. Thus, the professional community of teachers in this school created solidarity within their own borders and maintained the status-quo. In another school, teacher community acknowledged responsibility for under-achieving students. This school also had many mechanisms for openly raising and addressing conflicts over students’ race and culture. As a result, this school initiated organizational changes, such as the introduction of an African-centered pilot program to raise achievement for minority students.

Achinstein (2002) posited that the norms and practices of collaboration actually promoted conflicts in schools. Schools might adopt either avoidant or embracing stand towards conflicts. She argued that embracing conflicts in schools might generate opportunities for teacher community to acknowledge and critically reflect on their practices so that fundamental changes in school might materialize. Finally, Achinstein argued that teacher community actively negotiated membership and acceptable beliefs and that the orders in teacher community possessed inclusivity and permeability both within teacher community and in relation to outsiders, such as students and parents.
In a case study of site-based governance councils in Salt Lake City, Malen and Ogawa (1988) investigated whether building-based councils actually enabled teachers and parents to exert substantial influences on school policy and decisions. Program features of site-based governance councils in Salt Lake City made a favorable case for the participation of teachers and parents due to the key components of broad jurisdiction, formal policymaking authority, parity protections, and training provisions. With a combination of political system’s perspective and organizational perspective as the conceptual framework, Malen and Ogawa studied eight school councils in Salt Lake City schools.

Malen and Ogawa (1988) found that these school councils were characterized by low involvement in central subjects of education policy and modest involvement in marginal matters like discipline and extracurricular projects. Although principal-teacher parity was granted in school councils, principals, with an impressive array of resources, still dominated in school council functions. They found that the formal inclusion of teachers and parents in governance councils did not alter the traditional influence relationships in schools. Malen and Ogawa attributed their findings to the following factors: composition of school councils, relative power and role orientations of the principals and professionals in councils, norms of propriety and civility, political culture, and environmental conditions in schools.

Career ladder reform provides an important avenue for the development of teacher leadership with the installation of hierarchical positions that offer increased pay and expanded responsibilities and authority for qualified teachers. Malen and Hart (1987) examined how the career ladder reform in Utah was interpreted, assimilated, and adjusted at different levels of the education system. Regarding policy adoption and implementation as an adaptive process, Malen
and Hart were particularly interested in how various educational actors affected the policy adoption and implementation in the career ladder reform.

Malen and Hart (1987) were concerned with how the state, school board, and schools both sabotaged and sustained the original features of career ladder reform in Utah. At the school level, they reported distrust of the career ladder reform from principals and teachers, uniform distribution of benefits for teachers, and the pressure to discount imposed differentiations among teachers. On the other hand, there were evidences of expanded roles for teachers and perceived professional growth opportunities for teachers in these new roles. Overall, the original notion of career ladder reform was diluted by incremental adjustments on all levels of educational system. Fundamental changes in the work roles, responsibilities, and reward structure for teachers as envisioned in career ladder initiatives did not materialize.

In summary, these political studies either addressed teacher leadership directly (e.g., the new working relationship between teacher leaders and principals, between teacher leaders and teachers) or indirectly (e.g., career ladder reform, school-based governance councils, and collegiality). Adopting the lens of political perspective, all these studies reported a somber if not bleak picture of the realities of the implementation of much-lauded teacher leadership initiatives in schools.

These studies demonstrate how the newly formed or mandated school structures and programs conducive to the development of teacher leadership could backfire and in turn lead to heightened conflicts and ambiguities; how various actors in schools with differing interests and preferences employed strategies and resources to shape various reform initiatives; how control-conscious administrators watered down reform initiatives to protect their own managerial prerogatives. As Blase and Anderson (1995) argued, the micropolitical culture of a school is, in
part, a reaction to the type of leadership in the school. The use of micropolitical perspective did prove to be a potent tool in understanding school organization life and the underlying factors contributing to the success or failure of educational reform initiatives, such as teacher leadership.

It is clear from the above review that there still is a dearth of studies directly focusing on the micropolitical perspectives of teacher leaders. Instead of studying the structures, role development, design features, relationships, and processes that are peripheral to the development of teacher leadership, it is high time that attention should be paid to the core issue of how teacher leaders experience organizational politics in the performance of leadership duties. Symbolic interactionists assert that it is people’s interpretations and definitions of the situation that determine action (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). The micropolitical perspective is of benefit in demonstrating how teacher leaders’ experiences of school politics shape their actions, consequently shedding a new light on the constraining and facilitating factors of teacher leadership performance and development.

Summary

This chapter provides an overview of research on teacher leadership, micropolitical perspective in educational organizations, and significant political studies of teacher leadership. Research on teacher leadership demonstrates that various forms of teacher leadership initiatives do promote teaching and learning through collegiality and collaboration among teachers. But the performance and development of teacher leadership are also constrained by the organizational contexts of schools.

Organizations are inherently political with diverging goals and differing interests on the part of individual actors and groups. Micropolitical perspective, with the focus on the use of power to influence and protect, proves to be a potent approach in providing insightful
understanding of everyday school life. Extant political studies of teacher leadership provided evidence that principals, teacher leaders, and teachers all used a variety of political strategies to promote their respective interests in the implementation of teacher leadership initiatives. But there are very few studies that directly investigate teacher leaders’ experiences and perspectives of school level politics as they perform leadership functions.

This study provides theoretical insights of teacher leaders’ experiences of organizational politics. The findings of this study contribute to the existing knowledge base on the political aspects of teacher leadership by exclusively centering on the perspectives of teacher leaders.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to examine the micropolitical perspectives of teacher leaders in an elementary school. This study sought to describe teacher leaders’ experiences of school politics and the meanings that they attached to these experiences.

This chapter includes eight sections. The first section presents an overview of research methodology. The second section provides a discussion of symbolic interactionism and the rationale for adopting it for this study. The third section offers a detailed description of the site and sample selection procedures and criteria. The fourth section is a description of the school context. The fifth section presents a description of the data collection methods. The sixth section provides a thorough discussion of the grounded theory methodology in general and constant comparative analysis in particular. The seventh section offers a discussion of the credibility-enhancing techniques for the findings of this study. The final section is a subjectivity statement.

Overview of Methodology

According to Taylor and Bogdan (1998), methodology refers to the way researchers approach problems and seek answers. In the social sciences, the term is about how research is conducted. The assumptions, interests, and purposes of researchers determine the methodology they choose.

The purpose of this study was to describe the political perspectives of teacher leaders in an elementary school. The emergence of teacher leadership positions in schools has brought about new dimensions to traditional principal-teacher power relationship; in addition, school
politics, work relationships, and jurisdictions in schools have been profoundly changed with the implementation of teacher leadership initiatives (Achinstein, 2004; Peterson & Warren, 1994; Smylie & Brownlee-Conyers, 1992).

The broad research question of this study was: “What are the teacher leaders’ experiences of organizational politics and the meanings that they derive from these experiences?” Thus, the research question determines that the methodology for this study should be qualitative. According to Creswell (1998), the definition of qualitative research is,

Qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explores a social or human problem, the research builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting (p. 15).

The phenomenological perspective is central to the conception of qualitative methodology. The phenomenological perspective is aimed at understanding a social phenomenon from the actor’s own perspective and examining how the world is experienced (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). Phenomenological perspective gives rise to three important theoretical frameworks: symbolic interactionism, ethnomethodology, and feminist research.

This study used symbolic interactionism as the theoretical framework which guided the research design and the interpretation of findings. Furthermore, the grounded theory methods were employed to analyze data and develop micropolitical statements about the politics of teacher leadership. The ensuing sections discuss symbolic interactionism, site selection and criteria, sample selection and size, the contexts of the study, the grounded theory methodology, subjectivity statement, and the strategies for enhancing the credibility of this study.
Symbolic Interactionism

Theoretical framework of Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic interactionism stems from the seminal works of Charles Horton Cooley, John Dewey, George Mead, Robert Park, and others. These scholars believed that human action is influenced, in large part, from within the individual rather than from outside sources. Influenced by the teachings of Dewey, Cooley, and Mead, Blumer (1969) applied their insightful analyses of the processes of interactions to everyday life and contributed significantly to the development of symbolic interactionism. Symbolic interactionism places central importance on the social meanings that people attach to the world around them (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). Symbolic interactionism rests on three basic premises as elaborated by Blumer (1969).

This first premise is that people act toward things on the basis of the meanings these things have for them. Blumer (1969) defined “things” as everything that human being encounter in his/her world. These things may be physical objects like trees, social objects like organizations, and abstract objects like moral codes. Traditional social sciences and psychology either take meaning for granted or treat meaning as a neutral link between the factors responsible for human behavior and the behavior resultant from such factors (Blumer, 1969).

The defining feature of symbolic interactionism is set by the second premise which is about the sources of meanings (Blumer, 1969). The second premise states that the meanings are not inherent in objects but are social products that arise out of interactions. Traditionally, the meanings are regarded as being intrinsic to the thing that has it, or alternately as psychical accretions brought to the thing by the person for whom the thing has meaning (Blumer, 1969). Blumer stated that symbolic interactionism believes “the meanings of a thing for a person grow
out of the ways in which other persons act toward the person with regard to the thing” (p. 4). In essence, symbolic interactionism treats meaning as social products.

The third premise further differentiates symbolic interactionism from other disciplines on meanings by placing emphasis on the interpretative process involved in the use of the meanings. Blumer (1969) elucidated two steps involved in the interpretative process: (a) the actor indicates to himself/herself that the things toward which he is acting have meaning, and (b) interpretation then becomes a matter of handling meanings, the actor selects, checks, suspends, regroups, and transforms the meanings in the light of the situation he is placed in and the direction of his/her action. Thus, interpretation is not an automatic application of established meanings but a formative process in which meanings are constantly used and revised.

On the basis of the three basic premises, Blumer (1969) clarified two crucial concepts: non-symbolic interaction and symbolic interaction. Non-symbolic interaction occurs when the actor responds directly to the action of other people without interpretation. In contrast, symbolic interaction involves the interpretation of the action of others on the part of the actor. From a symbolic interactionism perspective, all organizations, cultures, and groups consist of actors who are in a constant process of interpreting the world around them; and it is their interpretations and definitions of the situations that determine their action (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998).

**Rationale for the Use of Symbolic Interactionism**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the experiences and the derived meanings of organizational politics from the perspectives of teacher leaders. This study regarded teacher leaders as organizational actors who constantly engaged in and interpreted political interactions with principals and colleagues. From these political interactions teacher leaders assigned meanings to school politics and the derived meanings in turn shaped their own political actions.
According to Blase (1991), political actions refer to the use of both formal power and informal power by individuals and groups to achieve their goals in organizations. Merriam (1998) considered theoretical framework to be the structure, the scaffolding, and the frame of a qualitative study. Therefore, it is apparent that symbolic interactionism constitutes the most apposite theoretical framework to guide the research design and the interpretation of the findings. Although symbolic interactionism is predicated on the individual level, teacher leaders may encounter same or similar experiences and situations so that the common shared meanings of teacher leadership can be developed.

Site and Sample Selection and Criteria

Site Selection and Criteria

The purpose of this study warranted that the study must be conducted in a natural school setting. Purposeful sampling guided the selection of a school site for this study. According to Merriam (1998), purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight. Therefore, the investigator must select a sample from which most can be learned. Patton (1990) further added that the power of purposeful sampling lies in the selection of information-rich cases central to the research purpose. Purposeful sampling assumes a set of criteria beforehand (Merriam, 1998). For this study, it is self-evident that the chosen school must have thriving teacher leadership positions and heightened political activities. Furthermore, the logistics of site selection like time frame and travel arrangements also bear on the site selection procedures (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992).

Therefore, an elementary school with membership in the League of Professional Schools in Georgia was chosen as the research site. The League of Professional Schools (LPS) is a joint partnership program between the University of Georgia and participating public schools across
Georgia. The participating schools in LPS agree to adopt the principles of shared-governance and action research. Shared-governance structures in LPS schools assure that there are a wide range of teacher leadership positions not only on the classroom level but also on the building level. Furthermore, shared-governance structures lead to an increase in school politics and new jurisdictions and conflicts in schools (Peterson & Warren, 1994).

To seek insider’s information, the researcher contacted the co-director of the League of Professional Schools and requested the co-director to nominate LPS schools where there were evidence of thriving teacher leadership and political activities. The co-director nominated six schools. After carefully considering the contexts of these schools and logistical issues, the researcher then contacted one suburban elementary school in a school district located in the Greater Atlanta area. The school district and the principal of the chosen elementary school granted the researcher permission for conducting research in that school.

Sample Selection and Size

This study addressed the political perspectives of teacher leaders in an elementary school. Teacher leaders in this study were defined as teachers who held formal positions to influence educational improvement both on the classroom level and on the building level. Consequently, all teacher leaders with formal positions in this school could be potential participants for this study.

The data analysis for this study was guided by the grounded theory methodology (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Accordingly, theoretical sampling was the main sampling strategy for this study. Glaser and Strauss (1967) defined theoretical sampling as a data collection process where the analyst jointly collects and analyzes data and
decides what data to collect next for the purpose of developing an emerging theory; theoretical sampling strategy is controlled by the emerging theory.

Initial participants in this study were chosen based on the criteria that they could provide the broadest range of information possible (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Creswell (1998) stated that theoretical sampling begins with selecting and studying homogeneous sample of individuals; after initial data analysis and the development of a tentative theory, the analyst then selects and studies a heterogeneous sample. The rationale for the procedure as stated by Creswell (1998) is to either confirm or disconfirm the contextual or intervening conditions under which the model holds. Glaser and Strauss (1967) argued that comparison groups provide control over two scales of generality: conceptual level and population scope; comparison groups also provide simultaneous maximization or minimization of the differences and similarities that bear on the categories.

For this study, ten participants, who were grade-level chairs or subject-area chairs, were initially invited to participate in the research because they not only exerted leadership roles in instructional teams but also influenced school decision making in the School Leadership Team Meeting which was the governing body for the school. After initial interviews and analyses, the researcher decided to seek additional participants with more substantial roles and experiences in school-level leadership in order to paint a holistic picture of the politics of teacher leadership. As a result, the researcher decided to seek three additional participants. Two of the three participants were school counselors; and one was a teacher representative on the School Council.

Unlike quantitative research, theoretical sampling negates the need of a pre-set sample size. Glaser and Strauss (1967) stated that the criterion for judging when to stop sampling is theoretical saturation. Theoretical saturation is achieved when the researcher finds no additional
new data to develop the properties of a category. With the saturation of one category, the researcher then goes on to saturate new categories. The researcher must maximize differences in his/her sample groups to develop as many diverse categories and the properties as possible (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Theoretical saturation is achieved when the gaps in his/her theory, especially in the major categories, are almost filled. At this point, the researcher can discontinue sampling and data collection. The actual sample size in this study was determined by theoretical saturation.

The sample size for this study was thirteen teacher leaders. The researcher conducted initial interviews with the thirteen teachers; however, five teachers were not available for the follow-up interviews due to a variety of reasons. For example, two of the participants transferred to other schools. The demographic, professional, and leadership role information about the thirteen participants is presented (see Table 3.1).

Context of the Study

This study took place in Bell Mountain Elementary School. Bell Mountain Elementary School was located in one of the biggest school districts in Georgia which took pride in spearheading various programs of educational innovations. Bell Mountain Elementary School opened in 1993. It served an affluent suburban community with an estimated median household income of over $150,000 dollars. Ninety-three percent of the student population lived with two-parent families and only three percent of the student population received free lunches or lunches at reduced cost. The parents in the community were well-educated and were enthusiastic in providing support to Bell Mountain Elementary. In addition, Bell Mountain Elementary forged a series of partnerships with local businesses which frequently provided various financial
Table 3.1

*Participant Demographic, Professional, and Leadership Roles Information*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Highest Degree</th>
<th>Years of Experience</th>
<th>Years of Experience at the school</th>
<th>Grade/Area</th>
<th>Leadership Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Browning</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Master</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2nd</td>
<td>School Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Merrilyn</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Post-Baccalaureate</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4th</td>
<td>Grade Chair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sherry</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Master</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3rd</td>
<td>School Council/Grade Chair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wright</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Gifted Education</td>
<td>Gifted Chair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sierra</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Ed. S</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Counselor K-3</td>
<td>Leadership Team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melitta</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Master</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Special Education</td>
<td>Chair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gayle</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Master</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2nd</td>
<td>Grade Chair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stanley</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Master</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5th</td>
<td>Grade Chair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Payton</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Kindergarten</td>
<td>Grade Chair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lawrie</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Master</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Technology</td>
<td>Coordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joyce</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Specialist</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Counselor</td>
<td>Leadership Team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belinda</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Specialist</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>K-5/Spanish</td>
<td>Special Area Chair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gary</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1st</td>
<td>Grade Chair</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

assistance to the school. For example, Barns & Nobles had a business representative on the school council.

The student population for 2002-2003 academic year at Bell Mountain Elementary was 1,083. White students constituted 82% percent of student population, Asian 8%, Black 4%,
Hispanic 3%, and other 3%. Over 140 students, 13% of the student population, received Special Education services, whereas roughly 220 students (21%) received Gifted Education services.

Bell Mountain elementary school had a total of 144 staff members. The staff was classified as follows: certified faculty, 90 (62% of total staff); paraprofessionals, 32 (22%); clerical staff, 5 (3%); custodial staff, 5 (3%); cafeteria staff, 9 (6%); and clinic, 2 (1%). Approximately two-thirds of the faculty had 1-10 years of teaching experience, and the mean of years of teaching experience for the entire faculty is 10 years. Forty-seven staff members hold a Masters or a higher degree.

Bell Mountain Elementary School evaluated student achievement through a combination of national norm-referenced and criterion-references tests, district standards, and rubrics developed by local teachers and students. From 1997-2001, the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills (ITBS) were administered to students in Bell Mountain Elementary. Results of the average ITBS scores were consistently six percentile ranks higher than Bell Mountain’s own benchmarks. Moreover, the school was considered a successful school in terms of student achievement in accordance with the State of Georgia 2001-2002 Report Card rating system, which was based on the 2001-2002 GCRCT test scores.

The mission statement of Bell Mountain Elementary was to challenge students to reach their full academic and behavioral potential in partnership with the parents and the community. The school charter of Bell Mountain Elementary affirmed its commitment to teaching and learning and to consensus building in school decision making. Leadership figured prominently in the fulfillment of mission statement at Bell Mountain Elementary. With membership in the League of Professional Schools, Bell Mountain Elementary counted on action research and
shared governance in the design and the fulfillment of a data-driven and research-based school improvement plan.

Bell Mountain Elementary was considered a “high implementing” shared governance school within League of Professional Schools. Shared governance structures at Bell Mountain Elementary included the Local School Advisory Council, the Instructional Council, and the Leadership Committee. The principal served as the facilitator of Instructional Council which consisted of the following quality teams: language arts/social studies team; mathematics/science/health team; media/technology team; S.A.F.E student team; and S.A.F.E teacher team. Each team had a teacher serving as facilitator.

In the ground rules laid out for the Leadership Team at Bell Mountain Elementary, there was a strong emphasis on group consensus. Consensus was defined as a decision-making process where members cooperatively arrived at a mutually acceptable decision which all members agreed to support. Issues raised at the leadership team were expected to be group or grade level related rather than individual and special interest concerns.

To conclude, Bell Mountain Elementary was a high-achieving successful suburban school with strong community involvement and support. The administration and faculty at Bell Mountain were committed to the practices of action research and shared governance in the fulfillment of the missions of the school.

Data Collection Methods

With symbolic interactionism as the theoretical framework, the purpose of this study was to investigate the political perspectives of teacher leaders in an elementary school. The primary data source for this study was interviews and the secondary data sources were observations and document collections. In total, the researcher conducted thirteen initial interviews and eight
follow-up interviews. The researcher also observed three meetings and collected a series of relevant school documents.

*Interview*

Interviewing is a method to shed light on how individuals “acted toward things on the basis of the meanings things had for them” (Blumer, 1969, p. 2). Bogdan and Biklen (1992) defined interview as a conversation with a purpose. The purpose for using interviews in this study was to learn the teacher leaders’ experiences of school politics and the meanings that they assigned to these experiences.

Taylor and Bogdan (1998) stated that researcher should choose interview as a data source when the research interest is clear and well-defined, when settings and people are not otherwise accessible, and when the researcher is interested in understanding a broad range of settings or people. This study had well-defined research questions, the experiences of school politics involved past events that were unavailable for observation, and this study was interested in learning the experiences of a broad range of teacher leaders in an elementary school. Therefore, interview was chosen as the primary data source. Furthermore, interview plays a central role in the data collection of the grounded theory methodology which was the data analysis methods for this study.

The three major types of interview are unstructured, semi-structured, and structured interviews (Lincoln & Guba, 1998). Unstructured interviews are most beneficial when the researcher does not know the social phenomenon in advance and must rely on the participants to tell what is going on in the setting (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Semi-structured interviews are guided by general questions; but it also offers the participants opportunities to shape the content of interview (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992).
At the beginning of study, the researcher attended the School Leadership Team meeting at Bell Mountain Elementary School in February, 2004. The purpose of the researcher’s visit appeared on the meeting agenda. The principal introduced the researcher and the purpose of the research study to the participants. The principal then circulated a voluntary participation form to all teacher leaders present. All teacher leaders signed the form and agreed to participate in the study. After the meeting, the researcher decided to choose ten participants. To minimize the impact of the research on instruction, the principal arranged a full day for the researcher to conduct initial interviews with the ten participants.

Initial interviews with the ten participants took place in a private room at Bell Mountain Elementary School. At the beginning of each interview, the researcher briefly introduced the purpose of the study and activity commitments; he then asked the participants to review and sign the Study Consent Form. With permission from each participant, the researcher tape recorded each interview. Due to the limited time arrangements for the first round of interviews, the researcher decided to use a combination of both unstructured and semi-structured format in the initial interviews.

For the follow-up interviews, the researcher contacted the participants through email and arranged a time and place at their convenience. All follow-up interviews took place in non-instructional time and in the participant’s classroom. The follow-up interviews were semi-structured. Follow-up interviews contained probes and clarifications for the initial interviews. In addition, follow-up interviews incorporated new questions on the basis of the analysis of initial interviews.

Taylor and Bogdan (1998) pointed out that the interview is a form of social interaction in which the meanings are constructed rather than communicated. In the interviews, the researcher
attempted to construct a situation that resembled one in which people naturally talked to each other about important things. The researcher constantly reminded himself of the need to be nonjudgmental, sensitive, patient, and attentive. The researcher made a point of removing the tape recorder from the sight of participants in order to lighten the formality of the interview situation. During the interviews, the researcher found it helpful to record participants’ words in shorthand so that quick probes and a feel of the conversation flow could be developed. Each participant brought different personality, perspective, and attitude into the social construction of interviews. Some participants were open, frank, and enthusiastic, whereas others seemed elusive and mincing their words. In the beginning of interviews, the researcher found it helpful to comment on the classroom arrangements and student work displays to build congenial relationships with the participants.

Taylor and Bogdan (1998) stated that one of the keys to successful qualitative interviewing is knowing when and how to probe; they argued that it is probing that sets qualitative interviewing apart from everyday conversations. Researcher uses probes to ask the participants to clarify or to elaborate on what the participants have said so that a truer picture of the meanings can take form. In this study, the researcher strove to be an active listener seeking important themes for elaboration during the interviews. Moreover, the researcher immediately transcribed and analyzed each interview to assess probing skills and develop new probes for future interviews.

Observation

Taylor & Bogdan (1998) argued that there are two limitations of interviews: (a) people say and do different things in different situations, and (b) interviews lack the context necessary to
understand the perspectives of participants. Taylor and Bogdan argued that observation can be an effective remedy addressing the limitations of interviews.

Patton (1990) stated that the purpose of observational data is to describe the setting that is observed, the activities that take place, the people who are engaged in such activities, and the meanings of what is observed from the perspectives of the people observed. Patton asserted that besides being helpful in understanding the context, observation also allows the researcher to be open, discovery-oriented, and inductive in approach; observation can also accord the researcher opportunities to learn things that participants are either unconscious of or unwilling to discuss.

Observation was a secondary and complimentary data source for this study. The researcher conducted observations of one school Leadership Team Meeting, one grade-level meeting, and one School Advisory Council meeting. In the observations, the role of the researcher was purely that of an observer. In each of the meetings, the researcher sat apart from the meeting table and took notes. The researcher decided not to tape record the meetings, instead, the researcher took a detailed note of the activities, agendas, sitting arrangements, and the verbal and non-verbal communications among the participants.

After the observation, the researcher immediately wrote up field notes and conducted initial analysis of observations. For example, after analyzing the agendas of one grade-level meeting, the researcher found that most of agendas for the grade-level meeting concentrated on administrative trivia, such as reception for school volunteers, arrangements of the party for the departing principal, and leadership application procedures. Little if any time was devoted to the instructional matters. From this observation, the researcher hypothesized that formal structures and processes may not be the main medium by which teacher leaders engaged in sharing and instructional improvement.
In this study, the relationship between observation and interview was reciprocal: from the interviews, the researcher attained a clear idea of what to observe next; from observations, the researcher gained a better understanding and accurate interpretation of the interview data.

**Documents**

The researcher collected a series of school documents to triangulate data for this study. Like observation, documents can provide a context of the problem being investigated (Merriam, 1998). Bogdan and Biklen (1992) stated that there are two types of documents: official and personal. They elaborated that official documents are written forms of communication produced by an organization and personal documents are the first person materials that reveal people’s actions, experiences, and beliefs.

This study collected official documents to provide background information about Bell Mountain Elementary and its various school structures and processes. The collected official documents included school mission and vision statements, ground rules of Leadership Team, meeting agendas, school descriptions (i.e., faculty and student background data), and minutes of task force committees and school council meetings, job descriptions, and school policies.

**Data Analysis Methods**

This study used the grounded theory methodology (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1990) to analyze data and to generate a micro-political theory of teacher leadership at Bell Mountain Elementary School. The generated theory was developed for a substantive or empirical area of inquiry (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). According to Glaser and Strauss, substantive theory is also a “middle-range” theory falling between working hypotheses and a grand theory. The grounded theory methods stress discovery and theory development (Charmaz, 1994). Grounded theory is “the study of experience from the standpoint of those who
live it” (Charmaz, 2000, p. 522). In the grounded theory method, the investigator is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis; and the mode of inquiry is inductive (Charmaz, 2000).

According to Charmaz (1994), the grounded theory method is characterized by a series of distinctive strategies: (a) data collection and data analysis proceed simultaneously, (b) the processes and products of research are influenced by data, not by a pre-set theoretical framework, and (c) ground theorists not only study process but also assume that making theoretical sense of social life itself is a process.

Stern (1994) argued that the strongest case for the use of grounded theory is in the investigation of relatively uncharted waters, or to gain a fresh perspective in familiar situations. The current literature on the political perspectives of teacher leaders is extremely limited. Consequently, the use of the grounded theory in this study was most appropriate because it could enable the researcher to be open to discovery and free from the restraints of prior theoretical constructs.

**Constant Comparative Analysis**

The core procedure of grounded theory is constant comparative analysis (Glaser, 1994; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The purpose of constant comparative analysis is to systematically generate a theory from explicit coding and analytic procedures (Glaser, 1994). During the data analysis for this study, the researcher engaged in four stages of constant comparative analysis.

*Stage one: comparing incidents applicable to each category.*

According to Glaser and Strauss (1967), the researcher should start by coding each incident in the data into as many categories as possible at this stage. Incidents are small units of data that tell what is happening in the research setting. When coding new incidents, the analyst compares them with previous incidents in the same and different groups coded in the same
category, which will yield the theoretical properties of categories. Through constant reflection and reformulation, the researcher makes the categories fit the data.

In this study, the researcher conducted line-by-line coding of the interview transcripts. Naming and categorizing of phenomena through a close examination of the data is described as open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The researcher assigned code words to each incident on the margins of the hard copy of interview transcripts. Meanwhile, he also recorded the same code words on a notebook. Following the premise of comparing incidents as elucidated by Glaser and Strauss (1967), the researcher compared each new incident with previous ones. In the notebook, the researcher kept similar incidents on one column and different cluster of incidents on another column. Thus, the clustering of similar incidents generated preliminary categories.

As new incidents were continuously compared with previous incidents in the same or different categories, the researcher gained an in-depth understanding of the meanings of the categories and its component properties. In the labeling of codes and categories, the researcher either constructed analytical labels (e.g., equal voice and representation) or used the words of participants (e.g., know the players) to represent codes and categories.

In the open coding, the same codes that fit several categories were put under these categories. Meanwhile, the researcher created a miscellaneous column to include codes that had no obvious relationships to any developed categories.

Stage two: integrating categories and their properties.

According to Glaser and Strauss (1967), at this stage, the unit of constant comparison changes from the comparison of incident with incident to the comparison of incidents with properties of categories. Incidents can be integrated into properties in the new phase of comparison, and the diverse properties themselves start to become integrated. Furthermore, the
categories will become integrated with other categories of analysis. As incidents, properties, and categories become more integrated, the process of constant comparison forced the researcher to make theoretical sense of each comparison.

In this study, the researcher reviewed incidents in the preliminary categories and developed theoretical properties, or sub-categories for each category. Glaser and Strauss (1997) stated that theoretical properties may include the range, type, dimension, process, conditions, and consequences of certain category. The researcher compared incidents with the developed theoretical properties to fully develop categories. For example, in the category of organizational analysis, the researcher compared incidents and built theoretical properties on the basis of the target of diagnosis, namely with regard to group, administration, and school structures. The development of theoretical properties enabled the researcher to achieve a higher level of abstract understanding of the categories.

*Stage three: delimiting theory.*

Glaser and Strauss (1967) stated that at this stage, the researcher should seek to delimit theory at two levels: the theory and the categories. Through reduction, the researcher can develop a theory within a smaller set of higher level abstract concepts. Reduction involves collapsing similar or overlapping categories and discarding irrelevant categories or properties. Reduction is a vital step in discovering the core category which is the central category around which all other categories form.

In this study, the researcher sought to refine and streamline the categories by collapsing similar categories and discarding irrelevant categories. For example, the researcher carefully reviewed all coded incidents in the miscellaneous column and made a decision either to place incidents into other categories or to discard some incidents as irrelevant.
Once the set of categories was finalized, the researcher started to explore the interrelationships of the categories. This procedure is called axial coding (Creswell, 1998). Creswell stated that the linking of categories and properties through hypotheses or propositions is part of the process of developing a theory. The discovery of a core category is critical to the development of a theory. Strauss (1987) stated that the core category “must be central, that is, related to as many other categories and their properties as possible.” (p. 36). The researcher identified “interpersonal team building” as the core category. The interrelationships between the core category and the remaining categories became the ground on which the researcher developed theoretical statements in the form of meta-themes.

*Stage four: writing theory.*

At this stage, the researcher possessed a wealth of coded data, series of memos on each category, ideas on the interrelationships among categories, and theoretical propositions. The discussions in the memos provided content behind the categories, which in turn became the major themes for the theory. This study presented the theories in the form of four meta-themes.

Throughout the four stages, the researcher wrote memos on coding, category and its properties, and the interrelationships among categories. “Memos are written elaborations of ideas about the data and coded categories” (Charmaz, 1994, p. 106). In the construction of memos, the researcher summarized each category and its theoretical properties and recorded initial analysis. In writing memos, the researcher was especially concerned with relating the core category to other categories. The construction of memos facilitated data analysis and the writing-up of the emerging theory.
Components of Constant Comparative Analysis

Components of constant comparative analysis include theoretical sensitivity, theoretical sampling, theoretical saturation, and theoretical pacing (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). These elements are essential to the development of a dense and integrated theory.

Theoretical sampling.

Glaser and Strauss (1967) defined theoretical sampling as “the process of data collection for generating theory whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes, and analyzes his data and decides what data to collect and where to find them, in order to develop his theory as it emerges” (p. 45). Glaser and Strauss further elaborated that the basic question in theoretical sampling is: “What groups or subgroups does one turn to next in data collection? And for what theoretical purpose?”

In this study, the researcher immediately transcribed each interview. He then analyzed the patterns, meanings, and the significances of the developed codes and categories to discover the direction for future data collection. For example, after initial interviews with ten participants, the researcher found that most of their political experiences occurred on the group level; in effect, the data did not provide insight into political interactions on the school level. The researcher then purposefully sought out three more participants with leadership roles exclusively on the school level to participate in the study. The researcher discontinued theoretical sampling when he perceived that theoretical saturation had been achieved.

Theoretical saturation.

Glaser and Strauss (1967) asserted that the criterion for judging when to stop sampling different groups is theoretical saturation. Saturation occurs when no additional data are found to develop new properties of category and when the gaps in the developed theory are almost
completely filled (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Glaser and Strauss cautioned that saturation can never be attained by studying one incident in one group alone.

Following the advice of Glaser and Strauss (1967), the researcher made every effort to maximize the variations in the participants to develop as many diverse properties of the category as possible. For example, in the selection of participants, the researcher went great length to select a broad spectrum of participants who varied in terms of teaching and leadership experiences, age, race, and highest degrees attained. With the continuous and reciprocal process of data collection and analysis, the researcher decided to stop data collection when he found that no new categories emerged out of analysis. At this time, the researcher had a high level of confidence in the trustworthiness and applicability of the developed theory. Glaser and Strauss (1967) further added that the process of achieving theoretical saturation was influenced by researcher’s theoretical sensitivity.

*Theoretical sensitivity.*

Theoretical sensitivity is the ability of the researcher to develop insight and to give meaning to the data (Glaser, 1978). Glaser and Strauss (1967) added that theoretical sensitivity is influenced by researcher’s personal and temperamental bents and his/her ability to have theoretical insights into the area of research.

In this study, the researcher enhanced theoretical sensitivity primarily from two sources: professional experiences and the literature review. As an Instructional Coordinator, the researcher had taken leadership roles in an instructional team in previous professional experiences. The researcher had extensive experiences of engaging in political interactions with the department head and fellow teachers; these experiences helped the researcher to relate to participants in this study and to attain a true understanding of their experiences.
The researcher also conducted extensive literature reviews on teacher leadership and school restructuring to increase theoretical sensitivity. Literature reviews enabled the researcher to have a better understanding and judgment of the data and to ground the findings of this study within the broad literature on teacher leadership in order to enhance the trustworthiness of the emerging theory.

Theoretical pacing.

Finally, theoretical pacing refers to the pace of the research process. Theoretical development is a slow and gradual process (Glaser, 1978). Pacing ensures that theory is not rushed but is emerged from a true understanding of the data (Glaser, 1978). In the course of this study, the researcher constantly engaged in the process of poring over the data on a daily basis to develop a true understanding of the data. Furthermore, the researcher recorded any ideas, hunches, and theoretical insights in the memo. The researcher purposefully scheduled interviews and observations at reasonable intervals to review and analyze data and to gain a fresh perspective for the next stage of data collection. A flow chart of the grounded theory approach developed by Taylor and Bogdan (1998) is presented (see Figure 3.1). It also captured the process of data analysis for this study.

Credibility of the Study

Credibility refers to the trustworthiness of the research process and the generated theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Lincoln and Guba (1985) defined credibility as the extent to which observations are credible representations of the phenomenon under study. A qualitative study can be evaluated accurately by the presence of explicit procedures and appropriate research standards (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This section discusses various strategies used to ensure the quality of the research processes and the findings of this study.
First and foremost, grounded theory has its own unique credibility criteria. These criteria are *fit*, *work*, and *relevance* (Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Fit means the categories are applicable and directly derived from data; Work is the ability of the theory to explain the behaviors under investigation; and relevance means that the categories are meaningfully relevant to the research setting.

In this study, the constant comparison method in the data analysis ensured compliance with the criteria of fit, work, and relevance. Line-by-line open coding and member check made
sure that incidents, properties, and categories were developed directly from the data. The identification of core category and its relationship with other categories further increased the practical applicability of the findings of this study.

According to Merriam (1998), the researcher is the primary research instrument in qualitative research. The understanding of the reality in research is in essence the researcher’s interpretation of the participant’s interpretation of the reality; consequently, the researcher must adopt a series of rigorous procedures to assure the truthfulness of his/her interpretations. This study used a broad range of strategies to augment the credibility of the findings.

Triangulation

Triangulation is perhaps the most well-known and most important of all credibility-enhancing strategies. Triangulation refers to the use of multiple methods to develop and confirm emerging theory and explain findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Denzin (1970) enumerated four types of triangulation: multiple investigators, multiple theories, multiple sources of data, and multiple methods to confirm emerging findings. In this study, the absence of multiple investigators was compensated by the strategy of peer debriefing. Multiple sources of data in this study included interviews, observations, and official documents. Peer debriefing and member checks also provided multiple methods of confirming the research findings.

Member Checks

Member checking is taking data, findings, and interpretations back to the participants for their confirmation and comment (Merriam, 1998). In the follow-up interviews for this study, the researcher summarized the first interview for each participant and asked each participant to either confirm or revise the summary of previous interviews. Some participants immediately corrected the researcher’s understandings of their experiences. For example, one participant
commented that the researcher misrepresented her role in one incident in which the administration decided to use lottery in assigning students to a new teacher’s classroom.

In addition, the researcher also incorporated analytical ideas into the follow-up interviews to test its meanings and applicability to other participants. For example, two participants, in the beginning of interviews mentioned that they felt like middle person in political interactions with the administrators and peers. In the interviews with other participants, the researcher sought to test this lead with the following question: “Other participants felt like a middle person in their leadership roles. Did you feel the same way? If so, please tell me something about it.” Although a few participants denied being middle person, most participants acknowledged it and provided rich data with regard to their experiences of being the middle person.

Finally, the researcher found it helpful to conclude each interview with the question “Is there anything you would like to add?” Most participants would recapture and clarify what they had just talked about in the interview, which provided the researcher an excellent opportunity to double check the contents of the interviews.

Peer Debriefing

Peer debriefing is a process of communicating with peers to provide an external check on the research process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Peer review involves asking colleagues to scan some of the raw data and to assess whether the findings are plausible based on the data (Merriam, 1998). Furthermore, peer debriefing can help the researcher to check researcher’s biases and to clarify the interpretations of his/her study. In this study, the researcher asked the major professor to review sections of the interview transcripts and provide feedback on the interviewing process. The researcher’s major professor offered valuable advice on how to conduct successful
interviews; for example, he changed the wording of several interview questions so that the researcher could elicit better input from the participants.

**Maximum Variation**

Maximum variation is the process of purposefully seeking variation and diversity in the sample selection to ensure a greater range of application of research findings (Merriam, 1998). In this study, theoretical sampling met the criterion of maximum variation by purposefully finding different sample groups for the development of a theory. Teacher leaders have a variety of leadership functions and they vary in terms of age, gender, race, professional experience, teaching expertise, and interpersonal skills. In this study, the researcher made every effort to ensure that the selected sample represented teacher leaders in Bell Mountain Elementary in terms of a series of demographic indexes.

**Persistent Engagement**

Persistent engagement involves spending sufficient amount of time in the research setting to absorb the contexts, to build trust, and to provide scope and depth to the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Persistent engagement was especially important because this study touched on the relatively sensitive topic of organizational politics. Furthermore, as an international student without prior K-12 experiences, the researcher realized that he needed additional time to develop analytic insights. The researched engaged in data collection at Bell Mountain Elementary from February to August of 2004. The extensive immersion in the research site afforded the researcher sufficient time to gain a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the contexts, issues, reform implementation, and school structures and processes at Bell Mountain Elementary. Besides observations and interviews, the researcher also walked around the school building and
participated in several school-wide student activities to have a well-rounded understanding of the research site.

**Thick Description**

Thick description helps the readers of a study to determine the match of the findings with their situations so that a decision of transferability can be made (Merriam, 1998). In this study, the researcher provided detailed information about the data collection and the data analysis methods, the context of the school, and the research participants. Moreover, this study extensively quoted the words of participants to illustrate the categories and themes. The reader of this study can draw their own conclusions about the credibility of the generated theory and ultimately decide whether the finding of this study is transferable to their particular situations.

**Subjectivity Statement**

Researcher invariably brings his/her own subjectivity into the research site and the data collection and analysis process (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982). It is crucial for the researcher to be aware and control his/her own bias. As an international student without previous American public schools experiences, the researcher brought unique strengths and limitations into the research setting. In addition, the past professional experiences of the researcher also shaped his possible biases.

The researcher worked as English teacher in a Chinese undergraduate college for three years, during which time the standardized National College Student English Proficiency Test practically controlled every aspect of the instruction. Thus, the researcher had extensive knowledge and experiences of working under accountability and standards-based initiatives. These experiences helped the researcher relate to the participants in this study as they also faced standards-based reform from the state and the federal governments. The faculty at the
researcher’s department was organized into various grade level teams for the goal of better facilitating and coordinating instructions for the standardized test. In 1998, I was appointed Instructional Coordinator for the faculty cluster responsible for the English instruction of students Class of 2001. The job description of Instructional Coordinator was to organize collective faculty lesson planning, to select supplemental test preparation materials, to administer and analyze grade-wide mock assessment examinations, and to develop instructional remedies for students in collaboration with peers.

As an instructional coordinator, the researcher had extensive interactions with the department head and fellow faculty members. It was during this period that the researcher developed an in-depth understanding of and an intense interest in departmental politics. The researcher came to the conclusion that the success or failure of any task in the department depends on how different actors and groups in the department use authority and influence to protect and advance their respective interests. The researcher also felt that the formal goals, regulations, and structures of educational organizations failed to provide a true picture of organizational lives and behaviors.

The researcher became a firm believer of shared governance during his study in the United States. The researcher believed that teacher leadership is the most crucial avenue of shared governance in schools. The researcher was of the opinion that teacher leadership has the potential of reculturing and restructuring schools into a professional community of learners. From past experience, the researcher believed that instead of the work design and the programmatic features of teacher leadership initiatives, it was the school politics that would ultimately determine the success or failure of teacher leadership in the schools. During the course
of this study, the researcher constantly reminded himself of these beliefs and took care not to be let these beliefs interfere in the process of data analysis.

For the researcher, the lack of experiences in American public schools constrained, to some degree, his analytic insights and the keenness of his observations and judgments. However, the researcher believes that the extensive literature review and persistent engagement in the field compensated for his lack of relevant experiences. On the other hand, the lack of experience in American public schools was also advantageous for this study because the researcher brought into the field a fresh, detached, and relatively objective perspective free from the prejudices and the embedded pre-conceptions deposited from extensive experiences in schools.

Throughout the research process, the researcher was constantly on guard against personal biases, particularly against his strong belief in the potent role of organizational politics. Accordingly, the researcher employed a series of credibility-enhancing strategies like peer debriefing and member check to ensure the authenticity of data, and the fit, work, and relevance of the findings.

Summary

Chapter 3 offers a detailed discussion of the theoretical framework, site selection, contexts of the study, sample selection and size, data collection and analysis methods, and credibility strategies for this study. Symbolic interactionism guided the design and interpretation of findings for this study. With multiple data sources, this study used grounded theory method to develop theoretical statements to examine the micropolitical perspectives of teacher leaders at Bell Mountain Elementary School.
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to describe the micropolitical perspectives of teacher leaders in an elementary school. Using multiple data sources, including interviews, observations, and school documents, this study adopted grounded theory methods (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1990) to describe teacher leaders’ political interactions and the meanings they derived from these interactions.

Data analysis of interviews, observations, and school documents revealed five themes of teacher leaders’ micropolitical perspectives at Bell Mountain elementary: (a) influencing strategies, (b) protection strategies, (c) influencing factors, (d) goals, and (e) effects. This chapter is divided into two sections. The first section describes and illustrates the five themes generated from data. The second section presents a framework of the interrelationships of the categories.

Description and Illustration of Themes

*Theme One: Influencing Strategies*

The conceptual framework for this study was the micropolitical perspective (Bacharach & Mundell, 1993; Ball, 1987; Blase, 1991; Gronn, 1986; Hoyle, 1986; Iannaccone, 1975). Blase (1991) argued that political actions in organizations result from the actor’s motivation to use formal and informal power to influence others and to protect self.

In addition to routine leadership functions, all participants in this study reported a surge of increasingly diverse and complicated demands on leadership roles as a flurry of state and
federal reform initiatives, notably the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), started to impact the school. For example, NCLB implementation required teachers to relinquish two planning periods in order to attend NCLB meetings every week. Furthermore, as foot soldiers of reform implementation, teacher leaders in this school had to apply a variety of influence strategies when interacting with their peers and the administrators to accomplish leadership tasks.

Interestingly, a few participants refused to characterize part of their leadership functions as influencing attempts, whereas most of them were ready to acknowledge the fact that influencing others was part of leadership activities. When asked about her influence strategies with the administrators, Belinda denied that she influenced others:

The word “influence” to me is I am going to change your idea; I am going to give you my things so you can see my way. You know what I am saying? I do not think, in this school, we do not influence other people; I think we show people the way we see things. And we tried to find all solutions. What is best for the kids? I do not see me as influencing them [administrators], I see me as approaching them for help. I see me as going to them for guidance.

Belinda consciously denied that she influenced others in her leadership roles; however, she did mention that teachers at Bell Mountain Elementary led by modeling and that the uniqueness of the school context nullified the need for influence. Blase (1991) pointed out that any actions in an organization, whether consciously or unconsciously motivated, have political significances. This section describes the influence strategies and tactics used by the participants both consciously and unconsciously (see Table 4.1).

Strategy 1: Team Building

Nine out of the thirteen participants were grade-level or special program chairs. Their major influence attempt was to build a team at the grade level using a variety of interpersonal strategies. They strove to transform the haphazard, physical, randomly assigned work group into a social, cohesive, and collaborative team. Within the strategy of interpersonal team building,
### Table 4.1

**Influence Strategies**

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<th>Influence Strategies</th>
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<td>Strategy 1: Team Building</td>
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<td>• Building We-ness</td>
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<td>• Encouraging group autonomy</td>
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<td>Strategy 2: Non-directive Leading</td>
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<td>Strategy 3: Approaching Administrators</td>
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<td>Strategy 4: Fostering Team Ownership of Change</td>
<td>• Demonstrating Positive Acceptance of Change</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Granting Autonomy for Teachers</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

the following tactics emerged: team orientation, building we-ness, encouraging group autonomy, and interpersonal behaviors.

*Tactic 1: team orientation.*

The number of teachers in a grade or program level at Bell Mountain Elementary ranged from four to thirty. The work group at each grade and program level was the main arena of everyday political interactions among teacher leaders. The tactic of team orientation includes
two elements. First of all, all participants in this study placed great value on working with the

team rather than over the team. Belinda explained her perspective:

I do not see much my influencing them; I see more as a team, group. We tried to do
everything as a team. And we are one of the closest teams of all, because we are so
special, so different than the other group. When we meet, we have different ways of
seeing things. And I did not see much of my personally influencing the group. I see the
opposite. I see the group influencing me because they are the ones who come up with
the greatest ideas. All I do is ask: “this is the issue we come today. This is what
we look to find a solution to the problem. What are your ideas, and how can we fix it?”

Wright, the Gifted Education chair, echoed Belinda’s idea of team work and discounted her own
leadership role. Wright commented that she was an equal participant in the group:

I know that I am a leader within the school, but within the gifted group, we are all
coworkers. And so we sit down together. I may be leading the discussion, but that is all;
a lot of ideas are flowing, a lot of ideas are flowing. And no one holds back. They tell me
what they think. And maybe it is hard for me to judge; I do not think I influence so much
because I am a grade leader as it is; I am just one of the people in my group. I do not
have more influence than we all talk things through and decide what is best for the group.

Gayle, chair of the second grade, agreed. She believed that her role was to set the tone for
meetings and to facilitate group interaction:

I think my grade-level could be a little unique; most of the people on our grade-level
have been together in the school for many years. I am not really a leader of those people;
we are all equals; they are not just on the leadership and go to the meetings. They are
very strong; everybody has strength. At our grade-level, everybody does something
important. If we need somebody to do something, everybody volunteers and helps. So
I don’t think I am a leader. I just try to set the tone for our meetings and try to make sure
everybody feels free and comfortable to say what their opinions are. We can share and
agree to disagree.

Gary, the first grade-level chair, added that working with the team rather than over the team
necessitated group implementation of decisions:

I think that is mainly a philosophy that I worked on all year; it is to help everyone see that
we are a team, and if we do make a decision, even if you do not want to do it, sometimes
we have the freedom to do things, to be different,… but there are some things that we all
have to do it together for the common good of grade-level or the school itself.
Belinda, Wright, and Gayle consciously accentuated their memberships on the team rather than the roles as leaders of the team. They rejected the idea of being the omnipotent heroine for the group. By discounting leadership roles, they were able to build a non-linear team structure that flattened potential hierarchies.

Another element of team orientation was to solicit input and solve problems at group and school levels. Joyce, the school counselor, reflected on the role of the A-Team, which was made up of counselors and administrators in the school:

I think the A-Team helps; it gives us a chance for the counselors to really know how we can support and help the administration and for them to know how to support and help us with the teachers. Then if you feel like you understand where we headed, what your goal is, what your needs are, then you can do a better job of projecting that to the teachers, and also helping them getting on board. Lots of times, you can take good ideas from the teachers to the different groups, a lot of times, the best ideas come from the grassroots, not from the top down.

On the other hand, despite their best intentions, some teacher leaders experienced confusion in working with different teams due to their unique roles. Sierra, the school counselor, reflected:

I think that is hard, because I am really on both teams [teachers and administrators], but I am really on everyone’s team; that is hardest part, being team player. But I think you have to know your role and remember that you are really here for the good of the school, the good of the children, not just care for one individual.

Sierra’s dilemma came from her unique position of being the school counselor. She had no stationery group of teachers to work with and had to interact with both the administrators and all teachers from Kindergarten to Grade Three. For grade-level chairs, the concept of team had a clear-cut and fixed boundary. Regardless of the nature of leadership roles and group contexts, all participants shared the common belief that the best way to influence teachers was through team work.
Tactic 2: building we-ness.

The building of an open, democratic, and free-flowing work team was not an overnight task. Obviously, teachers in the work groups differed significantly in terms of teaching experience, teaching philosophy, personality, and expectation for teacher leaders. For the participants, team building started from forging a common identity. The researcher coined the word we-ness to represent the common identity that participants strove to create in the work groups. The tactic of building we-ness includes three elements: establishing empathy, recognizing teacher differences, and accepting group decisions.

First, Sherry, the school council representative and third-grade chair, built a common identity with peers through establishing empathy with them and fostering group ownership. She summarized her approach to build we-ness when she talked about her preference for grassroots change:

You know, the grassroots effort is to me, the best way to get people to understand and to do something new, not coming from above: here is what you have to do. That sometimes could create resentment. And you know, I got somebody from my group saying why I have to do one more thing? So it is not that, it is let them see me, let them see the place we need to go; then it will come out from that; then we will all kinds of leaders who are, I will take that part, I will take this part of it, instead of everyone doing it just because we are told to. So it is two different views; I have always thought it will be the best way to do it.

She further elaborated:

[When faced with implementing changes] I feel like I am in the trenches with them. You know, it is not just me saying you all need to do this; it is me too. You know, I can say, we are working on this new thing, this hasn’t worked for me, there is something you all can help me with. So I am in with them, so I think when you lead peers, you have a lot of respect because you are doing the same thing.

Sherry then provided an example of building we-ness by sharing group documents:

We share everything we do, like we typed out a form for the principal, and make everyone a copy, and say, just for your file, this is something from our grade-level. So we are working on it, and then it represents us all, so everyone should have a copy. So I think
giving them more ownership and they feel like it is not something we come up with that we want you to do. It is we are all in this together.

Second, Gary, chair for the first-grade, talked about building we-ness by recognizing teacher differences and nurturing the value of the common good at the group level.

Our grade-level is just a group of amazing professional women who have a real diverse group; we have lots of strong personality, but I found whenever I model professionalism, I say to them: “we must move forward, we are going to do it this way, let us remember that is how we agreed to do it.” Everyone gets on board. I tried to help them see that we are all individuals and we teach with our own styles. There is something that has to be done for the common good. . . . I think the main thing is to be really honest and open in your group and be sure you are not talking things, not being divisive in anyway, just to make sure it is on the table all the time for the entire group; even sometimes it is painful to do it that way.

Third, building we-ness in some cases even meant accepting group decision at the expense of personal interest. Belinda recalled one incident:

But for the better of the group, sometimes, the majority of the time we do whatever the group wants, because that is the way it’s supposed to be, even though I feel that this is crap, but I have to do what the group wants. Like my present classroom--my classroom was twice this size; they changed and put me in this classroom. I was mad. They said that first of all, you do not come to the school because of your classroom, you love your job, and you do this and this. I sat down and listened to what they said, even though at the moment I was so upset that I did not tell them anything. This has helped me personally as a human being, as a person, to be patient with other people and to listen to other people, to make decisions based on what is for the best of anybody.

It was clear that the common identity of “we-ness” required participants to carefully accentuate the identity as an ordinary teacher in leadership functions. For teacher leaders, building we-ness fostered team ownership of grade-level affairs. They wanted to be seen as decision implementers than as decision makers. As Sherry pointed out, being seen as a decision maker could generate resentment among teachers and be detrimental to team building efforts. However, building we-ness did not come free of cost; for example, Belinda had to sacrifice personal interest in the implementation of group decisions. Moreover, participants had to adopt a series of interpersonal strategies when interacting with peers, which created stress. Building we-
ness was also a strategy used by teacher leaders to protect themselves in their leadership functions, which will be discussed later.

**Tactic 3: encouraging group autonomy.**

Team building was a careful, delicate, and cautious task for the participants. From their perspective, the value of team work precluded the adoption of assertive and prescriptive leadership styles. The tactic of encouraging group autonomy includes three elements. First, participants chose to build a tolerant group environment and to grant a high degree of freedom to peers in the work group. Payton, the kindergarten chair, allowed teachers on her grade level either to embrace or to decline certain changes as long as they met the kindergarten goals. She gave an example:

We are switching our old mathematic unit centers to literacy centers, which involves more literacy-based, phonemic awareness activities. It kind of exploded when it first came about because a lot of the teachers were not ready for change and felt like they needed to change for whatever reasons. I just went ahead and changed because the teachers I am mentoring were doing it.

She continued:

And I thought it was a good opportunity for me to jump on board and force me into it. Some people realized: “I don’t have to do it the same way the teacher next door to me and down the hall.” So it was one of the things, I think we just have to be comfortable with what we are doing as long as we are meeting IKS. It was my time to change, and I felt comfortable with changing. So a couple of other people panicked and felt like that they had to. But I think, once they figured out, as long as you are covering IKS, whatever manner you are doing it, it is fine.

Joyce, the school counselor, carefully maintained her role as a facilitator and encouraged teachers to take responsibility. She said,

When you listen as a counselor anyway, you are trying to help them personalize the problem, whatever it is, and helping them come up with the planned action for whatever it is they need to do. With the counselor, there is a particular need to make sure you don’t get in the middle of things; then you facilitate and move the other way so that people can take their own responsibility. And communication can go to who needs to hear it; you don’t want to just stop with you.
Second, Sierra added the need to be receptive to teacher complaints and to direct those complaints to positive channels; she said,

So if they [teachers] came here to whine and complain, there are times that I let them, because I think, sometimes you need to do that, but there are other times that instead of just, you know, letting them keep on complaining, and be sort of wasteful, I will encourage and model for, if I need to, the way of handling it: “Okay, that is awful and I hate it too; what can we do about it? Let us do something.” So instead of just sort of stirring the pot and making it worse, I will let them complain as long as they need to, but then, “okay, let us move on, and let us do something about it.”

Third, for some participants, encouraging group autonomy meant recognizing and valuing differences among teachers. For example, Gayle realized that disagreement was a natural process of team building:

We allow each other to disagree; we do not always solve it, because sometimes it is just a philosophy, a way of doing something, so we just have to know that we are not all going to be the same and to agree with everything. Everybody is respected . . . . We are all equal, we are all respected; if you want to disagree on that, it is fine. There are some things we are just not going to agree on. I think that is it: we do not have to agree all the time. But you are allowed to say whatever you want to say.

To summarize, encouraging group autonomy was a key tactic adopted by some of the participants to build a trusting, safe, and tolerant team. These participants respected teachers’ reservations and frustrations with certain changes. They appreciated the differences in values and philosophies among teachers; furthermore, they protected teachers by keeping what was said strictly within the grade-level. Some participants strove to empower teachers; for instance, Joyce allowed and encouraged teachers to solve their own problems. Being tolerant and permissive, participants were able to build trust and reduce tension in work teams, thus making teachers more receptive to influence. In stark contrast, other forms of educational leadership, particularly those used by state and federal agencies, were more prescriptive and implementation-oriented in nature.
**Tactic 4: interpersonal behaviors.**

Team building is a social and psychological process. The use of executive directives and structural power is obviously not conducive to the goals of team building. All participants in this study employed a series of interpersonal behaviors to build a productive and collaborative team through social interaction with teachers and administrators. The tactic of interpersonal behaviors includes three elements.

First, most of the participants recognized the need to maintain positive and calm atmosphere at the work group. Sherry stressed the importance of being positive with peers at the grade level:

> I think the way to influence teachers, first of all, is in a positive way. I feel like it is, whenever you are told to do something arbitrarily, when you are just doing for the sake of doing it without understanding why, you are going to run into problems because you do not have the buying from the people. I tried to come at it in a very positive approach, but also, in my tone when I say- - - make them understand this is not just a good idea: “let us work on it; let us try to do this.” And I am always able to get a lot positive response.

Being positive and indirect, Sherry was able to secure positive responses from peers. Similarly, Gayle reported that being positive facilitated the implementation of unpopular NCLB changes:

> I tried to make it [mandated NCLB meeting] worth while for them, so they don’t even want to be there, when they leave, there is value in it. And I think we have been able to do that; as much as we don’t like to give up that time, we know that we are learning things from each other; we are learning about teaching that helps us. We certainly are learning about our students, so at this time of the year, I am sure that everybody understands and agrees that there are values in this meeting, as much as they do not like being there.

Gayle further added that she made a point of maintaining calmness in the midst of changes and deadlines:

> I tried to maintain calmness; often times there is so much to do, that strengthen, and people get excited about the thoughts of something. I just tried to remind them and encourage us to know that nobody is doing things alone; we are all going to get through all of this. We all help each other.
Wright echoed the need to maintain calmness at the grade level. She vividly used the metaphor “the eye of storm” to describe her approach:

I think that I am a good leader for this group and the reason I do is because I do not blow up. I mean, I have my moments, but basically I can deal with things and look at the bigger picture and see things realistically, and I can say, “okay, we want this for this reason, but it won’t work, so how can we make it work?” You know, everyone has their emotions about things; then we sit down, and we figure out how to make things work. And I think that I am a good person to do that; if everyone is emotional, somewhere we got to come back together and calm down. They call me the eye of storm.

Second, several participants reported that they organized social activities at the grade level to promote team building. For them, having lunch together was both a popular way of bonding with peers and an informal occasion for discussion and sharing. Sherry talked about her effort to reach out and share with teachers in group lunch time:

So if you sit together at lunch, and go, “oh, this lesson is so good,” that kind of peaks their interest that might be another level; “if that is what you might want, let’s talk about it. Why not come to this group, because we are all new at this. Come to our group.”

Wright also used lunch period as an arena for informal grade meetings:

We lunch together. Some years, we are not able to eat lunch together. This year, we can, so I consider that informal grade-level meetings. But we also have grade-level meetings in our entire group, the media and technology folks. That is when we have things coming from leadership. So we talked about broad issues.

Payton took advantage of the occasion of lunch time to keep the group informed, she said:

Everybody looks after each other now; pretty much everyone eats lunch in the same room. The lunch schedule is--- by the time the last people come in, the first people were already gone. So we are just trying to make sure the ones in the middle to tell the ones that come in the last.

Payton also organized group activities to boost group morale and increase mutual understanding among peers; she provided a specific example:

We have kind of a spirit booster just recently--- we have secret pal activity--- just because we are in February, kind of dull, long, and dreary month, it is time for us to have a little bit of-- we are in the middle of conferences, we have tests going on. We just need something to pick up the beat, and just let us know, yes, we can get through. We have
secret pal activity for a week, you know, just to lift up everybody’s spirit, kind of know people that you might not know in a different way. Just things like that to ease tension and just help people to know each other a little better, to understand they may have something going on in their life out of their school that influences what is happening at school, as well.

Third, participants engaged in verbal and non-verbal communication in leadership functions. Sherry and Stanley were careful in their verbal communication with the school administrators. Stanley, chair for the fifth grade, described her conferences with the principal:

So I make an appointment, and I just laid it out. I started out just like talking with parents. Starting with the positive, then you hit the problem, and then you put the solution, and you end with the positive. She was really respectful. She understands our concern, and we are able to come to an agreement we both like.

Likewise, Sherry used the same “sandwich” approach when approaching the principals:

I feel like influencing someone, you do not just sit down and say this is wrong, but be able to--- you know, when we talk to parents, we sandwich, start with the good stuff, hit the negative, and finishing up with positive--- same with people, grown-ups. So you come in, you know, talking about how the good things are going on; you bring up the things you like to suggest change, or questions you have, and then bring suggestions to the table, bring positive suggestions, not just, you know, “I want the problems to be yours now, but I need some help.” I think really put it like it is a team effort.

Stanley and Sherry recognized the delicacy of communication with principals and the need to bring positive solutions to the table.

When it came to communications, Melitta saw the importance of being a good listener and addressing teacher concerns promptly:

When someone comes in that door, when I work on something, I set it aside and give them my full attention unless I have a child. I give full attention to them and I follow through. I tell them I am going to do something or find out something for them. I will get back to them ASAP. So I think you build trust that way. I don’t know all the answers, and they know I don’t, but they know that I will find out.

For Sierra, it was critical to have face-to-face communication with school administrators. She explained,

So if I have a problem, most of the time I talk to them, because very rarely, I will put a
problem on the email, only because so much gets lost in the translation--- the problem, it is misinterpreted. So if there is a problem, most of the time, in fact, all of the time, I will talk to them about it, and then from there we figure out what we need to do.

Belinda also learned to be more careful with her words because as a leader, what she said could really impact teachers. She reflected,

I never thought that my words influence people; it is not that they do not listen to me. What I say is influencing people. And I discovered that, so that is why I am very careful with what I said, because whatever I said can come back and bite me. So you know, wow, I discovered they actually listened to me. When I say something, they would say, “you know what, you are so right.” I am like, “oh, I do not expect this.” Before I really did not take the time to do it because I did not have to.

To review, for most participants, interpersonal interaction was an effective means of building a team out of a physical work group. As leaders of a work team, they aimed to establish positive, safe, tolerant, and respectful interpersonal interaction with peers; meanwhile, they carefully maneuvered to interact with school administrators in a positive and respectful way. In addition, some participants proactively organized social activities to boost morale and to increase mutual understandings among peers.

The strategy of team-building laid a solid foundation for organizational influence, which was especially critical considering the fact that participants lacked position and structural power to initiate and enforce executive directives. The strategy of team-building included tactics like team orientation, building we-ness, encouraging group autonomy, and interpersonal behaviors. All the participants sought to accomplish leadership tasks with the group rather than over the group. They sought to forge a common team mentality at the group level by discounting leadership status and foregrounding their identity as ordinary teachers.

**Strategy 2: Non-directive Leading**

Interpersonal team-building laid the foundation and facilitative arena for organizational influences; however, teacher leaders in this school additionally had to apply a variety of tactics to
accomplish concrete leadership tasks, to improve teaching practices, and to implement local, state, and national accountability initiatives. Lacking positional power and unwilling to be forceful and directive, participants had recourse to a variety of influence tactics characterized as non-directive. The strategy of non-directive leading consists of five tactics: modeling, promoting sharing, teaching, initiating, and voting.

Tactic 1: modeling.

Nearly all the participants adopted modeling as the most effective tactic for influencing peers. As leaders of work groups, the participants realized that it was critical to lead by example when selling initiatives, especially unpopular ones, to peers. The tactic of modeling has four elements.

First, Stanley provided an example of modeling unwelcome initiatives at the grade level. Parents in the school organized the Starnival activity to honor high-achieving students; however, teachers were unhappy because it took place on Saturday. Stanley recalled,

It is Saturday. Teachers are tugged, because we are paid annually, but we are also paid by the hours we work. We like to think of Saturday as our own, but I never looked it at that way; I am never paid by the hour. I looked at it as you work until the job is done. So they asked us to come; literally, the administration asked us to come on Saturday.

She continued:

So it is a very bitter pill. In this case, what I have to do is go to the teachers, “look, I also have things to do on Saturday, I got a baby shower on Saturday, I am 45 minutes away, I am coming. I am going to come to the early one. They need our help; look how much money they have given us for Christmas, look what they have put on for us, and this is what they all are asking for. Yes, it is tough, who can make it with me?” Some just say they can’t, but half of them are. They cannot force us, but what I have done is to say, “I am doing it, can you help me?” Stanley influenced teachers by reasoning, personally appealing to them for help, and most importantly, modeling administrative decisions. As a result, half of the grade-level teachers came on board.
Second, besides modeling unpopular initiatives, some participants also modeled group decisions, instructional change, and professionalism. As mentioned before, Belinda modeled group decision making by accepting a smaller classroom despite the fact that she was unhappy with the decision. Gayle contributed by modeling professionalism for the other teachers.

You know, we as a group make a decision; we all got on board. It is just a group of amazing professional women who have a real diverse group. We have lots of strong personality, but I found whenever I model professionalism, I say to them, “We must move forward; we are going to do it this way. Let us remember that is how we agreed to do it.” Everyone gets on board; you just have to remind them by modeling it.

Stanley reported that she primarily helped teachers improve instruction by demonstration and modeling:

Usually if there is something I want them to change, I often throw the ideas out, just make it, how do you try it this way; you know, “I tried it, this works well.” Things especially with the democratic learning, older teachers have set their ways; it is hard for them to let it go. And so if you can show them how to do step-by-step, just showing them and giving them the opportunity of observing, that is really the best way that I find with me. I don’t direct because they are professional, too. They want to do that way, and then if that is working, that is just fine. But sometimes it is not working, and if you show a better way, hopefully their professionalism will lead them to try it.

Third, some participants also influenced peers towards instructional improvement by modeling idea sharing. Sherry talked about influencing teachers’ instructional practice by modeling sharing:

I will bring my plan book, and bring this and say, you know, “you are welcome to my plan book; you are welcome to my papers on the computer.” or “I made this little test, you are welcome to use it.” I think sharing is another way to foster that leadership, because again it makes everyone equal, and it makes--- not like my stuff is just my stuff, no one else, you know, can understand it. I mean, it is just, in teaching there is nothing new; we all just recreate new ideas. We all recreate every day, so there is no new idea, so we just, I think--- but having an attitude that what is mine is yours, you can certainly borrow that.

Likewise, Gayle modeled by sharing her materials with peers. She said,

If I make a parent a letter or worksheet on something, I can send it everybody and say, “this is the worksheet I made up to practice this skill;this is the letter I send to parents to
ask them for help.” And everybody uses everything that does not just belong to one person; that belongs to the whole grade-level. I am not sure that is the truth in other schools.

Forth, Sierra modeled being a good leader and a good team player. She reflected,

[being a good leader] is really hard. I would say there are lot of times that I have to model it. The basics are simple things, like making sure I show up on time, coming to meetings on time, the basics that I dress professionally according to the dress code, and basically I follow the rules. That is the basics.

She continued,

Then I think also, especially as my role as counselor, one way I model it is by keeping confidential things confidential, because I do get a lot of information because of my role as counselor that is confidential, and what I think I model is that they realize that if they tell something in confidence, it does not go anywhere. So I think I earn their respect and their trust that way, and I think that is a sign of good leader; you can go to them and know that they will take care of everything, you too, but otherwise, it will stay right there.

As a school counselor, Sierra often helped teachers solve student behavior problems in classrooms. In addition to providing advice, she made a point of modeling the solution for teachers. She gave the following example:

I sort of show them how to use it by either going to their classroom or doing it, and just pretending like tomorrow when you go into class, Billy walks in, the first thing you might want to do is this, so I will teach it that way in their classrooms. Then other times, they will come to me with parent problems--- this parent is saying this, do not like me anymore, what will I do about it--- so a lot of times, I will teach them, honestly, almost like what I am doing with children, but we will role-play it, “okay, I will be the parent, you will be the teacher, this is what the parents said, what would you say? Let us talk about it, let us switch, you be the parent, I will be the parent.” Sort of teach them to have a parent conference, a successful parent conference that they can take some emotion out and just talk about the problem and deal with it, and then they will go and make the phone call.

To summarize, most participants used modeling to implement group and school decisions, to influence peers’ instructional practices, and to help teachers overcome classroom behavior problems. Modeling nullified the need to use structural power in teacher leadership functions;
instead, the success of modeling assumed that teachers’ professionalism would lead them to follow the examples set by teacher leaders.

Tactic 2: promoting sharing.

Another tactic of non-directive leading for the participants was to promote sharing among peers. Teachers at Bell Mountain Elementary were mandated to engage in sharing; specifically, they were required to set aside two planning periods for NCLB meetings devoted to the discussion of targeted skills implementation for students. Besides mandated sharing, teacher leaders also initiated and engaged in various forms of spontaneous sharing at the group level. To achieve these goals, participants actively encouraged, promoted, and facilitated sharing in work groups.

All participants recognized the value of sharing in improving teaching and facilitating their leadership functions. For example, Gayle believed that NCLB meetings, although mandated, offered valuable occasions for sharing. She reflected on how sharing reduced the teacher isolation that has long plagued the profession of teaching:

Just the opportunity to sit down twice and talk about what we were doing in our classrooms has made it very valuable because most of the time, there is never a chance for that. There are people on my grade-level that I have never seen; even though we are on the same hall, I never see them except on Monday and Thursday. And five doors away, I never see them. If I have these meetings, I do see them; we do get to learn from each other, which is, I think, our most valuable asset.

Payton agreed:

First, in the beginning of the year, we grumbled about having to meet so many times, but it has been, I think, a good opportunity for us to grow. I mean, that is what I said so many times over and over again; yes, we grow as a team and we learned to trust each other; we share information. Even though we fussed about it, I think it has been a good thing. The staff development has been a good thing because sometimes we do it before school, sometimes during our planning time, sometimes after school. So we have an opportunity to get together, to view videos, to get materials, or share ideas; it is like a light bulb goes off, when, you say, “oh, yeah, I can use this for this child, or use this as a group.”
The tactic of promoting sharing includes three elements. First, in the section on the tactic of modeling, Sherry and Gayle promoted sharing by *modeling sharing*. Second, the participants facilitated sharing by *designing meeting agendas and seating arrangements*. For example, Melitta used meeting agendas to structure sharing.

I always had typed agendas to give them. Because our time is limited, if we get into discussion, we may not get through. So I always have an agenda so they would have information when they leave.

Sherry also wrote agendas to remind teachers of the ultimate goal of sharing; she gave an example:

Something we have done is we ask to be here at a certain time, and we write an agenda on the board. So when they come in, they know we do have something to do. You know, it is not just like we all sit down and wait for the last person and maybe they will get around to it. So we put agenda on the board, 1, 2, 3. We all check it off as we go. So they know we are not just blowing steam here; we got things to do. We share everything we do.

Gayle purposefully organized meetings in a circle so that everyone had a chance to contribute to sharing. She explained:

When we have NCLB meeting, we try to all gather again, and we sit in a circle; we try to go around the circle, listening to concerns, questions or things that need to be talked about. Sometimes, we have visitors like the technology team coming to teach us about how to do reports on the computer or the reading specialist coming to talk about strategies or something. That is time we try to make it an open forum, where everybody sits in a circle and taking turns so everybody has a chance.

Third, a couple of participants reported that one delicate problem of promoting sharing was how to *approach veteran teachers*. Sherry talked about getting the word out and living with whatever outcomes emerged from encouraging veteran teachers to share:

Probably what I will do is just get the word out: like Thursday after school, if you want to sit in on a Writer’s workshop, discussion, you know, some of us will meet in so and so room to talk about it; you are welcome to come. Sometimes veteran teachers don’t, that is not enough, kind of I have already done ours.
She continued,

But a lot of times, sometimes veteran teachers put up a wall, you know, “I don’t need anything new; what I am doing is fine.” So I think just making them aware of it, making them aware that there is a group that they can come and hang out with, and they can come and read about, and just try to live it. Lay it out and leave it out. Lay it out: here is the material, here are the books, we are gonna meet, here is when, where, who, here is what we are trying to do. If they still do not want to come in to that new philosophy, whatever, leave it out.

Sherry actively sought to engage veteran teachers in sharing, but she was ready to step back if veteran teachers were not receptive. Similarly, Payton also found it hard to involve veteran teachers in sharing. At her grade level, some new teachers initiated changes from mathematic unit centers to literacy unit centers. Although Payton embraced the change, she shied away from imposing these changes on veteran teachers.

With the introduction of NCLB changes at Bell Mountain Elementary, teacher leaders were obligated to play a leading role in the task of promoting sharing among peers. They primarily promoted sharing by personally modeling it; in addition, they kept meeting agendas to maintain the focus on sharing and strove to make sharing a democratic process. They made efforts to involve veteran teachers in sharing, but teacher leaders uniformly chose to step back if attempts were unsuccessful. Clearly, with a limited supply of power sources, teacher leaders only had recourse to personal power in facilitating sharing. Participants may have perceived themselves as possessing less expert power than veteran teachers, which may have led them to adopt a cautious stand when trying to involve veteran teachers in sharing.

*Tactic 3: teaching.*

For some participants, another tactic of non-directive leading was to teach and encourage peers to improve. Using their expertise and personal experiences, some participants influenced teachers to seek professional development. The tactic of teaching includes two elements.
First, Belinda encouraged teachers to learn technology by *personally teaching them.*

Some teachers were uncomfortable with using computers, and she was determined to change their attitude:

> There are many in our group who do not want to see a computer. But you have to use computers because your kids are using computers. You have to apply modern things; you cannot just sit back and say I have been in this for nine years, and this is the way I am going to continue. You have to change.

She continued,

> A lot of times, they are doing something that computers would do it for them, and I said: “you do not have to do this, let me explain to you how to do this on the computer, and that takes five minutes instead of your doing it in three days.” So I tried to apply everything I learned; I tried to help them out also because for me, just trying to stay in school, there are a lot of things computers can help you do that you would not know until you are in school.

She then provided an example of how she actively influenced one teacher who was unwilling to embrace technology:

> I have one [teacher] would not do it, no matter how much you say, they do not believe that [technology], that is part of their curriculum. And they do not have time to learn new things because they are teaching. On the other hand, whenever there is a new program, and the use of technology is needed, they have to find somebody else to do it for them. And whenever they have a problem, what I will do is that I do not tell them how to do it; I am going to show them how to do it. So the following, when they need to use it, they say, “I do not know how to do it.” So I sit down with them and show them how to do it. So it is not like forcing them to do it, but if you needed, and there is nobody around, and you know how to do it, you can do it yourself.

Likewise, Part of Sierra’s job as a school counselor was to teach teachers how to solve student behavior and parenting problems. She talked about how she designed an individualized plan and worked through it with teachers:

> A lot of times, [teachers] will come to me because they are having behavioral problems with children; those are the biggest reasons that they come to me. And so different ways that I will teach them, you know, I will ask them, “What you are doing now to help that child, and is not working? So let us come up with a new plan.” Then I will show them that here is a plan that I have seen work before, so I will actually show them the plan. We draw it out together; we will decide how to best work in their classrooms.
Sierra brought in external resources and worked collaboratively to help teachers under certain circumstances. She explained:

So let us say, curriculum, a new teacher is having a really hard time because she has kids in her group, some can read, some cannot read, some are reading like third-grade levels, and they are really struggling, so I can’t help, in my role as counselor; I can develop some kind of plan, but I will go to the reading teacher, I will say to that kindergarten teacher, “Okay, how about if we go about asking the reading specialist; she will come in and she will give you some ideas,” and the three of us will devise a plan to help her. So depending on what the problem is, or, a lot of times I will bring in the speech teacher just because the speech teacher here has been doing years and years and have so much expertise not only in speech but also in children, sometimes I will say, “you know what, I am stuck too; let us bring her in; she knows so much.” So a lot times I will just bring in another perspective to see if the three of us can solve it, if we can do it together.

Second, some participant encouraged teachers to seek professional development. Belinda also encouraged teachers on her grade level to follow her example and work towards a higher degree. She said,

Any opportunity that I give, if I found something new, I will say I went to this service at this school, I would like you to think also--- you will learn how to do this and that. You can apply this and that. So I push them to do a lot of technology and in-service stuff that I have taken--- to go back to school. And because of that, many teachers are putting applications to do a masters. I am very proud of my specialist degree, and I went ahead to put application for Ed.D. These are the things that will help them in the future and will help us as a group because we will grow educationally, we will learn more things; that is what we need to do.

It was apparent that Belinda valued professional development for peers because it has the potential to foster group growth and facilitate leadership functions for group leaders.

Interestingly, only two participants mentioned teaching as a tactic for influencing teachers. Unlike the tactic of sharing, which was endorsed by most participants, teaching seemed to imply that one party was deficient in certain areas and needed assistance from another party; therefore, it violated the norm of equality in schools, whereas sharing only further perpetuated the norm in schools. The case of Belinda was an exception because she actively sought to teach
peers; on the other hand. Sierra mostly taught because she was approached by teachers who had behavioral problems. The attitude toward teaching suggested that most participants carefully respected and abided by the norm of equality in schools.

*Tactic 4: initiating.*

A couple participants went beyond being merely decision implementers and actively took initiative to exert influence at the group and school levels. Sierra, the school counselor, gave a relevant example of how she worked with school administrators to initiate a parenting class for parents at Bell Mountain Elementary:

In this school, we haven’t had any parent education workshops that the counselors have done since I being here. And I felt like that is something needs to be done. So I approach the administrators. In this community it is a very well educated, affluent neighborhood, but regardless, I still felt like they can use some parent education workshops.

She approached the administration and asked for help:

So I went to the administration and said this is what I would like to do; I’d like to try it, and let us just see. If nobody shows up, I will never do it again. But if they do, then we will know even they are educated, they still want some kind of parenting tips. So they let me do it; they said, “come up with a plan, come up with an agenda, show it to us and we will put it up there.” So it was something that had not been done in at least four or five years. But they let me devise it, create it, implement it, and people came! .... So this year, we did three different parent education classes; all three of them had 25 people. It is a lot, and it will continue next year.

Sierra was gratified and encouraged by the positive outcome of the parenting class initiative.

She was especially mindful of the administration that trusted and empowered her to take initiatives. She reflected,

So of course it made me feel good and encouraged me to try more things that might not be done before, but it let me know they trust me enough to know, and to be able to say, “I think this community wants it.” So if they did not think of that, they trust me enough to say, “Okay, if you think, try it and let us see what happens.” So it was very encouraging and very rewarding that I did it this time.
Taking initiatives was not a frequently used tactic; however, it was clear from Sierra’s case that the successful implementation of initiatives had elevating and empowering consequences for teacher leaders. The success of parenting class initiatives gratified and empowered Sierra; as a result, she was willing to take additional initiatives afterwards. One prerequisite for the successful initiatives was the support and trust from the school administrators. In this case, the administration at Bell Mountain elementary empowered and trusted Sierra to experiment with the parenting initiatives.

*Tactic 5: voting.*

A small number of participants reported that they used voting to build consensus at the grade level. The tactic of voting includes two elements. First, participants used voting to made decisions on administrative trivia. For example, the Special Education grade level consisted of about 30 teachers. As special education chair, Melitta used voting to build consensus on certain issues. She said,

We voted on many things. I am moving so they will vote on a new leader. So we will come to a consensus on that. The county is implementing a new on-line computer program to do all our IEP. We will be trained on that--- six hours of training. So we will vote on when we want the training, stay after school for it, or will come one day in summer. So they will vote on that. So we vote a lot.

As grade-level chair, Melitta would give suggestions before teachers voted; in the example of scheduling for IEP training, she put forward suggestions:

I would give them suggestion that they stay three nights after school for two hours and get it done in three chunks. So when I sit in here for six hours, some Saturdays, when we would rather be out. Or they can do six one-hour sessions. But that seems like a lot. So that would be my suggestion to them, I don’t know what they will decide.

Melitta noted that the group usually voted on inconsequential administrative trifles and that the vote was usually cut and dry:
You know, we have a wonderful group of people; I don’t think anyone feels strongly, usually it is cut and dry. They are little things like parties or what date you want to have. At the beginning of the year, we can have two parties for our children at our classroom. What do you want, winter party or spring party? So you vote on that, nobody really cares. You choose two, so we do not feel strongly about it. I don’t think we were given a choice whether we were going to do the IEP on the computer or not; we all are going to do that. And you would get trained, so we get to choose when we will get the training. You know, just little things like procedures.

Second, Gayle also used voting to test the waters when faced with the task of building consensus on certain issues. She said,

I usually try to get a general consensus on any of the issues involved, just asking the people, sending email, “this is the issue, let me know what you think.” I would put the votes together and see where we stand on it. That helps a little bit; when we do come back for discussion, it just shortcuts a little bit. Everyone had a chance to give input, so I can lead discussion in that direction.

To summarize, although voting was a democratic procedure to gather teacher input, it was in essence a passive tactic. Participants could only influence the voting process by offering hints and suggestions, as Melitta did. One reason that Melitta used voting was due to two facts: the large size of the group level and the heavy regulation of special education practices. Gayle used voting primarily to get a feel of group sentiment with regard to certain issues. The fact that only two out of thirteen participants mentioned voting testified to its relatively low effectiveness in influencing teachers.

**Strategy 3: Approaching Administrators**

One crucial dimension of organizational influence for teacher leaders was interaction with school administrators. Teacher leaders aimed to build a social, open, and equal team with peers. In stark contrast, the power relationships between teacher leaders and school administrators were so complicated and convoluted that participants had to walk a fine line, particularly when interacting with principals. The strategy of approaching administrators mainly relates to how teacher leaders approached and influenced school administrators at Bell Mountain.
Almost all participants applauded the school administration for their openness, visibility, and easy accessibility. Belinda was impressed with the “open-door” policy of the school administration:

The leadership in this school, I mean the administration, they are very approachable. You know, whenever you have an idea, it is like that; it is easy to knock at their door and say, you know, what was happening with what because they have an open-door policy. So it is very easy to going to tell them, “Okay, this is what is on my mind now. How do you think you can help me?”

Wright confirmed Belinda’s impression of the school administration:

We are very fortunate in this school because we have very open interaction and relationships with the administrators. They always wanted to talk, want to listen; they may not really change anything. They are always willing to listen. So if I had something that I felt like that I need to talk to them about, I will just make an appointment, or I just drop in if their doors are open and they are available.

However, most teacher leaders still felt that administrators were the ultimate decision-makers at school. For example, although providing input for the teacher room assignments for the next school year, Melitta still felt that the administration would make the final call:

Now, we gave them our suggestions, and we have to justify every decision; this is why we need a room with bathroom because we have special-needs children that need that facility. This is why we need a larger room because we cannot fit 20 people in this room. Just because you want a window, that does not cut; it is not a reason. So we justify it, we send our suggestions to the administration; they would ultimately look at all the input from all the leaders, and decide what is best for everyone.

Tactic 1: bringing positive solutions.

A significant number of participants reported that they usually approached the administration with solutions on hand. Most participants saw meetings with principals as an occasion for problem-solving, not merely complaining. Wright gave an example of field trip scheduling:
I will use the field trip as an example; it is same thing with the principal. With the field trips, it will be a grade leader; I would say, “if you change the schedule in this way, if you make this change, then this would work for us instead.” Because for me one is to complain, and the other is to offer an alternative solution. So we will do that with anything. There is just a lot of things coming up, so we will try to have a solution; I think a lot of people here do that automatically.

As discussed before, Sherry approached the school administration with respect and brought positive solutions. She added that it was important to articulate and to help the principals understand the teacher’s perspective:

So respect is one thing. Having a way to articulate exactly what you want or what exactly you need, coming in with not only your complaints but your suggestions. I feel like influencing someone, you do not just sit down and say this is wrong. And helping the principal understand, you know, the reason we are here is for the children, so whatever you want to come into, it is about the kids; it is a valid concern. And being able to articulate how the kids are affected negatively from whatever the problem is, and showing her, she is not in every classroom every minute. We are frontlines, we are with kids, we can see what sometimes they cannot. That is only because she is some different place in the school. So I think being articulate with respect and bringing solutions really helps.

Sherry provided an example of how she approached the school administration:

Sometimes the schedule of proctors that are on does not exactly match our testing schedule, and so all of us ended up being frustrated because we are ready to start the test but the proctors are not there. And I don’t think that the office is aware of that. So when you go to someone and you share something that is not working well like that, if you say, “proctors are not getting to classrooms sometime; would it be okay with you that I talk to the head proctor and perhaps just let her know and then maybe she can tell everybody else?” If it is a good solution, they will be happy with it. And in that case, you helped solve the problem, you know, is on the record.

Apparently, Sherry took great care to respect the principal’s authority and bring positive solutions; furthermore, she influenced principals by stressing the bottom line and bringing in teacher’s perspectives.

Stanley also adopted the approach of bringing positive suggestions when interacting with principals; she reflected:
First of the things, what I would do is to make sure that nothing comes out of my mouth unless it is important. I don’t chatter; I also do not complain. If it is something has to be done, if I know it has to be done, then I just lead them early and make sure it is done. So the principals already know that when I say something, it is because I already thought about it and already considered it.

She continued,

I often meet them [principals] in private if it is just something within our grade. I do not feel the need to bring it up in another environment because it often involves another teacher, and it is no one else’s business. And I always have because I have already thought out the problem or suggestion. I always have a suggestion or alternative. So I never come up with complaints unless I have a solution that is viable. And then I will be straight with them; I don’t say something is nice when it is not. But I am also respectful. So they know again, if it has to be done has been done. They tell me that. I do it.

When approaching the principals, Stanley established her credibility as a cautious and serious speaker; she made a point of bringing positive solutions to the table, and she was respectful and frank with school administrators.

Gayle commented on the culture of being positive and suggesting positive solutions for change at Bell Mountain Elementary:

I think the policy seems to be, or maybe an understanding. If you want to make a change, fine, present the change and also give the reason why and do not complain about anything until you know how to fix it. If you say, “I do not like the way this goes.” It is okay, you can say that, but you have to make a solution. “I think we should do this.” Do not just go and complain, if you don’t like it, come up with and make a suggestion. I think most people do that, because if you don’t have suggestion, do not complain about it.

Most participants willingly approached the school administration when they needed guidance and help. They were mindful of the need to maintain a positive posture and bring solutions when approaching principals. Participants usually approached the principals regarding task-oriented issues.

*Tactic 2: matching principals’ interests and priorities.*

Another tactic of influencing principals, reported by one participant, was to diagnose the interests and priorities of principals. Sherry explained,
I think knowing what is important to principals, if you know that certain programs, certain initiatives are important, just a knowledge of what they hold as priority is important because then you can decide if that is something you would like to get in on. “I am really interested in that program as well, if there is anything that I can do to get involved with.” So I think just keep your ears out and talking to people, be aware and observant, and look at the bigger picture really helps to see; I am not saying aligning all your principals according to theirs, but listen to what they hold as valuable, and maybe there is something you can get involved with. I think that is the way to bridge some of the interactions because that will foster other things.

Diagnosing principal’s interests, Sherry could better influence the principals with her involvement in the things that they valued. Moreover, for Sherry, being a positive team player could also influence principals to make allowances for her leadership functions. She said,

If you are positive team player, and the administration knows that, maybe, as you see things could be better, you can make suggestions for change, and if you have been positive all this time, you are more likely to get the change. If you have been a positive team player, and not griping, whining, and complaining. Maybe if you want to change the date of the meeting, the administration will look more favorably on us: “you know what, this group has really not complained, they have done the best they can, and they want one more little things; let us go ahead and give that to them.” But if we have been kicking our heels, and dragging our feet, they are not going to make any allowance for us.

Clearly, the participants had limited resources for influencing administrators. The administration in this school was committed to the value of shared governance and teacher empowerment; however, teacher leaders still kept a distance from principals. Instead, they identified more with peers and had more resources at their disposal for influencing teachers. Despite the entrenched establishment of shared governance structures and the presence of an empowering administration at the school, the traditional principal-teacher power relationship limited the reservoir of resources with which teacher leaders could influence principals. As a result, participants were careful and respectful in approaching principals; some influenced principals by being positive decision implementer in exchange for favors from principals. Clearly, the participants had sole recourse to personal power in interacting and influencing principals.
Strategy 4: Fostering Team Ownership of Change

As teacher leaders, the participants shouldered the arduous responsibility of selling and implementing school, local, state, and federal reform initiatives and mandates. While other educational leaders may have the options of issuing orders and executives in securing implementation, participants in this study were desirous of implementing initiatives without being directive with teachers. Participants used the strategy of fostering team ownership of mandated changes, which facilitated the implementation of unpopular changes. The strategy of fostering team ownership includes two tactics: demonstrating positive acceptance of change and granting group autonomy.

Description of major changes.

The most far-reaching change impacting Bell Mountain Elementary was the implementation of No Child Left Behind act which went into effect on January 8, 2002. One goal of NCLB is to ensure, within the next twelve years, that all children are performing adequately at each grade level. NCLB requires schools to test students in grades 3-8 and report their scores and gives parents the choice of sending their children to a high-performing school. NCLB mandates that all schools must demonstrate Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). The Georgia Department of Education measures AYP using test results from two state exams: the Criterion Referenced Competency Test (CRCT) for elementary and middle schools and the Georgia High School Graduation Test for high schools. In 2003, Bell Mountain Elementary met the AYP requirements.

The implementation of NCLB at Bell Mountain Elementary put a huge strain on the already overwhelming work duties of teachers. Every grade level installed a new NCLB
representative, whose role was to oversee NCLB implementation. Gary talked about the changes taking place at her grade level:

This year, we introduced the whole NCLB; we have a representative on our grade-level who leads those meetings, NCLB planning. That is primarily curriculum, you know, and assessing and planning. And that used to be more grade-level leader role, it seems now that NCLB person is taking over the curriculum and assessment planning. The leader of grade level is more about policies, planning, budget, discussions on everyday issues that come up.

Gayle further elaborated on the function of NCLB meetings at the grade level:

In the NCLB teams, it is all the people who teach the same grade in schools, so when I have NCLB teams, all the second-grade teachers get together to discuss the target skills that we are working on, the calendar as far as how we get into the target skills; we also review and check and see assessment how our children are doing with the targeted skills: “do we need to do more to work with that? do we continue on, are we keeping up, is our pacing too fast or too slow?” In strategies, we share the strategies like “what did you do for this skill, and did it work?” I can go and say, “I am not having any effect teaching this, so what are you all doing?” It is much more focused on the NCLB meetings.

Almost all participants reported that they and the teachers were frustrated with the implementation of NCLB initiatives. Teachers at Bell Mountain Elementary were required to set aside two planning periods to have NCLB meetings, which infringed on teachers’ valuable work time. Gary explained,

It has been difficult this year in some ways because we have a lot on our plates. And adding NCLB, which gives us two more meetings a week, it has reduced the amount of time we could put on grade-level issues because teachers have been in these meetings for so long; they have to plan to teach their children. Unfortunately, they do not make any more time in the day than we have right now.

Similarly, Sherry also reported teacher resistance to NCLB initiatives on her grade level:

With the coming of NCLB, we give up two day’s planning to meet together and to discuss certain things with kids. It has been a transition because we are used to having every day at this time; we can make copies and grade papers, whatever. But now two days you meet in there and you have to be on task. A lot of people, you know, are resisting that because it has been told to us and we have to do that.
Besides the overload in time commitments, some participants felt that NCLB initiatives had an adverse effect on their teaching. For example, Belinda complained,

NCLB forced us to change our schedules because all regular teachers have to have planning period at the same time; that means we have to teach all the first graders at the same time, all the second-graders at the same time. That really affected our program because we are now seeing our kids once every seven days. That is something coming from the nation; there is nothing we can do about it.

She further commented,

Because [NCLB] affected our program so drastically, this year we see our kids 15 times the entire year. That is a big difference. You cannot see a child 15 times and teach something that they will remember forever. But we have to work with that because we do not have another solution.

_Tactic 1: demonstrating positive acceptance of change._

Regardless of how participants personally felt about NCLB initiatives and other mandated changes, they conscientiously took a series of proactive steps in influencing peers to own and implement these changes. To foster group ownership of changes, some participants first made sure that they personally demonstrated positive acceptance of the mandated changes. For example, Sherry stressed the need of doing away with fussing over unwelcome changes; instead, she made sure to demonstrate positive attitudes towards change. She explained,

You know, there is no other choice; you got to get over that, whether that is right or not. You have to make it real, to make it right. You have to just take it. I mean the more you stew about it, the worse mentally you will be. So you just need to get over that, you know that it is black and white. I am going to make the best we can.

She continued,

So, you know, you just have to do it. I think the more you take it apart and analyze it, why and why, you are just wasting energy and it does no good; forgetting why you have to do it. It is not decision you make; it is out of your control. But how you view it, you know there is a saying about the things happening to you are not in your control, but the way your attitude about them is in your control, so the only thing you can change is your attitude.
Being empathetic and sympathetic, Sherry fostered team ownership of changes and worked side-by-side with teachers to implement changes. She was careful to avoid being seen as a decision enforcer. She said,

Well, I think if people in charge of that small group make it like they are the ones that are implementing it, then the groups can be mad at me. Like if I say, “guys, we have to meet, we have to meet,” that is not going to help. They are not gonna to like me any more for that. So if you say, “yeah, I do not want to meet, I have stuff to do, it is just the way it is, it is just transition time,” if you just try to have empathy, and try to say, “I am on the same boat, you know, I got as much stuff to grade as well.”

She fostered team ownership through building comradeship at the grade level:

So I think giving them more ownership, and they feel like it is not something we come up with that we want you to do. We are all in this together. So I still think when you have change coming from above, and if it is resisted, that you just keep everybody realizing that we all share the same load, it helps.

Gayle echoed Sherry’s positive approach towards mandated changes:

Well at this point, the NCLB meetings do come from the state or the country. We are not making that up. I don’t know if I have any influence; it is just that, “Okay, We are going to do it, we are just going to do it; do not waste time in complaining,” and that stuff. This is the way it is; this is not the question do we want to. There is no good way to deliver the bad news. This is the way it is; we are going to do it. Do not waste your time complaining; we will just do it.

Gayle worked hard to make the best of NCLB meetings and make it valuable for teachers. For her, it was important to foster sharing among peers in these meetings. She gave an example:

[Sharing] is one of the ways I can know my grade level does not mind having these meetings, and that is, I think they find value in the fact that they get something out of it as well. I mean, like we started to use the electronic report card this year; we needed to have a lot of talking about that, we did not understand, we did not know how to use it, all the use of electronic report card was new. If we had not had these meetings twice a week, it would be a lot harder, because sometimes we went to the computer lab all together and learned how to transport grades from one place to the other. So this has given us a common planning time in the middle of the day when we can all get together and do any number of things, go to the lab, talk about students, our lessons, and have a time to which we did not have before.
Despite the opportunities for sharing that NCLB meetings offered, Gayle reflected that teachers were upset with the mandated structure of meetings:

You know, we like the common planning time, we like to be able to share and talk. I just think that nobody likes the confines of Monday, Thursday meeting. That is part, even though they like what they get out of it most of the time. Nobody ever leaves like this is a big waste of time. They don’t say that, just the structure that they have to be there. I don’t think it is a good thing, you know; we just keep doing it. Hopefully, I think people would easily say that they realize there is value in it.

For Payton, it was important for her to embrace the changes personally before influencing peers to follow suit. She reflected,

First of all, I would have to know enough about it, to get on aboard myself, made sure that I believe in it because not knowing is an awful hard way to sell somebody for something. So once I am informed enough about it, and I have learned too, if I do not understand, I need to go and find it out. You know, I am not shy about asking questions, so if I don’t understand it, I need someone to explain to me until I do. That is the same with the literacy center thing that went berserk this year. You know, once I got behind it, it was easier for me to go ahead and go with the flow.

Tactic 2: granting group autonomy.

In fostering team ownership of changes, some participants made a point of granting group autonomy. For example, Payton was careful to allow autonomy and room for adjustment for peers:

By the same token, I saw the value of keeping the old way for the people who were not ready for change. So I can sit on the fence and help, once they are ready, I will help them and show how I was easing into it. But the ones who were not ready, I did not push it.

Payton had a particular aversion to being directive in fostering team ownership of mandated change and executives. For example, when the administration mandated that teachers take turns in standing at the hall and supervising student safety, Payton fostered implementation by modeling it. She recalled,

And a lot of teachers really have a had time giving up that 30 minutes time span that we accept children in the mornings. Buses come in at 8:20, you know nobody really want to commit a certain day, which is what we kind of were asked to do at the grade level.
She continued,

I didn’t really push the issue, I felt first like I really need to have it on paper, assign it; I brought it up, and I did not have a positive response, so I just let it go, but I went back and forth form the desk to my door everyday, and there is always teachers out in the hallway watching the children. So I felt like even though it is something that I followed through with the way I felt like I was asked to do, but it is still being done.

Stanley chose to be frank and honest with peers in implementing mandated changes. She primarily relied on the professionalism and maturity of peers to get things done. She said,

It is the same way; we are together twice a week during our planning time and talked about things. If there is a directive coming from above, and the teachers have to implement it, I tell them what it is; this is a fantastic team. First thing they do, they say, “Okay, how we are going to do it?” We very rarely have anything done solo. If there is anything that needs to be done, then two or three, or maybe all of us get together, and say, “okay, when we can find a time to get it done?”

She talked about how she relied on the maturity and professionalism of teachers:

But all I have to do is to bring it up, and say, “okay, who has not done anything this weekend?” I don’t have to assign to anybody, because the fifth-grade team, there is only one teacher who is a new teacher; everybody else has come in from somewhere else, so they bring maturity in. So, “okay. I will do it, will you help me?” I can just tell them that this needs to be done, and they get it done.

To summarize, teacher leaders at Bell Mountain Elementary were the foot soldiers of implementing mandated changes. Despite their own reservations with changes, participants strove to demonstrate positive acceptance. They made sure that teachers would derive value from the mandated changes. Some of the participants respected differences in peers and allowed a degree of freedom for teachers who had trouble with these changes.

Other educational leaders may issue unequivocal orders demanding and enforcing change. In sharp contrast, teacher leaders in this study were both reluctant and unable to be directive and prescriptive with peers. Teacher leaders at this school had to overcome teacher resistance and foster team ownership of changes. Notably, participants promoted the norm of equality in work groups to implement changes. Again, in fostering team ownership of changes, participants
primarily resorted to positive interpersonal qualities such as sympathy, honesty, and empathy. Once again the use of personal power was critical for teacher leaders in the implementation of the mandated changes.

Summary of Influence Strategies

The influence strategies discussed in this section include interpersonal team-building, non-directive leading, approaching administrators, and fostering team ownership of changes. It was clear that teacher leadership positions necessitated the skills of team building, interpersonal interaction, communication, gentle leading, and streetwise knowledge of approaching superiors. The influence process placed an exacting demand on the leadership ability and personal qualities of teacher leaders. Without access to structural power, participants in this study primarily relied on personal power for task accomplishment and change implementation. While some teacher leaders proactively built social teams out of physical groups to build consensus, others only used voting to arrive at group decisions. Besides the resources of personal power, other external factors, such as the administration and mandated changes, also had a significant bearing on the organizational influences of teacher leaders. Finally, it was noteworthy that participants had more ease and resources in influencing peers than in influencing school principals.

Theme Two: Protection Strategies

As middle-level leaders, teacher leaders at Bell Mountain elementary interacted simultaneously with teachers on one side and school administrators on the other, which had the potential of rendering them vulnerable to misunderstandings and resentments from both groups. The theme of protection strategies relates to how the participants took steps to protect themselves and their team in their everyday political interactions. The theme of protection strategies includes
four strategies: trust building, organizational analysis, conflict resolution, and managing the grey area (see Table 4.2).

**Strategy 1: Trust Building**

The strategy of trust building in many ways overlapped with the category of team building discussed above. First, like team building, trust building laid the foundation or intervening conditions for future protection strategies. According to the data, a higher level of trust with teachers and administrators minimizes tension and conflicts for the participants, thus significantly reducing the need for protection. Second, trust building shared similar properties with team building in the areas of interpersonal strategies and building we-ness. The strategy of trust building includes four tactics: interpersonal behaviors, building we-ness, protection of team image, and creating a safe team environment.

**Tactic 1: interpersonal behaviors.**

All participants made a point of using a series of interpersonal behaviors to build trust with teachers and administrators. Many of the interpersonal behaviors overlapped with similar behaviors in team building, such as being respectful, honest, and positive and avoiding being seen as a decision enforcer. However, some interpersonal behaviors uniquely served the function of trust building. The tactic of interpersonal behaviors includes four elements.

First, some participants believed that it was important *to be frank with administrators and to keep them abreast of group-level affairs* to build trust with administration and to secure their support. For example, Wright shared,

> Any testing, anything that is not ordinary, I will tell [the principal] about it. Just a sign, have a handle of it, you know, I think if there is some issue with the parents, I will always let the administration know. I do that---we all do that--- but I just automatically keep her updated on what we are doing because I have always done that, even though I am a classroom teacher, because I want that administrator to support me. That is what I do, I want the administration to support me.
### Table 4.2

**Protection Strategies**

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She continued,

If the administration is not going to like the way I handle things, I would rather know it now and figure out a way that would be a good way to handle the situation or the parent. I don’t want to find out after the fact that I really could have or should have handled this differently. So if I have some issue coming up with parents, I would always go to the administration and say, “here is what happened, here is how I handled it, I just want you to know what is going on, “and that really, really served me really well as a classroom teacher, and I do the same thing now.
Obviously, keeping the administration informed increased the level of trust between Wright and the administration; furthermore, she could more easily win support from the administrators because she also showed respect for the authority of principals.

Second, it is important for some participants to acquire the skill of self-deprecating humor and acknowledging mistakes when mishaps happened. For example, Belinda said,

So you have to be ready for the worst and the best because you never know what is going to happen. You need to learn to laugh, not so much at the situation but at yourself, laugh at yourself. You make a decision to do things; it turns out to be the worst decision you made. You need to relax and not take it serious and to laugh about it. Laugh with other people about yourself also. Why? Because they will laugh at you. You need to say, “you know what, that is the biggest joke I have ever heard.”

Acknowledgement of mistakes and self-deprecating humor helped Belinda show the human side of leaders and to build trust with teachers. Likewise, Sierra reported that she was not hesitant to let teachers know that she was not perfect.

Third, in handling teacher-related issues, some participants avoided involving administration whenever possible. As a counselor, Sierra learned that trust building was a critical and sensitive endeavor as she had to make the difficult decision whether to approach the administration about certain teachers. She learned to build trust with teachers through avoiding involving the administration unless absolutely necessary. She reflected,

I will try to deal with the teacher first; if that is not working, then I may go to the administration for help. But generally, I think we can solve it together. Or we can pull in another resource that is not the administration to help the teacher. I just think when you bring in the administration, the teacher feels scared. Most of the time, I would not go to the administration if I don’t have to unless I feel that children are in danger.

Being considerate and discreet, Sierra built trust with teachers as she strove to address issues with the teachers themselves. Stanley was objective and matter-of-fact in her interactions with teachers due to her extensive military experience. She reflected,

I am very matter-of-fact; that has really helped because I knew a lot of new teachers,
they are taking things personally; they also put emotions in what they say. Because of my experience, I am able to say, “do this, and do in a very objective way”, or “it does not matter what I think, this is what you are doing.” So I am able to focus on children’s behavior rather than just how they feel about me.

Fourth, several participants recognized the need of being diplomatic when approaching teachers, especially in delivering unwelcome news. They stayed away from being the unwelcome messenger and from being the target of potential resentment. For example, Gayle talked about her decision to package certain changes and present them to the team:

Just recently, I went to a meeting and learned that in NCLB meetings next year, we are going to add some more things. And in the meeting I went to, it was presented as not one more new thing to put on your plate; it is just a better way to arrange your plate. So I have to come back and share that with our grade level. And I knew that they would not be happy to see that we are going to add some more responsibilities next year. But I told them the same thing they told me: “We are not going to add more to our plate; we are just going to arrange it in a better way that will be working smarter instead of harder.”

Belinda corroborated the approach adopted by Gayle:

What I did, I just went in and said I did not see any changes down the pipeline: “Okay, but we should look at this and that, but right now I do not see anything major happening.” That is the best way for me to say nothing is going to change. It is going to stay the same. I have to say it in a very diplomatic way because it is very difficult.

For Melitta, when delivering bad news, she conveyed to the group that she was just the messenger, not a decision maker. She offered an example:

Once in a while, if funding is to be needed, then I do need a principal there because it will matter what we decide if it costs money. We can’t allocate that money; a principal has to be there to do that. So [principals] are there to support me in that. They ultimately make those decisions, so the grade level knows that, too. So they don’t usually shoot the messenger--- I would be the messenger. And I have a great group that know, these aren’t my decisions, I am just bringing that information to them.

To review, participants adopted a variety of interpersonal behaviors to build trust with their teams and administrators. Besides using positive interpersonal behaviors, participants also utilized protective interpersonal behaviors to protect themselves and maintain trust with peers and principals. Some participants readily admitted personal mistakes and used humor to smooth
things over; some participants avoided being the messenger of bad news; some carefully circumvented the administration to maintain trust with the teachers, while others actively built trust with the administration by keeping them informed. Although participants varied in the adoption of interpersonal behaviors, they all faced the formidable task of building and maintaining trust with both teachers and administrators without getting caught in the middle.

*Tactic 2: building we-ness.*

For participants in this study, building we-ness was both an influence and a protection tactic. As discussed in previous sections, building we-ness helped develop trust between teacher leaders and forge team ownership of grade-level affairs. When it came to protection, the common identity of “we-ness” helped participants deflect criticism by stressing certain decisions as a team product. For example, Belinda was careful not to let teachers quote her words; instead, she stressed the collective status of group decisions. She recalled one incident in which she and the group talked about scheduling:

> It is very difficult; you do not want them to go back and say that I say [scheduling] is a waste of time, that is what happened in the beginning. People would go back and say I said this, and I said that. We discussed something as a group, and we came to consensus, what we leave in there stays there.

She reflected on how she built we-ness at the grade level to fend off possible attacks:

> But you know, when I have problem with that, I want to make sure everybody had their say, negative, positive, I do not care what you have to say; I want you to say it in front of all of us, so we all know where you are coming from. And it is up to everybody to say that: “you know, she was right because this is what she said.” I think that is the best way to deal with anything. Just confront everybody at the same time, one time, so that nobody can say, “she said this.” No, no, we were all in this together, we all decided, this is what we all said.

In this case, seeking open input from teachers was both an influence and a protection tactic. It not only enabled Belinda to get input from teachers but also helped her to forestall possible
attacks by branding the decision as a collective one, which decoupled Belinda from its negative ramifications.

**Tactic 3: protecting team image.**

One surprising finding of this study was that participants were more concerned with the protection of the work group than with the protection of themselves. The tactic of protecting group image has two elements.

First, several participants reported that they were protective of group image in front of the administration and other school groups. Sherry shared her efforts to maintain a positive image of her group in front of others:

I mean, there are meetings that we go to and speak on our grade level, and you are not going to ever hear me saying bad stuff about my grade level in front of the group. I mean, no matter if we all have been at each other’s throats. I am not going to say that to another group of people. I am a third-grade representative; I am not going to sit on this table and say my group cannot get along; I am not going to do that. Whatever is going on, we will fix it.

She believed the protection of group image would build trust and promote sharing in her group:

I might say that to an administrator personally in the event that they may help me figure out a way to get everyone back together. But I won’t share that in front of other people. So I think that standing up for your group because your group is not sure how you will represent them, they will not trust you. And they are not going to feel safe enough to grow.

She continued,

So they have to know it is like a family: you don’t have one family member go to another family member and talk bad about your family, you know; you protect each other. When you are talking about representing the whole group in front of other people, I think you have to make sure that you are protecting them as far as representing them as positively as you can.

Sherry made a clear distinction between her group and other school structures. She was careful to maintain a positive image of her group even if things were not going well. Protection of group
image, on the one hand, enabled her to build trust with peers; on the other hand, it also implicitly
protected Sherry as the representative of the group she led.

Belinda had a frustrating incident in which one teacher approached the administration
behind her back with regard to certain issues in her group. This incident testified to the
importance of maintaining group image for teacher leaders. She recalled,

When I started out, there was like a lot of little subgroups within the big group, and it was
because there was a new person in our group, and that person was not accustomed to our
culture, and of cause they wanted to do something different. Because she was a regular
teacher assigned to be a special teacher, there were a lot of things we did that they did not
agree with. Because they did not agree with us, instead of coming to us and telling us,
they went straight to the administration.

She continued,

Then I went to the leadership meeting, and the AP told me that your group said this and
this. I said, “No, my group did not say this, as a group we decided that this is the action
that we will take.” And they said, “someone in your group said it.”

Belinda was irritated that the teacher approached the administration behind her back and
projected a negative image of her group and her leadership in front of the administration. She
described her feelings:

I was irritated --- not upset, but irritated because we are grown-ups and we all should be
able to get along. I don’t have to agree with everything that everybody said, but at least I
can understand where they are coming from. So I can understand why they are saying
this.

Second, one participant reported that most grade chairs covered up problems from the
administration in Leadership Team meetings. She said,

Well, over the years, we were always told, hearing that new people are taking over as
grade-level chairs, you just, every time they will say, “when you go to leadership, you
just say everything is fine, you just say it,” it is like you sitting in the meetings, that was
what everybody does; [principals] will go around the table, and ask, “what is happening
in your grade-level?” “Oh, we are fine, we are fine”. “Do you need anything?” “No, we
do not need anything,” and then you know, each grade level is behind the scenes and just,
you know, fighting like that.
She suggested that cover-ups were a norm for teacher leaders when it came to interacting with the administrators.

Sherry quintessentially described why teacher leaders chose not to be forthcoming with administration in a vivid way:

Like sometimes when you sit with principal, you do not want the principal to see your dirty laundry, you know; you do not want them to know you have trouble with something. You do not want your superior to know you have trouble.

Most teacher leaders deemed or were influenced to deem it necessary to present a positive and unified group image to the school administrators whenever possible. The traditional superior/subordinate power relationship dictated that it was in the interest of the subordinates to withhold information from the superiors. The tactic of protecting group image also supported the assertion that the participants perceived their power relationship with the administrator as unequal, which is rather significant considering the fact that shared-governance structures at Bell Mountain Elementary had been institutionalized for years.

*Tactic 4: creating a safe team environment.*

Besides the protection of group image, several participants aimed to build trust with teachers by creating a safe and trusting environment for teams. Sherry perceived that it was particularly important to create a safe team environment in times of change.

We have lot of changes lately in our curriculum--- we have a new spelling incentive, we have new math adoption. So I feel like communication is the key, making sure every one knows their voice is ready to be heard, and whatever they have to say, it is a safe place to say it. It is just us, if you really have trouble with this, let us know, we can help. It is not like you get into trouble for saying I have to do this thing. So I think creating a safe environment in change and also staying together and communicating are the two biggest areas you are trying to lead in the midst of change.

In the implementation NCLB initiatives, Gayle allowed teachers at her grade-level to voice different opinions freely. She put it this way:
The NCLB has been a big pill to swallow this year. But now this year, we are taking two of these planning times to have an NCLB meeting. Last summer, when we were planning that, we knew that it would be difficult for teachers to understand. So I just tried to let them to voice their concerns and opinions and validate.

She continued,

Allowing them freedom to say whatever they want, and they know that they have the confidence of the group; nobody else is going to say anything, even if I say, “I think I do not like it, and I do not want to do it.” That is okay; they can say they do not like it, they are not going to do it. Nobody is going to go and say, and tell anybody else, and like get reported to anybody. So, I guess, just freedom for them, freedom of speech to say what they want about it, express their feelings but know that it is not going to be reported to anybody.

To summarize, trust building was a particularly difficult task for middle-level teacher leaders. The findings of this study suggested that the participants were more concerned with and more effective in building trust with peers than with school administrators. Even though participants identified more with peers, they still were very thoughtful in building trust with them through a series of interpersonal behaviors aimed at building a safe, tolerant, and trusting team environment. Teacher leaders in this study actually helped perpetuate the norm of equality in work groups to build trust with teachers.

*Strategy 2: Organizational Analysis*

The strategy of organizational analysis was a key component of the theme of protection strategies in the study. Although trust building laid the foundation or intervening conditions for protection, only in social interactions could participants assess situations, make judgments of people and events, and take appropriate protective actions for themselves and their groups. The data suggest that participants constantly diagnosed their interactions with teachers and administrators and acted accordingly. The strategy of organizational analysis includes three tactics: diagnosing group, diagnosing administration, and diagnosing school structures.
Tactic 1: diagnosing group.

At the group level, participants mainly tried to identify the person or persons they could trust and those who were potential troublemakers. The tactic of diagnosing group includes two elements. First, they studied the personalities of group members. For example, Sierra reflected on the importance of knowing everybody:

I think, as a leader, you have to know the players in the game, so part of being a leader is knowing who you can trust, who you cannot trust so much, who is on your side, who is not on your side. I think knowing that the people you are working with, even as an employee, but especially as a leader, I think you have to be intoned with those things, even knowing your administration.

She further elaborated,

So I think the way I protect myself being a counselor is by knowing these things about people. I lead in a way that they can be led. So I might not talk to you the same way I talk to her. So I try to talk to you in a way that you can hear me the best, and I don’t have to be productive. I may talk to her something whole differently from you, but I am taking you to the same place.

Sierra felt that leadership was like a game and she had to know the personalities of teachers to act accordingly. She used the analogy of a game to describe her experiences:

I think it is like a game, you have to know the rules of the game; you don’t always have to play by the rules, but you have to know the rules. So you have to know where you can bend the rules and where you cannot bend the rules. And who you can bend the rules with, and who you cannot bend the rules with. My job, working in the school is a huge game. There are so many people in this building with so many different personalities that in order to be an effective leader, you really have to understand different personalities. There are some people that you need to talk to very firmly and not giving a lot of room for discussion.

Sierra shared how she took actions based on teachers’ different personalities:

Some will come in and say to me, “This is what I wanted to do, what you think?” And I know that I cannot give that person much room and then they will take it too far. So I will say, “No, you cannot do that, it will not work. Come up with another plan.” There are other people, if I talk about it firmly too, they will be very offended and they will not come back to me again. So there are other people, I would say, “let us think about it together, do you think that it will work?” So you have to know the personalities; then you also have to know who you can trust.
Likewise, Belinda actively sought to grasp the personalities of group members in leadership activities; she reflected,

I am learning things about myself that I did not know before. I am learning, I think a lot of times before I say something. Before I never took time to analyze that, so personally it affected me in a positive way; I have a lot more patience with grown-ups. Now I see grown-up’s point of view; I get to study everybody, cause I am that type of person. I examine the person; I can tell you when I say this, I know who is going to react, because that person is not going to like it. You have to study the members of your group. And you have to know them. Once you know them, you can live happy because whatever you said, you know she is going to be upset about that, she is going to be okay with it. If you know that, it makes life easier.

Second, participants used their previous leadership experiences to diagnose group.

Wright, a veteran grade-level chair, believed that her job was made much easier because she had been a leader of the same group for several years. When asked about how she promoted open sharing at her group level, she reflected,

One aspect of it is that I have been with the same four people for several years, so we know each other very well. Any shyness would be off a long time ago. Everyone’s opinion is valued; therefore, they feel they can contribute, and I think that has just grown overtime.

In contrast, things were a little bit rocky for Payton, who had only recently assumed her first term as grade chair. She said,

I am trying to get into a position kind of managing, you know; if there is any kind of tension or things like that, I am not very good at that. I am learning as I go. It is something I am trying to work on; I am not strongest voice on the grade-level; there are teachers on the grade level who have been teaching much longer than I am. So I am very new.

Her diagnosis of the presence of other stronger voices at her grade level led Payton to take a cautious approach in embracing changes. As discussed earlier, Payton was reluctant to push veteran teachers to accept changes initiated by new teachers at the grade level. Payton also hinted that she found it hard to deal with subgroups at the grade level:
So even among the 12 of us, there are subgroups, and you can turn to these people for support, as long as it doesn’t become to be one of those things that is us against them. as long as we are open to sharing, that will be fine.

Belinda also reported the existence of sub-groups. In one case, some teachers went so far as to approach the administration directly behind her back. As a result, Belinda was forced to use confrontational tactics with the teachers involved. Although only two participants explicitly mentioned the presence of sub-groups in their work groups, it was clear that the identification and taming of sub-groups constituted a major challenge for them. Clearly, participants actively engaged in constant organizational analysis of work groups, which helped them identify potential friends or foes and to take corresponding actions.

Tactic 2: diagnosing administration.

Another target of organizational analysis for the participants was the school administrators. Participants diagnosed administration mainly from concrete events of their interactions with the administrators. Almost all the participants reported a favorable impression of the school administrators. Participants generally felt free and willing to approach their administration when they needed help. Sherry provided an example of how the principal took time to help her deal with one student:

Last year, I had a student who repeatedly made very bad choices. And I went to the office; the principal was the only one there. She was very happy to come and talk to my student in the hall. It was a very busy day for her, lot of things going on; I did not want her to come and talk to him. But she said, “no, no, I will come.” She took time out of her busy morning and spoke to the kid in the hall, and that did a world of good for that student because he had never been spoken to directly by someone in the school. I think that principal truly understands disruption of classroom is going to disrupt everybody.

Events like this one encouraged Sherry to seek future support from school administrators. Wright also perceived the school administration as open and attentive:

We are very fortunate in this school because we have very open interaction and relationships with the administrators. They always wanted to talk, want to listen; they
may not really change anything. They are always willing to listen. So if I had something that I felt like that I needed to talk to them about, I will just make an appointment, or I just drop in if their doors are open and they are available. If that is inconvenient, I will make an appointment. I will do that without hesitation.

Sierra felt that the school administration trusted her to make decisions:

I think the number one way [principals] empower me is that they trust me as a professional. So therefore they can say to me, “okay, here is the problem, what do you think?” And then they listen to my answer. So I know they believe in me, so I feel comfortable and confident in going solving these problems. So I would say they empower me mostly by trusting me and letting me try it and maybe fail, but they will support me if I do, and they will help try again. So they give me the opportunities to practice my leadership skills, I guess, but without trust, I don’t think I would be able to have opportunities to be a leader.

From interactions with the school administrators, participants felt the administration to be open, trustful, caring, and approachable. As a result, participants felt safe approaching the school administration for help and taking initiatives on their own. But there were also signs of discord in teacher leader-principal relationships. For example, one participant gave a detailed example of how she learned not to trust one administrator when her mentoring relationship with the veteran teacher did not go well. She recalled:

When I first came in here, I did not know who I can trust, I was still learning. Someone asked me--- the other counselor, we are both counselors--- and our personalities are very different. So my first year, she was supposed to be my mentor, but for me it was just hard to be mentored by her because we were very different. So it was easier for me to just figure it out on my own.

She continued,

So I had meeting with one of the administrators, and the administrator asked me, “Tell me how is going on with your mentor.” So I said, “You know everything is fine,” and she said, “No, I really want to know, this is confidential between you and me.” So unfortunately I said ;“You know, honestly, it is not working great, but it is more me than her, just not working that great.” That administrator told another administrator who told the other counselor, who came to my room and said, “what is wrong?” So then I knew that there are things I could tell that administrator, but not everything.
Sierra reflected on what she learned from this incident:

> What happened was it turned into a gossip thing, and then I looked like an idiot, and I had to explain to [the veteran counselor] why I was talking about it behind her back. Yes, it was awful. When talking about protecting yourself, I think you do have to protect yourself by knowing the players, but you also have to be an effective leader by knowing your players.

Regardless of the positive or negative experiences teacher leaders derived from diagnosing social interactions, they learned to know the players in leadership functions, which was a crucial part of their experience of organizational politics. Based on the results of organizational analysis, participants either actively approached peers or administrators in leadership functions or retreated to a safe distance.

**Tactic 3: diagnosing school structures.**

The final target of organizational analysis was related to the larger school structures. Their experiences and perceptions of various school structures influenced participants to either embrace or question these structures. The tactic of diagnosing school structures included two elements.

First, participants *diagnosed the natures of school structures and acted accordingly.* As the School Council representative, Browning perceived the difference in functions between Leadership Team meetings and School Council meeting, which in turn led her to take differing actions. For Browning, her experiences of School Council influenced her to take the role of an observer. She perceived the School Council to be mostly information-sharing in nature:

> [the school council] was not a lot of work, but it was very informative. We learned about the real inner-workings of the school system, not just our school. We have guest speakers almost every time we met monthly for two years: we have a nutritionist from the county office, we have different special ed leaders coming to talk to us about different special ed programs. The School Councils consists of teachers, parents, and community leaders, so a lot of times we, the two of teachers, know what is going on, but it was to inform the community leaders and parents what is going on in the school.
Despite being the vice chairperson of the School Council, Browning felt that the principal set the agenda for the school council and that her role was mainly that of a facilitator. She said,

The principal sets the agenda based on how we close the previous meetings. She would ask the representatives what else were they interested in learning about the school, and sometimes just regular discussion such as nutrition, “how did you decide what is served in the cafeteria?” She will contact the nutrition department and have some of them from county office come.

She continued,

The other teacher and I, our role was the facilitator for the school. If the parents had a question about how something is being done, we very much participated in the conversation at the meetings. So we, at every meeting, give teachers’ perspectives to the topic being discussed.

On the other hand, Browning perceived Leadership Team meetings to be the governing body for Bell Mountain Elementary. Thus, she played a more active role in it. She explained,

Leadership meeting is the governing body for the school. With the principals and AP, there are several ad hoc members, like gifted and special education areas, but it has one representative from each grade level on it. Leadership team governs the school under the guidance of the principal, and that was what the principal would do, bring topics of the school council to the leadership meetings.

Browning talked about her role in the leadership meeting:

I like that role. When you are in leadership team, you really know the goings of this school, you really know what is going on, you really are aware of everything that is happening. Then you are just the liaison person between the administration and your grade level. The leadership member is just a channel of the flow of information between the administration and everybody in the school.

Clearly, Browning’s experiences and diagnosis of School Council and Leadership Team determined the different roles she played. Overall, Browning reported positive experiences of school structures and her subsequent active involvement in those structures.

Second, participants diagnosed school structures from their experiences in these structures. For example, one participant expressed doubts about the purpose of shared-governance structures:
I talked to a couple of people in leadership, and I question the role sometimes because with other administrators too. This is the first time I am on leadership, but you know we always participated in the League of Professional Schools; we talked about shared-governance. It is like, other principals that we had in the past was like, “I would laugh at it.” This is not shared governance, this is what she said, and this is what we do.

As a result, this participant experienced confusion and hesitation over whether to raise certain issues at the Leadership Team meetings because she did not want to look bad; she shared,

You know, it is kind of like, if we had concerns, if you bring it up in leadership, sometimes it is almost like not getting reprimanded, but it is like, “why would you even think to go there?” You know, you are in the middle, it is like you want to help your grade level; you want to bring up these issues. By the same token, you are not sure they want to hear it.

Doubtful of the role of Leadership Team meetings as an open forum, she conceived her role as mainly a channel of information between administrators and teachers on the grade level:

So, I don’t know if there are any other schools that actually do have talk, a good communication back and forth about grade-level struggling with this: “what can you do to help us?” It is like, “there is so much I want to tell you, can I say anything?” I had to ask a question last time we met. I said, “I don’t know, is it the appropriate time to ask a question?” I asked the question and got the answer, and I was just like this the whole time because I did not want anybody to get upset, but I don’t know; I feel like it is a just way for them to give back the information and to take it back to a bigger scale.

This participant’s diagnosis of Leadership Team meetings led her to play a more cautious role. She sought to protect herself by avoiding raising sensitive issues and assuming a passive role as a medium for information flow. Of all the participants, only one participant explicitly raised questions about school structures.

To review, participants in this study constantly diagnosed social interactions on three levels: group, administration, and school structures. They diagnosed organizational actors and structures with different approaches, which in turn influenced them to take different protective actions. Despite the differences in the results of organizational analysis, participants assessed the
social and political interactions with peers and principals and ultimately determined an appropriate course of action.

Strategy 3: Conflict Resolution

The strategy of conflict resolution relates to how teacher leaders engaged in the task of handling conflicts and also protecting themselves. As middle-level leaders, participants in this study particularly avoided conflicts and the task of conflict resolution; furthermore, they shared a special concern over how to protect themselves when faced with the formidable task of resolving conflicts. The strategy of conflict resolution includes three tactics: direct confrontation, proactive prevention, and cautious circumvention.

Sources of conflicts.

For the participants in this study, conflicts originated from several sources. First, conflict arose when there were disagreements over teaching philosophies and values. For example, Payton was caught in the middle when instructional changes initiated by new teachers encountered opposition from some veteran teachers on the grade level. Belinda also experienced conflict when new teachers on her grade level disagreed with established practices.

Second, teacher leaders invariably generated resentment and conflicts when exercising leadership functions. For example, Payton recalled an incident in which she was instructed by school administrators to keep silent about a possible new addition to the staff at her grade level; her silence on this issue frustrated peers. Payton remembered,

But it has several things coming up that I had to keep my mouth shut; for instance, when we added a new teacher, I knew a month and a half in advance that we are having a new teacher, a couple of months into the school year. But I was not allowed to say anything about it, and there was a lot of concern on the grade level. There was a lot of concern with the teachers wondering what they were going to do, how they put us in the class, how this is going to affect the parents. That is an unusual situation for us because we never had to add a teacher before like that. I did feel like some of the teachers resented the fact that I knew some of the things that they did not know.
Third, participants were unwittingly entangled in conflicts when certain administrative policies did not sell well with the teachers. For example, Payton recalled that teachers were upset when the administration prohibited teachers from bringing their own children during the periods of pre-planning and post-planning. Finally, participants ran into conflict with other grade levels over the arrangement of scheduling and instruction time.

*Tactic 1: direct confrontation.*

Only one participant used the tactic of direct confrontation to resolve conflicts when one teacher new to the grade level approached the administration behind her back. Belinda was infuriated when the administration approached her and caught her off guard. She explained:

Because [the new teachers] did not agree with us, instead of coming to us and telling us, they went straight to the administration. Then I went to the leadership meeting, and AP told me that, “your group said this and this.” I said, “No, my group did not say this, as a group we decided that this is the action that we will take,” and they will say, “someone in your group said it.”

Deeply irritated, Belinda immediately called a grade-level meeting to confront the teachers involved:

What I had to do was that I have to go back to the group, the whole group, and I called a meeting. I said, “okay, this was the different points of view, you said this and this, but the consensus of the group was this. Even though we all agree this is the way we do things. We all were in this plane. Someone said behind my back and behind the groups’ back; right now, I would like everyone, if you know a knowledge of this, please bring it on now in front of everybody because I do not like the ‘he says, she says thing’.

Belinda then described the results of this confrontation: “And the person that did it did not face up and said that they did it. On a later date, I got an email saying, “maybe what I told this person, they took it wrong way.” This open confrontation was clearly a breach of the norm of courtesy for participants when interacting with peers. In this incident, Belinda was prompted to take extreme confrontational action because her image and the image of her group were in jeopardy in the eyes of school administrators. Interestingly, Belinda justified her action by stressing the need
to maintain the integrity of group decisions. The intensity of this protective action also testified to the paramount importance of protecting self image and group image for Belinda.

**Tactic 2: proactive prevention.**

Of all the participants, only Sherry used the tactic of proactive prevention to contain potential conflicts on her grade level. She said,

I think taking things, not wanting things to get big. I can think of some examples that we kind of put things back on track early, so that did not get to be big disagreements that might divide the grade level. Like perhaps a teacher is not satisfied with the playground rotation. And some one is not ready to take kids out when they are supposed to. Well, instead of letting that fester and getting bigger and bigger, and let the teachers get upset, just stop it right there, make sure everybody is on track and just lay out the ground rule, just remember this is why we have to do this. And just make it very non-confrontational, non-threatening, because at that point it is tiny. And if you did something that it is a tiny wrong, it is no big deal. But the bigger it is, the more alienated people get.

**Tactic 3: cautious circumvention.**

Most of the participants carefully circumvented conflictive situations through cautious interaction or by bringing in outside resources. The tactic of cautious circumvention included two elements. First, some participants protected themselves by involving the administration when faced with conflicts. Wright involved the school administration when she wanted gifted resource teachers on other grade levels to attend school county meetings. She said,

At this school, we have classroom teachers on each grade level with gifted certification. They plan and work with the resource teachers, so all the resources teachers really need to attend the county meetings because they have been go back to their grade levels that they work with. And so we had to discuss with our administration; we had to go to the county level and get approval for that. There are steps that we have to go through, so that was one issue for our grade level. There is a desire for everyone to attend, there was a need for everyone to attend, and so we addressed that, went to the administration, and got it worked out.

Wright did not personally take up the difficult and unpopular task of asking other teachers to attend county meetings; instead, she protected herself from unpleasant situations by resorting to
the authority of principals. Browning also involved the school administration when faced with certain sensitive issues:

If I have a delicate situation, if someone was doing something wrong that I can help them with, I would go to them and talk to them directly. If it is something insensitive, say, a dress code violation, you know, something that I am not comfortable with or something that they are doing that I would feel a little uncomfortable, then I will let the administration handle it.

Second, some participants sought to resolve conflict by transferring the task to various school structures. Melitta raised grievances to school structures when teachers on her grade level had to give up instruction time to attend NCLB meetings at other grade levels. She explained,

At each grade level, they requested that special education go to their grade levels, so if you have second-grade children in special ed, then you go to second-grade planning period. But that is not your planning period, so you have to leave children’s instruction time to your paraprofessional to go to the planning period for NCLB, which we think is wrong because you are taking away instruction time; that is going to leave someone behind. So it is not right; they don’t have the bucks worked out, we feel. We have a representative on NCLB committee, she expressed that. And the compromise this year is special Ed teacher will go to two meetings a month instead of two a week.

As middle level leaders without much structural power, participants in this study mainly took passive, evasive, and protective approaches to solving conflicts. Participants generally avoided being involved in conflicts or unpleasant situations; they carefully brought in the administration and referred sensitive issues to school structures, particularly those issues that were authoritative in nature. On the other hand, teacher leaders were sometimes forced to take aggressive actions when personal and group images were in jeopardy. It was noteworthy that participants in this study not only protected themselves but also actively protected group image and group interests, such as instruction time for teachers on the grade-level.
**Strategy 4: Managing the Grey Area**

Despite their best efforts to build trust with teachers and administrators, some participants still felt that they were caught in the grey area of confusing identities and loyalties. Even though most participants clearly aligned themselves with teachers, they had to find ways of protecting themselves in handling the delicate situations of middle-level leadership. The strategy of managing the grey area includes three tactics: avoiding being caught in the middle, being cautious in communication, and transmitting/withholding information.

**Tactic 1: avoid being caught in the middle.**

The difficulty and delicacy of middle-level leadership led participants to avoid being caught in the middle whenever possible. For example, Sierra reflected on the difficult position of being on both teams:

I guess all leadership job is such a fine line because I have to be loyal to the administration but I also have to be loyal to the teachers. So I am sort of in the grey area. I am one of them, but I am not one of them. I have to play on both teams, so that is a fine line that is taking me---this is my third year--- it is taking me a while to figure out how to build trust with both of them.

She continued,

Because I am really on both teams, but I am really on everyone’s team, that is the hardest part, being a team player. But I think, you have to know your role, and remember that you are really here for the good of the school, the good of the children, not just care for you. I struggle with that grey area. And because I am more like a teacher, I am also friends with teachers, so then the line between friend and professional gets very blurry.

Besides continuing to try to build trust with both teams, Sierra carefully avoided getting caught in the middle when tough issues came up, she explained,

I learned this from the AP: getting people to solve problems and handle things face-to-face with someone instead of coming to me and complain about it, or going to the administration and complain about it. So they came to me, I said, “okay, did you talk to the person about it? If you didn’t, it did not really get solved.” It is not always what they want to hear, but at least they know that I am not going to get in the middle of it, and if it is a big enough problem, they will try by themselves to work it out.
Tactic 2: being cautious in communication.

The delicacy of teacher leadership required the participants to be doubly cautious in interacting with both teams, particularly with regard to verbal and written communication. Belinda was careful to assume a measured tone when talking with teachers. She made a point of avoiding either dampening or overencouraging teachers. She reflected,

And I measure my words very carefully, which is something I did not do before, because I did not have to: I was just member of the pack. I can just say whatever. But as a leader, I have to learn that my words are the ones going to create the climate. If I speak negatively, forget about it. If I speak positively, I am bringing up the hopes a little bit too much. So the best would be always in between. So if the worst happens, they cannot say that I made them believe that everything is okay. The better would be, wow, it turned out to be okay, You have to be very careful; you have to know how to play the game. You have to be ready for the best and be ready for the worst.

Belinda learned to protect herself from possible blame by striking a delicate balance between being positive and negative in her interaction with teachers.

Likewise, participants were very careful and measured when interacting with the school administration. Several participants mentioned that they carefully checked their requests before submitting them to administrators. Melitta provided an example in which she gave input to the administration about room assignments for the next school year:

For one thing, we have to think about what is best for everyone, and then we also have to think about what the administration wants and what they will accept. And not that we could tell them what we want, but we want to tell them something that will be acceptable to everyone. I pointed out to them, you can tell them you want the principal’s office, but you are not going to get it. So why would you tell them that? We have to be reasonable here. So I think by pointing out--- reminding them that we have to see the bigger picture.

Similarly, Merrilyn carefully monitored her tone and wording when communicating with school administrators:

I make every effort to present us in a positive light. So if I send an email, if I have to ask a question, I try to be really careful about how I word that because email is difficult: you may say something, people may perceive it differently. So I just make every attempt to think carefully before I communicate because I do not want to send any mixed messages
or any negative messages. So that is what I tried to do, and think through thoroughly any request that I make, any questions that I ask so that I work appropriately.

**Tactic 3: transmitting/withholding information.**

As leaders of the school, teacher leaders had access to a wide range of information that was not readily available to rank and file teachers. Access to information carried mixed blessings for participants. On the one hand, the possession of information broadened the limited power base of teacher leaders; on the other hand, the acquisition of information also generated resentment and misunderstanding. The tactic of transmitting/withholding information includes two elements.

First, participants strategically presented information to shield themselves from potential harm. Sherry reminded herself to avoid putting a personal spin on information when relaying it from the school to the grade level. She shared,

> I mean, when you are the middleman, you have to relay the message. You can not put spin on it; you have to say it the way it is said, and later if they want your opinion of it, you can say your opinion of it, but when you are delivering it, you have to be as pure as you can as far as the message. You have to keep that message pure all the way through. If the principal says something, and I changed it and tweaked it to my own opinion and give it to them, that is not fair to them because they did not hear the true message; they just hear my filtering of it. That is not fair to them.

Conscious of being the middleman, Sherry was careful to relay a pure message from the administration down to the grade level. She made a distinction between relaying messages and giving her personal opinion of the message content. She perceived putting a personal spin on the message not only was unfair to teachers but also could put her into trouble.

Second, some participants withheld unwelcome information from the grade level to avoid upsetting the status quo. For example, Gayle learned to package or to sweeten information to make it acceptable to teachers; she packaged incoming changes as ways of doing old things
better. It is worth pointing out that teacher leaders also withheld information from school administrators, particularly information related to certain group affairs.

To review, teacher leadership positions unavoidably put the participants in difficult and delicate positions with regard to both administrators and teachers. To protect themselves, participants in this study adopted a cautious stand when communicating with teachers and administrators. Furthermore, participants strategically presented information or withheld it from both teachers and administrators to sell changes and fend off potential resentments.

Summary of Protection Strategies

The theme of protection strategies included the strategies of trust building, organizational analysis, conflict resolution, and management of grey areas. Trust building and organizational analysis laid the foundation and intervening conditions for protection strategies. Building trust helped participants establish a broad trustful environment that minimized the need for protection. Organizational analysis enabled the participants to take appropriate protective actions based on their experiences of social interactions with teachers and administrators; these protective actions were especially important during conflicts, given the delicacy of middle-level leadership.

It was apparent that teacher leadership positions inevitably required participants to protect themselves and work groups in their leadership functions. At the same time, teacher leaders in this study had a limited reservoir of resources and strategies to engage in self and group protection. Notably, while participants reported more ease in influencing teachers than administrators, they found it equally daunting to protect themselves from both teachers and administrators. Furthermore, participants took a more active role in influencing others, whereas they mainly withdrew and took a more cautious stand when it came to protection.
Finally, the target of protection for teacher leaders occurred at two levels: self and work groups. Interestingly, all participants in this study relied exclusively on their personal power for protection; there was no evidence of the “dark” side of politics at play, such as interest groups and coalition building.

*Theme Three: Influencing Factors*

Several factors shaped the participants’ influence and protection attempts. Data analysis suggests that influencing factors were either internal (i.e., specific to each participant) or external (i.e., organizational factors). The theme of influencing factors includes internal and external influencing factors (see Table 4.3).

*Internal Factors*

Internal influencing factors refer to those factors related to the unique characteristics, background, and circumstances of the participants. Internal factors in this study were entry into leadership, perception of self in school decision making, and personal background.

*Entry into leadership.*

At Bell Mountain Elementary, teachers could take on leadership roles in the following ways: principal appointment, volunteer, election, automatic ascension, and being approached by peers (see Table 4.4). More than half of the participants (61%) entered into leadership roles by volunteering or being approached by peers. Only 23% of all participants were appointed by the principal or through the election process. And 15% of all participants became automatic leaders due to their roles as school counselors. This factor includes three elements.

First, a significant number of participants *volunteered for teacher leadership positions.* There was a norm of rotating teachers at the grade level to take leadership roles; for example, Payton volunteered for grade-level leadership because of the rotation. She explained:
Table 4.3

Influencing Factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme Three: Influencing Factors</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Internal Factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Entry into Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Personal Background</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Perceptions of Self in Decision Making</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. External Factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Leadership Style of School Principals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• School Contexts</td>
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<td>• Group Contexts</td>
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<td>• Time</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

We got several teachers who have been kindergarten level for several years since the school opened. One has been on grade leadership twice; the other has been around for a while, working part-time at this point. So they were ready for someone else to take a turn; last year I was doing a lot with the money, handling all the money we have to spend that was down from the county or state or whatever. I feel like it is my turn, so I volunteered, not necessarily regretting it. It has been another year of growth for me.

Likewise, Stanley decided to volunteer for a leadership role because of the rotation and her interest for the teaching of math and science.

Well, there was vacancy, the grade-level, as far as that was concerned; I was the only one who hadn’t done it. Some grades they really vie for. But for us, if you want it, you get it. That is as far as that is concerned. But, with others, I love math/science, so I asked for that quality team. For that reason, I also volunteered to be on the ecology club and to do the science fair.
Table 4.4

Distribution of the Means of Ascending into Leadership

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Means of Taking Leadership Roles</th>
<th>Number of People (N=13)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Volunteer</td>
<td>5 (Payton, Gayle, Merrilyn, Stanley, Wright)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being Approached by Peers</td>
<td>3 (Belinda, Melitta, Sherry)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal Appointment</td>
<td>2 (Gary and Lawrie)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Automatic Leadership (School Counselors)</td>
<td>2 (Sierra, Joyce)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Election</td>
<td>1 (Browning)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Second, some participants were encouraged and even pushed to take leadership roles by peers. For example, Belinda talked about how she was approached by group members who noted the leadership qualities she possessed:

I was pushed by my group. You become the leader for the year’s span. This is my sixth year here. The first years, someone else was the leader when I got here. And then is the time for somebody to get the job. And everybody else has done it. There are really only two of us that did not do it. I was approached in a very nice and polite way if I could represent the group for the following year.

She reflected on why she was approached for the leadership role:

The reasons that they wanted me to do it is because they think I was very calm, stable, even though I was very active and energetic. I am very calm when I come to certain things. They think I was very professional in the way I carry myself. Their opinion was that they felt that I would be a very good representative for them. And I think, the way they put it is, since there are two of us, they do not see that person as speaking for them, though she was very nice. After most of them pleaded, I accepted it and said I will try. I really enjoyed it.

Clearly, indigenous selection of teacher leaders allowed the work group to choose the leader they saw fit instead of having to accept the one appointed by principals who might be unfamiliar with
group. Indigenous selections of teacher leaders also testified to the fact that the school principals empowered teachers and were willing to delegate power.

Third, the local selection of teacher leaders had a positive effect on participants’ political interactions. For example, when asked whether she was worried about changing positions in front of teachers, Belinda said,

No, because I am someone [teachers] appointed, I would look at it differently. I might say, “they may not like me. This is their choice.” So I kind of embrace it in a different way, but if I self-proclaimed myself, you know what I mean, it will be different. I was begged to do this because they thought it was the best option.

Belinda implied that she felt more empowered and unrestrained in her leadership role due to the being approached by the group. On the other hand, she would have felt more constrained if she had been appointed by the principal or had proclaimed herself as group leader. As a result, Belinda did not hesitate to push group members to learn computer technology and to seek professional development. Belinda also confronted teachers directly when her image and the group image was at stake in the eyes of administrators. Clearly, indigenous selection of leaders not only enabled work groups to choose the most qualified leaders but also empowered the chosen teacher leader to act more proactively and unrestrainedly.

The fact that only two out of thirteen participants had been appointed by school administrators also had an impact on teacher leaders’ political interactions. Teacher leaders who had not been appointed by school principals could avoid being seen as the principal’s point man, which reduced teacher suspicion and helped teacher leaders identify more with the teachers than with administrators. For example, most participants chose to build a closely-knit team as the major influence strategy with teachers. However, this strategy would have been much more difficult to accomplish if they had been appointed by school principals.
To review, the way participants entered into leadership roles proved to be a crucial factor that influenced teacher leaders’ political interactions. At Bell Mountain Elementary, indigenous selection of teacher leaders took hold and gave teachers more power to choose and volunteer for leadership roles. This phenomenon also corroborated its status as a “high-implementing” shared-governance school in the League of Professional Schools.

In addition, the norm of rotating teachers at Bell Mountain Elementary created a community of leaders that facilitated teacher leaders’ leadership functions. For example, some were upset when Payton had to withhold information about the addition of new teachers to her grade level, but some teachers who had been in leadership roles were more understanding. Payton recalled,

> You know, I think the grade level at that time was kind of upset that I didn’t say a whole lot. The teachers who have been here for years kind of know that it is, especially some of those who have been in leadership before. There are a lot of things on needs-to-know basis. And I have learned that myself this year.

**Perception of self in decision making.**

Another important internal factor was how the participants perceived themselves not only in group and school decision making but also in their delicate roles as middle-level leaders. Participants constantly evaluated their roles in social interactions and acted accordingly. The factor of perception of self in decision making includes three elements.

First, some participants held a narrowed view of their leadership functions. For example, Mellitta perceived herself as having limited roles in school decision making:

> I have been leader for two school years. And most of here has been, someone above me has made the decision. And I then bring that info and help my people accept that. If I was making the decision, I would have my people all studying and coming to the conclusion together; this would be the best. But I am kind of caught in the middle as a leader. So I don’t know, right off hand, how I can use it here. This is how a leader should be though.
She continued,

But when someone is telling you, “this is what you have to do.” then it is hard to say, “okay, we are going to study this and see how we would do it.” You just have to do it. So, in that case, as a leader here, I think you have to support the decision that was made and help them see the bigger picture quickly so they accept it and do it willingly, not grudgingly.

Melitta clearly felt that she was not a decision-maker at the school but was obligated to support any decisions that were passed down from above. She also felt caught in the middle between teachers and administrators. As a result, Melitta took limited action in influencing teachers and principals. For example, she was among the few participants who chose to use voting to arrive at group decisions. Melitta mainly perceived her role as that of a cheer leader and supporter. In terms of protection, she was cautious to involve the administration in hot-button issues.

Second, some participants perceived themselves as active decision makers in the school. Sierra had a clear and positive perception of herself as a leader in school decision making. She shared,

Because counselors in all schools are part of the leadership team, so automatically you are part of the leadership team. So I was given it because I am counselor, so I had to take it. But I enjoyed it, and I like being part of the team making decisions to help the goal and help the school run smoother.

She attributed her positive perception to the empowering principals:

I think as a leader with leaders ahead of me, I think that it is done in that way that it is not one person running the show. If that is not the case, my job as a leader would be much different; because one person at the top has given permission for the AP to give permission to the leaders, it has made my job much easier.

With a positive perception of self in decision-making, Sierra actively sought to influence teachers. As mentioned before, Sierra actively brought in other resources to help new teachers improve reading lessons. More importantly, Sierra also actively took initiative to spearhead new
programs at the school level, such as opening unprecedented parenting classes at Bell Mountain Elementary.

Overall, participants with a strong perception of self in decision making were also more prone to take on several leadership roles. For example, Sherry actively engaged in leadership roles as grade-level chair, school council representative, and facilitator of the Language Arts Quality Team. Wright not only had leadership roles at the group and school levels but also served on the Teacher Advisory Council of the county school board.

Third, participants held differing perceptions of the delicacy of teacher leadership positions. Most participants perceived leadership as a difficult and delicate task, particularly when interacting with both teachers and administrators. For example, Sierra expressed ambivalent feelings about being on both teams, and she struggled to maintain loyalty to both teams at once. Owing to the delicacy of leadership positions, Belinda struggled with how to approach grade-level teachers. She explained,

[Teacher leadership] is very delicate. You have to know the person you are talking to, first of all; you have to know what type of administrators you have. You have to know what you can tell your grade level, what you cannot tell your grade level, and how to tell them also. Like I can go to the principal and ask her opinion about scheduling; I can come up to the meeting thinking, “this is waste of time.” That would be my personal opinion, but I cannot go to the grade-level and tell them this is waste of time.

Similarly, Melitta perceived herself to be the middle-man between administrators and teachers, so she consciously let teachers know that she was just a messenger to deflect any potential resentment from teachers. The perception of the delicacy of teacher leadership also led teachers to approach school administrators cautiously. For example, Payton divulged that most teacher leaders in the school presented a rosy and unified picture of their grade levels to the administrators. In addition, Payton struggled with deciding which issues she could raise at the
leadership meetings. Thus, it can be seen that teachers who perceived the delicacy of teacher leadership positions generally approached leadership functions with special care and caution.

On the other hand, a few participants did not perceive themselves as middle-level leaders or refused to let the perception impact them negatively. For example, when asked whether she had ever felt like a middle man, Stanley responded,

Being the middle man? Is this what you are asking? I promised myself out of it. I am not the middle-man. The teachers who try to, I have discovered that people trying to do that have resentment for some reason. Most of the times it is not towards you because you are the messenger or you have to be bad guy.

Interestingly, Stanley attributed teacher resentment to their immaturity:

Usually, [teachers] are immature themselves; they do not have the experience, and they do not have the maturity, so they are trying to blame you, trying to do something to you. And I discovered that all I have to do, you know, “this is the best, this is the way we need to do it, how can I help you to do it?” Or “this has to be done tomorrow; this is what I have already done, this is what you need to do to help me.”

Refusing to be the middle-man, Stanley was direct and clear when interacting with teachers, especially when assigning tasks to teachers. She said,

And so when I do hear some griping, I say, “time out. Yesterday, I did this, this, and this. I triple booked myself here, here, and here. Now I can ask you to do this, and you can do this.” I am not that mean, you know, but sometimes I do have to do that because as a leader, we do a lot of things that they do not realize that we do.

Moreover, Stanley also chose to be frank with the administration, and she was comfortable telling the plain truth to school administrators. She also talked about the need to get rid of deadwood on the grade level to optimize it. Clearly, Stanley’s denial of being middle-man influenced her to be more open, direct, and forceful in her leadership functions.

To summarize, how teacher leaders perceived personal roles in the decision-making process and the delicacy of teacher leadership clearly shaped their political interactions. If participants viewed themselves as having limited capacity in decision making and as being
caught in the middle, they tended to have limited influence strategies and exercise more protective actions. Conversely, if participants viewed themselves as a credible voice in decision making and not merely a middle man, they were more active in influencing others; however, they were also aware of the need to take protective actions. It is worth pointing out that teacher leaders’ perceptions took form in the interaction with teachers, principals, and school structures. Based on the data, a continuum of the participants’ perceptions of self in decision making and orientation to influencing and protection strategies were presented (see Table 4.5).

**Personal background.**

Aside from school organizational structures and processes, teacher leaders’ personal background also affected their political interactions. For participants in this study, personal background referred to prior life experiences, previous leadership experiences, and personal temperament. The factor of personal background includes three elements.

First, **participants’ personal experiences affected their leadership functions.** Stanley had extensive military experience before she became a teacher and leader at Bell Mountain Elementary. Accordingly, Stanley approached leadership functions with a high degree of frankness and forcefulness that set her apart from the other participants. She reflected on how her military experience taught her to deal with impediments:

> Usually I do not let things bother me. If you are not willing to go out on a limb, you are not a good leader. I came from military; I have been a leader since I was 18, in one form or another. And so I have been in situations where you got a lot of impediments, but you are just a leader by who you are; and it is your personality and nature that makes you a leader. So the only impediments are what you allow.

Military experience helped Stanley learn how to handle impediments in leadership functions. More importantly, she developed the mentality of a strong leader despite adverse circumstances.
Table 4.5

*The Continuum of Participants’ Perceptions of Self in Decision Making and Subsequent Orientations of Influencing and Protection Strategies*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Perceptions of Self in Decision Making</th>
<th>Orientation to Influencing Attempts</th>
<th>Orientation to Protection Attempts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belinda, Sherry, Sierra, Stanley, Wright (N=5)</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Strong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Browning, Gary, Gayle, Joyce, Payton (N=5)</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Strong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lawrie, Melitta, Merrilyn (N=3)</td>
<td>Weak</td>
<td>Weak</td>
<td>Strong</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As a result, Stanley consciously refused to let the delicacy of teacher leadership affect her in a negative way.

The cultural background of Belinda, who came from another country, influenced the way she interacted with teachers. She shared,

I come from a different culture and country; I see things differently. So for me to understand what is going on in the minds of the students and parents, I will have to go back and learn things their way. My mentality is different; I cannot lead them if I do not understand where they are coming from. That is why I love going back to school.

Belinda also commented that there was a strong respect for education in her native culture. She constantly improved herself professionally by studying for a higher academic degree. Additionally, she encouraged teachers to learn computer technology and to work for higher degrees.
Second, evidence suggests that participants with prior leadership experience possessed more resources and strategies in political interactions. Moreover, they were more willing to engage in additional leadership roles. For example, Browning applied for school counselor representative position after her term as grade-level chair expired. She explained,

The school council started the year when I joined it; that was the first year of school council. Previous to that, I have been grade-level chair for three years, and that job is a two-to-three year commitment, and then that commitment was over. So when I left that commitment as grade-level chair, I thought I would like to do something else in the leadership role, and when the principal told us about the school council, I thought that would be another way I can serve.

In contrast, Payton, a first-term grade-level leader, felt that her lack of prior leadership experience restrained her leadership functions and put her on a rocky start. Payton encountered resistance from veteran teaches when she personally embraced new programs initiated by other teachers. She also did not conceive herself as the strongest voice on the grade level.

Third, the personal temperament of participants also came into play in shaping their political interactions. Wright believed that her personal qualities of being calm, realistic, and logical helped her see the big picture at the grade-level. Similarly, Belinda reflected that her calmness and professionalism facilitated her influencing and protective attempts. Payton reflected that as a “step-by-step” person, she had to make a series of leadership style adjustments, including improvements in organizational skills:

Just staying organized and trying to stay ahead of anyone has been a big thing for me this year. I am step-by-step people. Once I get pass the next pressing thing, then I think of the other. But I am trying to be someone who is more global: look at the whole picture and see what is going on because it takes a lot of stress out of me to do that.

To summarize, as organizational actors, participants invariably brought their personal background into play in their political interactions. Their life experiences, leadership
experiences, and personal temperament affected their orientation to and how they engaged in political interactions.

External Factors

Besides factors unique to each participant, another cluster of influencing factors was related to school organizational contexts, structures, and processes. The external influencing factors included five factors: leadership style of school administration, group make-up, school climate, and time.

Leadership style of school administration.

As an integral part of reform initiatives to restructure schools, the success of teacher leadership in large measure depends on school administrators. Findings from this study further suggest that teacher leaders’ political interactions were prone to the influences of the leadership style of school administrators. The factor of leadership style of school administration includes four elements.

First, participants reported that school administration at Bell Mountain Elementary was open, approachable, and visible. Almost all the participants held a positive impression of the “open-door” policy set by the school administrators. As a result, most participants felt free to approach administrators to seek help, to participate in decision making, and to take initiatives. For example, Gayle reported that she frequently walked into the principal’s office unannounced to discuss certain issues.

Second, another important trait of the administration was that the principals empowered teacher leaders. At the school, there were a variety of school structures at the grade (i.e., grade-level chair), inter-grade (i.e., quality team), and school (i.e., Leadership Team meeting and School Council) levels that afforded teachers ample opportunities to exercise leadership roles.
Furthermore, principals often stepped back and let teachers make decisions; for example, principals rarely directly appointed teacher leaders. The empowering administration at the school also encouraged autonomy and allowed teacher leaders to take initiative. For instance, principals encouraged and supported Sierra to spearhead parenting classes at the school, which let Sierra felt trusted and empowered:

[Principals] let me devise it, create it, implement it, and people came! So of course it made me feel good and encouraged me to try more things that might not be done before. They trusted me enough to say, “okay, if you think so, try it and let us see what happens.”

At Bell Mountain Elementary, principal commitment to shared-governance was apparent in a variety of ways. For example, the school administration reversed previous practices and asked grade-level chairs to develop tentative maps for classroom assignments. Although the principals still made the final decisions, participants felt that their input was actively sought after and valued. Wright shared how she felt about the process:

I do feel that teachers have a lot of input in what is taking place. The final decision may not be my final decision, may not be what I personally choose, but I have input. I think that makes it easier to deal with decisions, if I do not agree with them; I had input, other people had input. I have to understand that sometimes there are other points of view, and you look at everything; there are other points of view. I have a particular instance may be more relevant. But I appreciate having input in all of that.

Merrilyn noted that the principals assured well-rounded representation in the school:

I feel everybody is well represented in the meetings, and the principal makes sure that she hears from each person. So even though it is a large school and there are a lot of us sitting around that table, I think everyone has a chance to voice any needs or concerns. So I think that is a big positive.

Third, the principals also modeled leadership skills for teacher leaders. Sierra reflected on how the principal helped teacher leaders to develop leadership skills:

We had our leadership meetings once a month; the principal would actually do a book study on leadership, so we talked about leadership. So one way we sort of get skills by, you know, by class, by learning it, reading it, discussing it. I think she models it, and I learn personally; I learn a lot from modeling others. You know, what I like, what I do
not like; I don’t want to be like that, I want to be like that. So she is a great model. She has taught me by example, a lot of the leadership skills. She has sort of groomed us and taught us and modeled for us and coached us through the past two years so that we can even rise higher to the occasion, to be a better leader.

From observing Leadership Team meetings, it was clear that the administration was adept at modeling leadership skills for teacher leaders and involving all participants in school decision making. The principals made a point of identifying areas of support that they could provide to teacher leaders. A typical Leadership Team meeting started with a status check of the school; the principal started each meeting by asking each participant questions such as “How can we help?” and “What do we need to hear?” Furthermore, the school administration used the occasion of Leadership Team meeting to keep teacher leaders abreast of what was going on at the school.

At each Leadership Team meeting, the principal conducted a book study on leadership. The principal encouraged participants to reflect on the leadership topics of the chosen book. For example, in the meeting of February 23, 2004, the principals focused on leadership in times of change. The principal sent a memo on the topic to each participant. The memo challenged participants to take the “high road” and to pave the uncharted days with security and calmness for work teams. The memo also listed practical tips on how to approach leadership in times of change, such as sharing convictions without being contentious and persuading without power moves.

A perennial item on the agenda of a Leadership Team meeting was sharing ideas. The principal always set time aside in the meetings for participants to share ideas. In the meeting of February 23, 2004, some participants used the allotted sharing time to discuss the need for training on how to use computers to enter in-service hours for teachers. As a result of the discussion, the principal decided to develop a guide sheet for teachers on how to enter data into
the database. Clearly, at Bell Mountain Elementary, the principals went out of the way to support and to develop their teacher leaders. Principal leadership nurtured, encouraged, and facilitated the development of teacher leadership. All participants felt that the administration exerted a positive impact on their leadership functions. Wright summed up how most participants felt about the school administrators: “We are very fortunate in this school because we have very open interaction and relationships with the administrators. They always want to talk, want to listen; they may not really change anything. They are always willing to listen.”

Forth, there were a few reports that principal leadership hampered participants’ political interactions. For example, Payton recalled that she had to face teacher resentment because the school administration enforced a no personal child policy during the pre- and post-planning periods:

[The no personal child policy] had been presented in the beginning of the year. Then I think it would not be so much chaos and controversy about it with the staff members. Because it just has been something that has been done since the school was opened. But nobody really knows the reason behind it. So I could say, I know that [school administrators] make decisions for a reason; they may not feel like they need to explain them, but something like that, I think, would have just settled a lot of ruffled feathers, like if they had said that children might get hurt.

Payton felt that it was hard for her to enforce the personal child policy because the administration did not provide rationale for it. Also, despite the fact that all the participants felt that the school principals were open, supportive, approachable, and empowering, they also kept a cautious and respectful distance from the school administrators. The traditional principal-teacher power relationship still characterized the principal-teacher leader power relationships. Sherry made a tell-tale comparison of her relationships with principals and teachers. She viewed principals as her superiors, and teachers as her equals:

Like sometimes when you sit with principal, you do not want the principal to see your dirty laundry, you know; you do not want them to know you have trouble with
something. You do not want your superior to know you have trouble. [For teachers], I am not your superior. But if you don’t do that, you might start to be viewed as a superior, and you are not a group then, it is one person in charge of others. That is not the way, I think, at least in this grade level. I mean, I know the principal had to be in charge of teachers; I do not think at this level that works as positively as it should.

To review, principal leadership was a critical factor influencing the leadership functions of teacher leaders. Although the superior-subordinate power relationship constrained the principal-teacher leader interactions, principals at this school established organizational structures, processes, and norms that positively facilitated the leadership functions of the participants.

School contexts.

The school contexts indirectly influenced participants’ political interactions. School contexts include factors such as the excellence of the school, parental involvement, and school culture and norms. Bell Mountain Elementary was a “high-achieving” school in terms of student achievement. The factor of school contexts includes three elements.

First, the excellence and reputation of Bell Mountain Elementary motivated teacher leaders to work harder to live up to that good reputation. Belinda reflected on how the excellence of the school influenced her to push teachers on her grade level:

This school, the culture of the school, if I describe, is just daily superb excellence in everything that everybody does. Their goal is to do the best that is available, not the best you can do, but the best that is available. That influences me, in the sense that I want my group, I want my area, I want myself to portray what is expected at the school, which is a very high expectation. Not just do something, to say, “okay, I did it,” but to do it at the best of my ability.

She continued,

That influences me to be a leader, try to push my group, also always do something way and above, which is not difficult to do because that is the way they think also. And we have at this school a mentality: if people do it, it is meaningful. And we want to be the best for everybody.
Second, at Bell Mountain Elementary, there was a high degree of parental involvement that had a strong voice in instructional matters. Belinda talked about the need to interact with parents at the school:

Parents of the school expect the best. This is not a school where parents sit back and say, “The teachers do this in the classroom and I appreciate it.” No, they are in your face. And if they do not like something you are doing, they will tell. They expect to get the best for the kids because they look at this school as a private school. They are paying the tuition and salary. So you have to know how to interact with them; you have to know how to speak to them.

Similarly, Payton mentioned that the parents put a lot of pressure on the teachers. In the School Council meeting of April 12, 2004, one parent representative raised a series of tough questions about how teachers in the school engaged in professional development activities. The principal had to provide detailed information about the processes and the standards of professional development at the school. Clearly, parents at Bell Mountain Elementary had a strong sense of ownership of the school and indirectly influenced teacher leaders’ leadership functions.

Third, the culture, norm, and climate of the school also had a bearing on participants’ leadership functions. Sierra felt comfortable in exercising leadership due to the norm of shared-governance at school. She said,

I really think it is the way school is set up, mostly because of the principal, and that teachers allow you to be a leader also. I don’t feel like it is competitive, thinking “who are you? You are one of us, what are you doing this for?” I think it trickles down; it is really kind of shared-governance feeling.

Similarly, Gayle liked the tone of the school. But she was worried about the forthcoming change of principal at Bell Mountain Elementary:

This school is kind of unique. I have taught in lots of different schools, I love this school, I hope I can stay in this school when finally I do retire. The principals set the tone and feelings for the school. That is why we are concerned because we are getting a new principal. We have a nice feeling in the school, a nice tone.
To review, school contexts constituted the broad external environment where teacher leaders engaged in political interactions. Bell Mountain Elementary was a high-achieving school with strong parental and business involvement, staff dedication, and a well-established norm of shared-governance. These school contexts influenced teacher leaders to have the highest standard possible for themselves as leaders of the school.

*Group contexts.*

Work group was the immediate micro-environment where participants engaged in political interaction. As mentioned in the strategy of organizational analysis, participants constantly evaluated interactions and determined their subsequent political actions. The physical make-up of their work groups influenced not only the social but also the political interactions of the participants. The factor of group contexts includes two elements.

First, *group size had a bearing on the participants' leadership functions.* The size of grade levels ranged from four to thirty teachers. Melitta, the special education chair, lamented that the sheer number of teachers on her grade level made it difficult for her to perform leadership functions:

> We have grade-level meeting, it is 30 people. Most of the grade level is 9-10. We have a large group of people to get information out and to make sure they are comfortable giving me their concerns. We are so large; we live in different areas. And also very busy, we really do not get together; we tried to get together once a month. We just couldn’t do it. We wish we could have more time together.

The sheer number of people made it difficult for Melitta to interact fully with teachers. As a result, Melitta sometimes had to use voting to make group-level decisions. Similarly, Payton reported that the size of the grade level and the presence of two part-time teachers on her grade level created communication problems:

> A lot of it is sheer numbers. We have two part-time teachers. It was hard to communicate with those two classrooms. One teacher will be here on the Mondays, and we will switch
off mid-week, so we will meet again with a different teacher Thursday. Pretty much it was up to them to relay information back and forth to each other. One team was pretty good about doing it; the other was not.

In contrast, Wright had only four teachers on her grade-level. She had lunch with them everyday and turned the lunch meeting into an informal grade-level meeting.

Second, staff stability or turnover played a role in participants’ leadership functions. Wright also commented that the staff stability facilitated leadership functions, especially with regard to sharing and trust building. Similarly, Browning felt that staff stability on her grade-level enabled her to handle the delicacy of leadership functions better. She said,

In our second grade-level situation, I think we have fewer [delicate situations] because we are a very stable grade-level. Over the years many grade levels have changed four or five teachers a year. This year we have only one new teacher; last year we had two new teachers; we had several years with no new teachers. So we are a pretty stagnant group; we do not change a lot. I know these teachers very well.

Conversely, Payton felt that constant staff turnover was one of the difficulties that she faced as a leader. As discussed before, Payton encountered staff resentment because she had to withhold information with regard to the addition of a new teacher to her grade level. She felt that staff turnover contributed to staff resentment:

We never had to add a teacher before like that. I did feel like some of the teachers resented the fact that I knew some of the things that they did not know. I think everybody has just grown this year, just coming together as a team and trusting each other. I think that is a big part of it: getting to know each other. We did have such a big turnover, so many new teachers, that is a big part of it.

Staff turnover also created problems for Belinda. As discussed before, she had one incident in which a new teacher on her grade level approached the administration behind her back because the new teacher was not accustomed to the group culture.

To summarize, group contexts had a direct impact on participants’ leadership functions. The size of the work group either facilitated or constrained teacher leaders’ efforts to build
consensus, trust, and group norms; staff turnover jeopardized teacher leaders’ effort to build trust and norms at the grade level.

Time.

Time was also a crucial factor in influencing teacher leaders’ leadership functions. Most participants reported an overload in leadership activities and paperwork that took precious time away from interacting with teachers, sometimes even from their own classroom teaching. For example, Gayle lamented that an overload in meetings had a negative impact on her teaching:

The thing that can get in the way of teachers is the time spent away from the classroom for anything. If you can make one thing that makes a teacher happy is let her go to a classroom and work. Never enough time for that. Anytime you have any meeting, whatever it is, that impedes us. We want to work in the classroom with our children, preparing for our children. The only thing that get in the way is everything else you have to do, which is a lot of that.

Payton echoed the same sentiment; she felt that paperwork and meetings took much of her time:

There are so many things that you have to stay on top of it, so much paperwork. So much has to be put out to the other 11 people, then retrieve back to me, so I can compile it and send it to somebody else. So that is the biggest thing. Besides that, just to realize that we are all here to do the job, you know; our job is to teach. Sometimes I think we lose sight of it because there are so many demands. Only if they will give us enough time to teach and leave the paperwork for someone else.

For Sherry, there was not enough time to engage in collaboration with teachers even with the overload in meetings. She said,

I think time is the biggest factor. I know we need time to meet, need time to collaborate, to talk about things, but sometimes it seems like meetings are not productive enough. We work in very short spurts, we have 40 minutes before school, we have 20 minutes for lunch, we have 30 minutes for specials, we have 30 minutes after school, so sometimes I feel like our time is our biggest enemy because there is just not enough of it.

Sherry acutely felt the conflict between leadership functions and the demands on her performance in the classroom. She commented,

There is no way around that. There is not enough money to bring substitutes every time you need to, nor do we want to; it is not good for the kids. You know, how every day,
every week, every month we need to meet, so that is the biggest thing to me, how to
strike a proper balance.

Time also was the scarce resource that the participants actively sought after. As discussed before,
Melitta protected instruction time for the Special Education grade level when other grade levels
requested teachers from Special Education to attend their planning meetings.

To summarize, participants in this study experienced a significant increase in time
demands as meetings and paperwork inundated their schedules. It is noteworthy that the
implementation of NCLB at Bell Mountain Elementary required teachers to give up two
planning time periods for NCLB team meetings. As a result, participants not only had a shortage
of time for engaging in leadership functions but also experienced a conflict in time between
leadership functions and classroom teaching. Furthermore, time was so short in supply that it
became a scarce resource that participants vied for.

**Theme Four: Goals of Political Interactions**

Theme four relates to what participants in this study sought to accomplish as they
engaged in political interactions. Theme four includes three goals (see Table 4.6).

**Goal 1: Task Accomplishment**

The fundamental goal for the participants was to accomplish assigned tasks as leaders.
Participants perceived leadership tasks in two ways: representing and facilitating.

*Representing.*

Most participants viewed their leadership roles as being primarily the channel of
communication between teachers and the administration. Consequently, they played the dual role
of being representatives for both teachers and administrators. As grade-level chairs, most
participants represented their respective groups at the Leadership Team, which was the
governing body for the school. Browning, along with Sherry, also represented all school
Table 4.6

*Goals of Political Interactions*

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teachers at the School Council. In their work groups, participants served as representatives for the administration to communicate information and implement school policies at the grade level. Teachers also conceived teacher leadership positions as primarily representative; for instance, teachers in the Special Area chose Belinda as their leader simply because they thought that Belinda would be a better representative for the group.

As teacher representatives, participants maneuvered to advance the interests of their respective groups. Melitta fought for more instruction time when other grade levels requested more meeting attendance from the Special Education teachers. Likewise, Wright approached the school administrators to request a larger classroom for one teacher on her grade level. She said,

> We talked, we have one request, one request is that we have one person that does the map. We have a classroom, [the teacher in the building] is in a small area, and she needs a larger space for the number of students she was serving. Again I explained to the principal why that was needed for her. So that is really our number one priority. At this time on the tentative map she did have a bigger classroom.

Besides advancing group interests, participants made a point of representing the group in a positive light. Sherry consciously represented her group in a positive light to school administrators and other grade levels. Payton mentioned that there was a norm of hiding group
strife from school administrators at the Leadership Team meetings. Positive representation of work group was attributable to the prevalent superior-subordinate power relationship in schools; it also served the function of protecting work groups and the teacher leaders themselves.

As representatives for the school administration, participants were in a more treacherous position. They were aware of the need to get the message across without being perceived as the decision maker. In their political interactions, they were more aligned with teachers than with school principals. They also helped perpetuate a norm of equality at the work group level, which created contradictions with their roles as representatives of the school principals.

To review, the basic goal for participants was to effectively represent work groups and school administrators simultaneously. While participants were active, assertive, and resourceful in representing their work groups and group interests, they were more careful, diplomatic, and cautious in representing the administration and relaying school decisions to teachers. Clearly, all the participants wanted to be perceived as rank-and-file teachers rather than as middle-level leaders.

Facilitating.

Another responsibility held by the participants was to facilitate various grade-level tasks. Most participants perceived themselves as facilitators rather than as leaders. For example, Payton stressed her role as the facilitator for the group:

I really do not feel like I am that much of leader, but just a kind of facilitator of bringing everybody together and getting information shared. I feel like I am managing the grade level. I run the grade-level meetings; I am kind of a mentor for everyone as well as mentoring three new teachers to the grade-level---kind of oversee all activities.

Browning, the school council representative, characterized her duty at the School Council as that of a facilitator:

The principal sets the agenda based on how we close the previous School Council
meetings. Our role was as the facilitator for the school. If the parents had a question about how something is being done, we very much participated in the conversation at the meetings. This is how we do it from the teachers’ perspective, so we, at every meeting, give teachers’ perspectives to the topic being discussed.

Most participants felt that facilitating meant providing support to teachers. For example, Belinda supported group decisions even she did not agree with them:

I want teachers to know that I am there for them; no matter what goes on I will listen, and I will support them 100%. Even if their decision is something I do not agree with. But if this is what they want to do, as human being, I will support them. I will not support something that will not be of benefit for anybody. Most of all, I want them to know is that I am there to help them, there for them. I am not there for me; I am for the special areas.

Stanley believed that her role as facilitator was more in the foreground when it came to group-initiated activities. She said,

If it is directive, then the consensus is we are going to do it. And that is consensus. But if it is not directive, our grade is just fabulous because I can come to them and say, “hey look, why would you try this, anybody?” And we talked about it, and as a grade, we found we are so much stronger thinking together. And we always come up with great solution, great alternative, or whatever it is. So unless it is something that is directed, I am really the facilitator when it comes to my grade, that is all I am.

For participants, another way of facilitating was to provide emotional support to teachers. Wright intervened to calm things down when people on her grade level became emotional. Melitta and Payton cheered up some teachers when they were feeling down. Sherry made a point of checking up on every teacher on a daily basis. She said,

If there are two days when I have not talked with teachers on this hall, I go down during my off time, break in the morning: “hey, how are you doing? What is going on with you?” Just checking in with everybody. I can speak to people next to me more often during the day than I would, you know, but there are a couple of teachers who pass and do not cross as much, so you have to make a point to go down there and just to keep your ear to the ground. You got to keep your hands, you know, “is everything okay?”

To sum it up, participants envisioned their leadership roles as a two-fold responsibility: representation and facilitation. As representatives for teachers, participants sought to represent
their work groups positively; and they were mindful of advancing group interests. As representatives for school administration, participants were careful to transmit the message without being perceived as decision makers by teachers. As facilitators, participants strove to provide various types of support to teachers.

Interestingly, the majority of participants did not mention participation in decision making as one of the goals of leadership. Most participants felt that they were simply a channel of communication between school administrators and teachers. As middle-level leaders, they were more oriented to the role of decision implementer than to the role of decision maker.

Goal 2: Team Building

Besides the basic goal of task accomplishment, participants also reported a higher-level goal of team building for leadership activities. The goal of team building was to transform a physical, haphazard work group into a social, cohesive, and collaborative work team. The goal of team building includes three elements.

First, besides the building of a common identity in the influence strategy of team building, participants sought to develop teacher autonomy at the grade level. Stanley felt that there was a need to get rid of deadwoods on the grade level to build teacher autonomy, she said,

It will only be accomplished when some of the deadwoods are gone ---is that even if I am not here, the grade level would still get together as grade level and still get something accomplished that needs to be accomplished, whether I am here or not. I am talking about deadwood. There are always a few at grade levels. But the teachers who are rooted in what they have always done, and they do not want to change. We got to get rid of them or change their minds. If they won’t change, we just got to get rid of them because you got to be flexible, you got to go with the flow, but even more importantly, the best leader is the leader who when she steps out, people can continue to function because they know what is expected of them.
Clearly, Stanley sought to build a team that could function on its own even in absence of the leader. Similarly, Sierra learned to step back and encourage teachers to solve their own problems. She reflected,

But I also learned that I like to fix things for people. I like to take care of everybody and make sure that they are okay, but I have learned not to give advice as much, to let other people figure it out for themselves, but guide them in it but not telling them to how to do it. That is something I have learned. In that way, you are sort of breeding new leaders and breeding independent thinkers as opposed to little followers who are not thinkers.

Second, most participants also aimed to establish a positive work relationship with teachers and administrators. Most participants wanted to minimize conflicts at the grade level. For example, Payton realized that a close and positive team environment was a prerequisite for the accomplishment of group tasks. She explained,

I just want everybody to get along. I just first like we become a close team, to be able to share, and making sure that everybody is where they need to be in doing what is best for the children. There is no reason for many of the petty stuff that went on this year, like the us vs. them kind of thing. There is no reason for that.

Third, another goal of team building for most participants was to be a leader for the team without being perceived as a power holder. Sierra shared her vision of the ideal leadership in work team:

I think it is something that I am doing little by little. I want people to see me, I want to establish myself as a leader, but still being one of them. It is tough, but it is still my goal. I want to be the kind of leader who can joke with, cut up with you, but also be able to say, “no, you crossed the line.” So that is tough, that is my dream and that is my goal. Yeah, it is hard, but I don’t want to be just a leader, and I don’t want to be a leader only in title, but not really a leader.

To summarize, besides task accomplishment, participants also aimed to build positive, social, cohesive teams out of their work groups. In fact, effective team buildings reciprocally facilitated task accomplishment for the participants. It is significant that the goal of team building transcended the mere task of building positive work relationships in the team; the
participants further aspired to encourage teacher autonomy and to develop a community of leaders in their work groups. Interestingly, the target of team building for the participants exclusively related to teachers. There is no evidence that participants aimed to build teams with school administrators. Once again, traditional power relationships with principals influenced participants’ political interactions. Participants carefully kept a distance from administrators, whom the participants viewed as superiors.

Goal 3: Protection of Self and Group

Finally, another goal of participants’ political interactions was to protect themselves and their work groups. Participants sought to protect their personal images in front of school administrators. For example, Belinda openly confronted a teacher who directly approached the school administration behind her back. Belinda justified her actions as a measure to protect the integrity of group image and consensus. Implicitly, she was also protective of her own image in front of school administrators because the incident might have cast an unfavorable light on her leadership abilities. In addition, Payton mentioned that teacher leaders often withheld group strife from school administrators because it might have reflected badly on them. Thus, one of the paramount concerns for the participants was to protect their image in front of the school administration and other school personnel.

Participants also protected themselves from possible teacher resentment by carefully managing the delicacy of middle-level leadership. As discussed earlier, participants fended off potential teacher resentment through building trust, strategically presenting information, avoiding explosive situations, and bringing in school administrators. In most cases, participants took an avoidant, passive, and conciliatory stand when engaged in protective actions with regard
to teachers. Only Belinda reported that she used confrontational tactics when one teacher “snitched” to the administration behind her back.

In addition to the protection of self, another goal of protection for some of the participants was to protect group interests and group image. Sherry, Gayle, and Belinda all consciously projected a positive and unified group image before the administration and other grade levels. Sherry believed that the protection of group image fostered trust and helped build group identity, and she believed that the integrity of group consensus necessitated the protection and presentation of a unified group image before school administrators. Clearly, for participants in this study, protection of group image was intricately linked with the protection of self in political interactions.

Some participants actively engaged in the protection of group interests. For example, Melitta fought for instruction time at her grade level when other grade levels requested meeting attendance from Special Education teachers. Sherry secured allowance for her group from the school administration through positive and prompt implementation of programs and school decisions. Wright carefully negotiated with other grade level when there were schedule conflicts. Wright also successfully petitioned the administration for the assignment of a bigger classroom for a teacher. Clearly, participants protected group interests through exchange, negotiation, and interactions with various school actors and structures.

To summarize, participants engaged in political interactions with the administration and peers to accomplish a variety of objectives. First of all, the most important goal was to ensure the successful accomplishment of leadership tasks, such as being representatives for both their groups and school administrators. They also aspired to be facilitators for various group activities. Second, participants aimed to build a socially cohesive and collaborative team out of the physical
work group. Third, participants aimed to protect themselves from the delicacies of teacher leadership; furthermore, they also sought to protect group image and interests in their leadership functions.

Theme Five: Effects of Political Interactions

Theme five relates to the personal and professional effects of taking political actions on participants. Theme five includes three effects: learning experience and growth, broadening, and stress and conflicts (see Table 4.7).

Effect 1: Learning Experience/Growth

For participants in this study, teacher leadership afforded them an opportunity to step out of the classroom and engage in leadership functions. They learned to interact with peers and school administrators, to participate in school decision making in various school structures, to implement federal, state, local, and school decisions and initiatives, and to maneuver through the subtleties and delicacies of middle-level leadership. The effect of learning experiences/growth includes two elements.

First, most participants reported a strong professional growth as a result of taking on leadership roles. For example, in the follow-up interview, Payton reflected on how she had grown as a first-term leader:

Actually, a lot has changed since we talked. I think it is just an experience for me as a leader as well. And a lot of new programs have been put into place this year. And I have grown as a leader, I have learned what responsibilities are mine. Other teachers have meetings that they have to run, like NCLB meetings. We are all struggling with it at the beginning because we really did not know what was expected.

She continued,

So I was very frustrated at the time we spoke before. But, I think I have found my place, and I know that I do not have to be perfect, and no one expects me to be perfect. Nobody expects me to do it all on my own. So it has really been a growing time for me, which has been good.
Table 4.7

Effects of Political Interactions

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Payton was so encouraged by the learning experiences that she offered to be the grade-level leader for a second term. Sherry explained that she had a better understanding of school programs as a result of serving as a grade-level leader and teacher representative on the School Council:

"Professionally, it is wonderful because I feel like I am hearing something more than once, and I have better ways of articulating to other people. For instance, test scores. I taught third grade 13 years, I know how to read and all the test for the kids, but I hear it again at school council with parents. I hear it again, and again. I learned something new; it cements in my head every time. So professionally, I feel like I can articulate because I hear it over and over. I hear it again in another way, in another perspective.

Second, many participants also learned the difficulty and unpredictability of teacher leadership. For example, Belinda learned the unpredictability of being in the middle as a teacher leader. She reflected,

"You have to be very careful; you have to know how to play the game. You have to be ready for the best and be ready for the worst. My dad called and said, “How you are doing?” I would say, “Why you are always like that?” You never know, something can happen tomorrow; something can happen when you put the phone down.

She continued,

"That is the way you have to be as leader. You cannot just give [teachers] the 100% hope when you are not even sure of yourself. You know, in the middle. My brother said,
“If you are in the middle, everything from both sides is falling on top of you.” That is absolutely right.

Belinda also learned to face the difficulties of leadership with a sense of humor and to be relaxed when things went awry. Sherry learned that trust could be easily broken in leadership functions. She said:

I think what I learned most is that respect and trust can be made and broken very quickly. Well, it can be broken very quickly, I guess, not made very quickly, but I think everything you choose to do either helps build the respect as a leader or tears it down a little bit. And so you know, I just have to put it in a bigger picture. And what I have learned is that treating people like the way you want to be treated covers a lot of things.

**Effect 2: Broadening**

Taking on leadership roles broadened participants’ experiences and knowledge base. They reported a deeper understanding of self, colleagues, school programs, school principals, and in some cases, the county school system. The effect of broadening includes three elements.

First, participants felt that they had a deeper understanding of school programs and changes. For example, Sherry reported that she had become better to articulate school programs since taking on her leadership roles. She also reported that teacher leadership broadened her perspectives:

[In the leadership meeting] I listened to, I run it through a third-grade filter, but also I have to run it through the school filter. I am a parent in this school as well as a third-grade teacher, as well as a leader. So I think in all filters in once. And a lot of time, something, you know, will hit one of those filters. I think you try to be as honest and genuine with your intentions as possible, and run everything through different perspectives.

Second, leadership granted teachers access to advance or exclusive knowledge of information at the school and county level that was unavailable to ordinary teachers. Wright reflected that access to information broadened her perspectives and facilitated her leadership functions:
I really have, I hope, a good understanding of all aspects of the school, and I also had a leadership role in representing the school on TAC, which is the Teacher Advisory Council, that has helped me to get a broader picture of the county. And I have done that for four years. You meet four or five times a year, they get one representative from each school, and to meet with the superintendent. Sometimes I have to remind myself that I have a view of the county that other people probably did not have.

She continued,

I have been in this county for 20 some years in different schools. And then having attended these meetings and hearing teachers from other schools, hearing the superintendent. So I think that really broadened my perspective, you know, going to the area board meetings. There are just a lot of things I experienced as a result of that. That has broadened my base and it happened gradually.

Third, leadership reduced well-documented teacher isolation and afforded teachers opportunities to take a closer look at the professional lives of peers. For example, Belinda reported that she was more involved with peers, and in turn, that peers had a better understanding of what was going on in her classroom:

People influence me a lot in my thinking, my way of seeing things, which is completely different. Before [taking on leadership roles] I really did not take the time to do it because I do not have to. But now, you know compliment is something everybody like; to compliment somebody, you have to know what they are doing. You have to get involved. I am involved in things that I never am involved before. All the people’s career, what they are doing on a daily basis, I learned so much because I have to report what they are doing.

She continued,

They also learned from me because I have been teaching for five years, and I am doing little things in my little world nobody knew what I was doing. Now they know what is going on in my classroom. I have gained so much knowledge about myself, about the school system, about programs in the building so much because I am in the leadership team.

Browning also reported that in the School Council she learned a lot about the inner-workings of the county system:

I learned a lot about all the different special ed functions in our school. A representative from each group came and told how they work with their children, and as I said, the nutritionist came from the county office. We had visits many times from the school board
representatives; she gave us information on things that are on-going and in the voting process. So sometimes we hear things a little early before they went public, you know, what is going on in the school system, which is very interesting to me. So the meeting is a very good learning experience.

It is apparent that political interactions helped teachers step out of their classrooms and venture into the inner-workings of the work group, school, and county. Political interactions broadened teachers’ perspectives, experiences, and knowledge base. More importantly, leadership functions broadened their limited power bases; namely, leadership functions granted teacher leaders access to or advance knowledge of information.

Effect 3: Stress and Conflicts

Besides growth and broadening, political interactions invariably generated some negative effects for participants. These negative effects include stress and conflict with teaching. Participants in this study experienced considerable stress from fear of conflict and overload in time and duties. Payton reported that leadership put a lot of stress on her:

I am a step-by-step people. Once I get past the next pressing thing, then I think of the other. But I am trying to be someone who is more global--- look at the whole picture and see what is going on because it takes a lot of stress out of me to do that too. A lot of stress. Next year, we got a couple of teachers who are leaving. New ones are coming in, one that is moving from fifth grade to here, one is moving up from here to fifth grade. You know, the challenges of fitting 11 kindergarten classes in one hallway. So, I do not know how that is going to work.

Payton also experienced stress from the fear of conflicts that might rise at the group level:

I am keeping my fingers crossed that [conflict] will not happen anymore. I have two teachers that are very close together, but they will tell each other just like it is. So I mean, I don’t know that I am still comfortable--- that I am at a point yet where I can say I can solve disagreements. But I know I can go and ask for help from the administrators, which is something that I should have probably done this year, but I didn’t know that I had that support. I mean, it was there; I just did not ask for it.

In summary, political interactions brought both positive and negative effects on the professional lives of teacher leaders. As for positive effects, political interactions afforded
participants ample opportunities for professional growth and broadening in terms of knowledge base, perspectives, and power sources. However, political interactions also created stress and conflicts for the participants.

A Framework of the Interrelationships of Categories

Glaser (1994) and Glaser and Strauss (1967) stated that it is helpful to present findings with a visual model. Accordingly, the researcher developed a framework to shed light on the interrelationships of the categories (see Figure 4.8).

This framework visually presents the interrelationships of categories that emerged in this study. It should be cautioned that the interrelationships of categories were developed both explicitly and implicitly. Interpersonal team building was identified as the core category. The core category of interpersonal team building related to all other categories in the following ways: First, each of the four categories in influence and protection strategies contributed to team building; in other words, team building efforts necessitated both influence and protection.
attempts. Second, a series of internal and external influencing factors had a bearing on team building. Some of the influencing factors constituted intervening conditions for team building, such as the leadership style of school principals. Third, some categories were identified as the goals and effects of team building. Notably, most of the interrelationships between the core category and all other categories were two-directional and reciprocal.

To conclude, this chapter presented the micropolitical perspective of teacher leaders in Bell Mountain Elementary School. Specifically, this chapter offered a detailed account of the influence and protection strategies, the influencing factors, the goals, and the effects of teacher leaders’ political interactions.

Chapter Five presents a summary of the study, illustration and discussion of four theoretical propositions in the form of meta-themes, discussions of the findings as related to relevant literature, and implications for practitioners and future research.
CHAPTER 5
SUMMARY, DISCUSSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this study was to describe the micropolitical perspectives of teacher leaders in an elementary school. This study was conducted in a shared-governance suburban Georgia elementary school with high student achievement and strong parental and business involvement. This chapter presents a summary of the study, illustration and discussion of four theoretical propositions in the form of meta-themes, a well-rounded discussion of the findings as related to current literature on both teacher leadership and the micropolitical perspectives, and the implications of this study for future research and practitioners.

Summary of the Study

The broad research question for this study was “What are teacher leaders’ experiences of school-level politics, and what are the meanings they derive from these experiences?” Out of six candidate schools, the researcher selected a shared-governance elementary school with a wide array of teacher leadership positions as the research site. During the four-month research period, the researcher conducted numerous interviews and follow-up interviews with a total of 13 participants, observed three meetings, and collected a series of school documents. Theoretical sampling (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) guided the selection of participants and determined the final sample size.

Adopting a grounded theory design, this study used constant comparative analysis (Glaser, 1994; Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to analyze data and develop a substantive theory. The purpose of constant comparative analysis is to generate a theory from explicit coding and
analytic procedures (Glaser, 1994). The researcher engaged in a series of coding procedures, such as open coding, axial coding, and selective coding, to develop and integrate categories. Overall, this study generated 17 categories or category sets. The researcher applied a series of strategies to ensure the credibility of the findings of this study. The most important credibility-enhancing strategy was triangulation using multiple sources and multiple methods of confirming findings. The researcher also made every effort to ensure the maximum variation of participants in terms of teaching experience, leadership experience, age, ethnicity, and other important variables.

The findings of this study presented in Chapter 4 identified four influence strategies and four protection strategies adopted by the participants. This study also discovered a series of both internal and external influencing factors of participants’ political interactions. Furthermore, this study found that the over-arching goal of teacher leaders’ political interactions was to transform physical and haphazard work groups into social, cohesive, and collaborative work teams. This study also found that political interaction generated opportunities for professional growth for teacher leaders and expanded their otherwise limited experiences and perspectives; nevertheless, it also generated ambiguity, stress, work overload, and conflicts for teacher leaders.

Meta-themes and Discussions

The grounded theory method stresses discovery and theory development (Charmaz, 1994). The generated substantive theory is a “middle-range” theory falling between working hypothesis and a grand theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). It should be noted that the theoretical statements in the form of meta-themes in this study had limited range of application and only held true for one empirical area of inquiry: Bell Mountain Elementary School. Based on analysis
Meta-theme One

Teacher leaders’ experiences of school politics and the meanings they gave to it primarily occurred at the work-group level. Utilizing a variety of influence and protection strategies, the primary goal of teacher leaders’ political interactions was to transform physical, haphazard work groups into social, adhesive, trusting, and collaborative work teams. Based on the data analysis, team building was identified as the core category connecting and relating to the remaining categories. The influence and protection strategies taken by the participants served the expressed function of building a work team. The four influence strategies (i.e., team building, non-directive leading, fostering team ownership of change, and careful approaching) sought to build a work team that was diffused in leadership functions, equal in status, open, adhesive, and tolerant in social interactions. The four protection strategies (i.e., trust building, organizational analysis, conflict resolution, and managing the grey area) contributed to the goal of team building through creating a trusting and conflict-free internal team environment and a safe and protective external environment when interacting with other actors and structures at the school. The identified internal and external influencing factors had a direct bearing on the processes and results of team-building efforts; at the same time, team-building efforts also had mixed effects on teacher leaders.

A majority of political studies on teacher leadership have focused on the development of new working relationships between teacher leaders and principals (Datnow & Castellano, 2001; Smylie & Brownlee-Conyers, 1992; Smylie & Denny 1990); on teacher leaders’ roles in various shared-governance structures; on teacher leadership initiatives and programs; and on teacher
leadership activities, such as collaboration (Hargreaves, 1991; Malen & Hart, 1987; Malen & Ogawa, 1988; Peterson & Warren, 1994). Few political studies have specified the primary locus to which teacher leaders’ political experiences were oriented. One significant finding of this study was that the locus of teacher leaders’ experiences and the derived meanings of school-level politics occurred primarily at the work-group level. Instead of being preoccupied with both working relationships with principals and participation in shared-governance structures, teacher leaders in this study identified team building with teachers as a top priority.

This finding is consistent with the features of lateral influence in organizations where there is increasing use of groups to accomplish organizational tasks (Potter, Angle & Allen, 2003). In fact, this study suggests that lateral influence characterized most of the teacher leaders’ influence efforts, specifically team building. According to Potter, Angle and Allen, lateral influence occurs when the two parties involved do not have a clear and unambiguous hierarchical difference between them. For participants in this study, the lack of formal position power determined that their interactions with peers were in essence laterally influential. In this study, team-building efforts initiated by the participants flattened hierarchies in the work group and nullified the direct use of formal power in accomplishing tasks. Participants discounted leadership status and stressed their identity as a rank and file teacher in order to influence peers. Compared to upward influence (i.e., attempts to influence principals), participants had more resources and strategies at their disposal in lateral influence. This study confirmed that the primary foci of teacher leaders’ political interactions were teachers.

This study also found that team building perpetuated a common “team” or “we” identity in the work group, which produced mixed effects. On the one hand, common identity facilitated lateral influence and enhanced the social adhesiveness of the work team; on the other hand, the
common team identity created inter-group competition and communication problems with other school actors or structures. For example, one participant reported that most teacher leaders were not willing to be forthcoming about certain negative group issues at the school Leadership Team meetings. Moreover, most participants kept a safe distance from the school principals and did not seek to create a “team” or “we” identity with them. This study found that even with the well-entrenched norms and structures of shared-governance at Bell Mountain Elementary, traditional superior-subordinate power relationships still dominated the configuration of principal-teacher leader power relationships.

From case studies of teacher collaboration in two urban schools, Achinstein (2002) delineated border politics as an important part of the micro-political process of teacher collaboration and community building. Achinstein found that efforts to define a sense of community constructed walls and borders that perpetuated both insider and outsider statuses. The findings of this study, to some degree, confirm that border politics does play a role in teacher-collaboration initiatives, such as teacher leadership. In this study, school principals were granted outsider status as the participants sought to build a social and equal team with peers. In other words, the work group constituted the border that the participants used to demarcate the insider/outsider status. However, this study also found evidence of finer differentiations of sub-borders within the work group. For example, Belinda reported that there were acts of sabotage by teachers new to her grade level who did not approve of the group norms. In addition, several participants consistently reported that veteran teachers were suspicious of new changes and were reluctant to share. Thus, in team building, the formation of borders and the differentiation of insider/outsider status were fluid and constantly negotiated. Although the physical work group
was a critical index of border formation, the locus and the formative process of sub-borders within the group remained elusive and little understood.

As the primary goal of the participants’ political interactions, team building was also in essence an effort to build a professional community at the work groups. Achinstein (2002) suggested that conflict could be a powerful source of group cohesion through the construction of a common enemy; likewise, this study found that the participants enhanced group cohesion through the joint implementation of externally imposed mandates, initiatives, and decisions that were unwelcome to teachers, such as NCLB initiatives. Teacher leaders in this study built a professional community by establishing group norms, fostering shared values, and creating a sense of belonging and connectedness; more significantly, this study found that participants actively protected the professional community by presenting a unified and positive image to outsiders and building a trusting, safe, tolerant, and autonomous group environment.

Interestingly, while teacher leadership initiatives are supposed to flatten hierarchies in school organizations, this study found that teacher leaders actually perpetuated the insider/outsider differentiations in the efforts to build team and professional community at the work group.

Meta-theme Two

In political interactions, teacher leaders at this school primarily relied on personal power and power derived from access to information in influencing others and protecting self and work group. For teacher leaders, personal power came from expertise, emotional qualities, interpersonal skills, and dedication. Teacher leaders rarely used and had access to structural power in political interactions. Needless to say, power is a critical element in the political studies of organizations (Bacharach & Lawler, 1980; Pfeffer, 1981). Potter, Angle, and Allen (2003) argued that the success of any influence and protection attempts depends on the influence
agent’s ability to apply one or more effective bases of power. They categorized power into two broad categories: position power and personal power. The finding of this study suggests that teacher leaders mainly relied on personal power in leadership functions. Another important source of power originated from access to and possession of a variety of information, especially at the school and county levels.

**Personal power.**

In this study, the personal power of teacher leaders came from a variety of sources. Most participants influenced others through their well-recognized expertise in certain areas. For example, teachers would approach Sierra for help in handling student behavior and parent issues. Teachers would willingly adopt Sierra’s recommendations and worked with her in the proposed remedies. Belinda utilized her expertise in technology and knowledge from advanced degrees to influence peers towards instructional improvement. Melinda and Wright influenced peers with extensive knowledge of the requirements of special and gifted education. The majority of participants in this study were also recognized instructional leaders at their respective group levels, which greatly facilitated their influence attempts. In stark contrast, Payton, who was a first-term leader with limited teaching experience, encountered initial difficulties in her influencing attempts and engaged only in administrative trifles such as field work and budget management.

Clearly, expertise constituted a major source of power for the participants. They acquired expert power mainly from extensive teaching experience and instructional prowess, knowledge of subject matters, and knowledge from working toward a higher academic degree. The use of expert power presupposed that teachers recognized teacher leaders’ expertise and would willingly follow their advice and guidance. However, as Potter, Angle, and Allen (2003) pointed
out, expertise power is based on credibility and is therefore not permanent. They also argued that in a professional organization where knowledge is more distributed, expert power may not be a critical source of power for organizational actors. However, this study found that even in professional organizations such as schools, the natural differences among organizational actors in terms of experience, capabilities, and breadth and scope of knowledge still made expert power a credible and useful source of power for certain organizational actors.

Apart from expertise, another source of personal power for teacher leaders at Bell Mountain Elementary came from their emotional qualities, including personal traits, life experiences, and interpersonal skills. First, five out of the thirteen participants were approached by peers to take on leadership positions. One of the criteria that peers had for their leaders were personal traits. For example, peers approached Belinda for the group-level chair position because they perceived her to be calm, stable, and unafraid to speak up for the group. Wright was also known by her peers to be calm, logical, and realistic. Although being an automatic leader due to her position as counselor, Sierra’s personal trait of risk-taking led her to inaugurate parenting classes at the school. Pfeffer (2003) also recognized that personal characteristics could be an important source of personal power for leaders; he summarized that successful leaders were articulate, sensitive, socially adept, competent, and popular.

However, this study did not find sufficient evidence of charismatic leadership. Conger and Kanungo (1998) argued that charismatic leadership occurs in three stages: in the first stage, the leader must critically assess the status quo; then the leader must articulate and formulate transformational goals and assess what resources are available and what constraints impede the realization of future goals; finally, the leader must demonstrate how to achieve these goals through inspirational and counter-normative means. Most of the leadership behaviors in this
study fell within the confines of task implementation, response to external mandates, and the maintenance of status quo. Although personal charisma can be a potent source of power, there is no evidence to suggest that it constituted a source of power for participants in this study. It was unclear whether its absence could be attributed to the personal traits of teacher leaders or the contexts of school (i.e., school structures and processes).

Finally, participants acquired personal power through their ability to evoke emotions and conduct talks. All participants in this study strove to foster positive emotions at the work-group level, whether in task accomplishment or the implementation of externally imposed initiatives. Rafaeli and Sutton (1991) recognized the expression of positive emotions as a ubiquitous means of organizational influence. Pfeffer (2003) asserted that power is accomplished through talk, which was corroborated by the findings of this study. Participants in this study were careful and meticulous in their talks with peers and administrators. Participants repeatedly and deliberately chose the word “we” to perpetuate the “team” identity. In addition, some participants learned to be nuanced and discriminating in talking with different personalities and in making subtle demands. Thus, the ability to evoke positive emotions and to conduct effective verbal communication provided another source of personal power for participants.

*Information power.*

Bacharach and Lawler (1980) identified access to information as a basis of power, which consists of access to or opportunities to access information about the inner workings of the organization or about the relations of the organization to the environment. Unfortunately, information power is still largely underexplored in political studies of school organizations. For example, how information power is materialized in schools and the conditions for and the effects of utilizing information power are still unclear. As middle-level leaders, participants in this
study gained access to information through participation in a variety of group, school, and county leadership structures, such as School Leadership Team, School Council, and Teacher Advisory Council at the county level. In this study, information power was in essence a *derivative of structural power* because it depended on involvement in school structures rather than on the personal qualities of power holders. Rank and file teachers do not always have access to information power due to their positions in school organizations. Unlike personal power, information power is perishable and also transferable to other organizational actors.

The acquisition of information power expanded the limited power bases of teacher leaders in Bell Mountain Elementary School. Participants reported that involvement in school structures enabled them to have exclusive or advance knowledge of information about school decisions and externally imposed initiatives, programs, and changes. Several participants reported that access to information broadened their perspectives and facilitated political interaction. For example, Wright reflected that her involvement in school and county structures equipped her with unique perspectives that were unavailable to other teachers. Some participants reported that they enjoyed being in the loop of school decision making and having access to confidential information.

This study found that participants strategically presented, withheld, and delayed information to both peers and school administrators. As a channel of communication between school administrators and peers, participants were in a unique and strategic position either to facilitate or constrict the information flow in both directions. Some participants packaged or delayed certain information, such as unwelcome decisions and initiatives, to foster peer ownership of change. Participants also withheld information about group affairs from school administrators to present a unified and positive group image. However, the acquisition of
information power also produced negative results for participants. One participant reported that withholding information generated teacher resentment; almost all participants experienced information overload which exacerbated their leadership workload.

*Structural power.*

Bacharach and Lawler (1980) defined structural power as the form of power that comes from the legal right to make decisions governing others, which usually originates from one’s official position. Structural power usually grants power holders not only the ability to apply sanctions and awards and but also the control of real and symbolic resources (Bacharach & Lawler, 1980). Of all the forms of power, structural power is the most potent in the sense that it possesses all four bases of power: coercive, remunerative, knowledge, and normative (Bacharach & Lawler, 1980). However, as middle-level leaders, participants in this study did not have much structural power at their disposal. Even in a shared-governance school like Bell Mountain Elementary School, it is clear that most of the structural power still remained in the hands of school administrators. In addition, there is evidence that the influx of standards-based accountability initiatives only further perpetuated the centralization of structural power at the school.

The semblance of structural power participants had in this study was the power to call group meetings and initiate certain group activities. When faced with one teacher who made complaints to school administrators behind her back, one participant utilized this type of structural power and called an emergency group meeting to confront the teacher publicly. But this type of structural power fell well short of the ability to apply sanctions and rewards; moreover, the utilization of this type of structural power was extremely limited in frequency.
Bacharach and Lawler (1980) stated, “most theorists view power as a mode of interaction rather than as a structural characteristic that stands independent of and in opposition to the actors engaged in the interaction” (p. 16). They argued that attention must be paid to the interactional dynamics of power relationships and the network of relationships encompassing a particular relationship. They asserted that “power is a function of dependence. More specifically, the power of an actor is a function of the other person’s dependence on the actor” (p. 20). As a crucial link between school administrators and teachers, teacher leaders in this study procured a certain degree of power from their unique positions in school structures. However, it should be noted that this type of structural power did not grant them the authority to govern others.

Although lacking a repertoire of structural power, participants were also unwilling to apply structural power in their leadership functions. Participants wanted to be perceived as a member of the corps of teachers rather than as an immediate superior of teachers. In fact, the use of structural power would have contradicted and compromised teacher leaders’ stated goal of building a social, equal, and collaborative team at the work-group level. Most participants made a point of discounting leadership status, and implicitly, the need for the use of structural power, in team-building attempts.

Compared to other political studies on teacher leadership (Achinstein, 2002; Hargreaves, 1991; Smylie & Brownlee-Conyers, 1992), this study, for the first time, delineated the sources and bases of power for teacher leaders in a shared-governance elementary school. The findings on the sources of power accessible to teacher leaders have important significance for the future design and implementation of teacher leadership initiatives, which will be discussed in a later section.
Meta-theme Three

At this school, teacher leaders’ political interactions were influenced by a range of internal and external influencing factors. The most crucial internal influencing factors were entry into leadership and perception of self in decision making. The most important external influencing factors were the leadership style of school administration and group contexts.

Principal leadership proved to be a critical index of teacher leadership at this school. Compared with other political studies on teacher leadership (Achinstein, 2002; Hargreaves, 1991; Smylie & Brownlee-Conyers, 1992), this study contributes significantly to teacher leadership literature through the discovery of a series of both internal and external influencing factors on teacher leaders’ political interactions at the chosen school.

Internal influencing factors.

Internal influencing factors included entry into leadership, perception of self in school decision making, and personal background. At Bell Mountain Elementary School, there were a variety of avenues (e.g., volunteer, peer nomination, election, and principal appointment) through which teachers took on leadership roles. More than half of the participants in this study either volunteered or were nominated for teacher leadership roles by peers. The fact that the selection of teacher leaders occurred at the indigenous level had significant implications for the political interactions of teacher leaders. First, indigenous selection of teacher leaders facilitated the accomplishment of teacher leaders’ stated goal of team building at the work-group level. Unlike principal appointees, indigenously selected or volunteering teacher leaders could more easily foster teacher acceptance and build a common identity with peers. Second, indigenous selection could have been the best means of selecting the most qualified and committed teacher leaders. This study found that teachers would usually nominate candidates with promising
leadership qualities, such as willingness to speak up for the group and the personal qualities of calmness and stability. Contrary to the claim that formal teacher leadership positions may exclude certain groups from leadership roles and impede the distribution of school decision making (Anderson, 2004), this study found that indigenous selection and the rotation of teachers for leadership roles contributed to the building of a community of leaders at the school.

Perception of self in school decision making was also an important internal influencing factor. On the one hand, some teacher leaders perceived themselves as having limited roles in school decision making, such as being a channel of communication between administration and peers. On the other hand, others viewed themselves to be active decision makers. For example, Sierra took risks in initiating parenting class at the school. However, this study did not generate much insight into how teacher leaders develop perceptions of self in school decision making. It could be surmised that the formation of this perception was attributable both to participants’ personal background and to their interactions with various actors and school structures.

Finally, personal background also influenced teacher leaders’ political interactions. Personal background included previous teaching and leadership experience, life experiences, and personal temperament. It is noteworthy that in some way, internal influencing factors could also be attributed to school organizational structures and processes. For example, indigenous selection of teacher leaders depended in large part on the principal’s willingness to delegate such powers.

*External influencing factors.*

External influencing factors refer to the school organizational structures and processes that directly affected teacher leaders’ political interactions. In this study, external influencing
factors included leadership style of school administrators, work group contexts, school contexts, and time and space.

The leadership style of school administrators was identified as the most critical external influence on teacher leaders’ political interactions. School principals at Bell Mountain Elementary were open, visible, approachable, caring, supportive, and most importantly, empowering. As a result, all participants felt supported and empowered to engage in leadership functions. This finding corroborates previous studies that affirmed the critical influence of principal leadership on teacher leadership (Datnow & Castellano, 2001; Smylie, 1997; Smylie & Brownlee-Conyers, 1992; Wallace & Hall, 1994).

This study also found that despite principals’ commitment to shared governance and teacher leadership, traditional power relationships at schools invariably led to teacher leaders’ maintaining distance from and voluntary subordination to school administrators. Similarly, Smylie and Denny (1990) found that teacher leaders usually played within the acceptable patterns of practice and authority in schools. In a comprehensive review of principal-teacher transactions, Malen (1995) stated that despite the introduction of new structures designed to bolster teachers’ influence, principals still retained control of school-wide decisions even in schools with extensive experience in and strong commitment to shared decisions. From the findings of the present study and other studies, it can be seen that traditional power relationships still exert a powerful effect on teacher leadership development, regardless of the nature of governance structures in the schools.

The leadership style of administrators at Bell Mountain Elementary was a convoluted and nuanced picture that defied simple categorization. First of all, the open and empowering school administration had a positive impact on teacher leaders’ political interactions, especially in the
area of concrete task accomplishments. Secondly, evidence suggests that principals also controlled ultimate school decision making and most of the meeting agendas. As a result, a significant number of the participants felt that they were only “representatives” and “a channel of communication” rather than credible decision makers. The contradictions in the leadership style of school administrators warrant further study, especially with regard to the factors that mediated principals’ commitment to and practices of teacher empowerment. Particular attention should be paid to how the implementation of standards-based accountability policies affects principals’ practice of power and authority in schools.

This study also found that group size, group member personalities, and staff turnover influenced teacher leaders’ team-building efforts. Potter, Angle, and Allen (2003) asserted that the trend towards less hierarchical organizations necessitates the use of groups to accomplish organizational tasks. Schein (2003) further argued that organizational socialization is critical for the understanding of work groups. Schein defined socialization as the process by which a new member learns the value system, the norms, and the required behavior patterns of the society, organization, and group that he/she is entering. Thus, group size, group member personalities, and staff turnover can affect teacher leaders’ ability of team-building, which is in essence a group socialization process. This study found that reasonably small group size and staff stability facilitated teacher leaders’ team-building efforts. However, there still is a dearth of in-depth understanding of how teachers are socialized into teacher leadership positions and how teacher leaders themselves build group norms and cultures.

*Meta-theme Four*

*Regardless of the motivations of different political interactions (i.e., either to influence others or to protect self and work group), teacher leaders at this school utilized team building*
and interpersonal interaction as the foundations for all types of political interactions. This meta-theme attests to the status of interpersonal team building as the core category connecting and relating to all other categories.

Blase (1991) stated that organizational actors utilize power either to influence others and/or to protect self. This study further found that the participants at Bell Mountain Elementary sought to protect not only themselves but also their respective work groups. In this study, both the influencing and protective behaviors fell under the broad category of team-building efforts. A social, equal, and collaborative work team required the team leader to take appropriate influence and protective actions, which in turn contributed to the building of a social and collaborative work team. Specifically, influence strategies served to facilitate task accomplishment, to build group norms, and to promote organizational learning at the work-team level; whereas protective strategies fostered a safe and trusting internal team environment and maintained a positive team image externally.

The majority of previous political studies on teacher leadership are predicated on the individual level. Some political studies have exclusively focused on the interactions between teacher leaders and principals, between teacher leaders and teacher, and on teacher leadership program features and collaborative activities (e.g., Achinstein, 2002; Anderson, 2004; Datnow & Castellno, 2001; Hargreaves, 1991; Malen & Hart, 1987; Smylie & Brownlee-Conyers, 1992). In contrast, this study found that teacher leaders mainly set team building as a top priority, whereas political interactions with principals were placed in the background. Clearly, participants had more resources in and commitment to political interactions with teachers than with the principals. Moreover, principals were glaringly absent from the target of team building efforts initiated by the participants. Team building required teacher leaders to forge a common
identity with teachers, which ironically might have helped perpetuate the “us vs. them” mentality in the school. In addition, this study did not generate much evidence of the “dark” side of school politics, namely the use of non-sanctioned means, such as interests groups, coalitions, and bargaining, to achieve organizational goals (Mayes & Allen, 1977). It is unclear whether team building nullified the need for non-sanctioned means of influence or the research methodology used in this study was not conducive towards discovering the use of non-sanctioned means.

Several studies have demonstrated that the norm of teachers’ working relationships, particularly the norm of equality among teachers, posed an obstacle for teacher leadership development (Smylie, 1992a; Wasley, 1991). Interestingly, this study found that teacher leaders actually had recourse to and fostered the norm of equality at the work group to accomplish the goal of team building. Similarly, Datnow and Castellino (2003) found that teacher leaders had to maintain their identities as teachers to build trust with fellow teachers. This study implies that teacher leadership positions with embedded hierarchical and status differences may actually jeopardize teacher leadership development in schools.

Smylie and Brownlee-Conyers (1992) found that teacher leaders focused on the interpersonal aspect of their relationships with the principals. Pfeffer (2003) stated that the deemphasis on formal authority in organizations renders interpersonal influence increasingly relevant and prevalent. Consistent with these findings, this study also discovered that interpersonal interaction was an integral part of the influence and protection process in which participants sought to be respectful, positive, caring, calm, tolerant, and assertive about group interests. Furthermore, participants were careful and measured in both verbal and non-verbal communication with both peers and administrators. As discussed before, participants in this study heavily relied on personal power in political interactions. Needless to say, interpersonal
interaction afforded a crucial arena where personal power could be used to achieve team-building goals.

Potter, Angle, and Allen (2003) posited that lateral influence takes place when there is no clear and unambiguous hierarchical difference among organizational actors. They further elaborated that lateral influence processes consist of socialization, individualization, intergroup influence, and interindividual influence. Clearly, lateral influence primarily occurs at the group and interpersonal level. In this study, most of teacher leaders’ political interactions fell under the category of lateral influence. They engaged in lateral influence attempts through the means of team building and interpersonal interaction.

In contrast to lateral influence, participants in this study had limited upward influence on school administrators. Apart from careful interpersonal interactions, this study also found that teacher leaders used tactics of impression management and reciprocity in upward influence attempts. Potter, Angle, and Allen (2003) asserted that lacking position power, subordinates may heavily have recourse to informal and unofficial means in upward influence attempts. This study found that teacher leaders were less committed to upward influence than lateral influence and usually resigned to the maintenance of traditional superior-subordinate relationships even though principals were committed to teacher empowerment and shared-governance.

Implications

This section presents the implications of this study for future research, school practitioners, policy makers, and university leadership preparation programs. The first section suggests the implications for future research; the second section discusses the implications for school practitioners, policy makers, and university leadership programs.
Implications for Future Research

The political aspects of teacher leadership have received inadequate attention in recent literature. Extant political studies on teacher leadership have concentrated on the roles, the development of new working relationships between teacher leaders and principals, political activities in shared-governance structures, career ladder reform, and certain aspects of teacher leadership activities such as collaboration (e.g., Anderson, 2004; Datnow & Castellano, 2001; Hargreaves, 1991; Malen & Hart, 1987; Malen & Ogawa, 1988; Peterson & Warren, 1994; Smylie & Brownlee-Conyers, 1992). This study focused on how teacher leaders utilized power to engage in political interactions with peers and principals, especially in the areas of informal interaction and influence.

Building on the foundations of previous studies, the findings of this study contribute to existing knowledge base on politics of teacher leadership with the discovery of the power sources, goals, strategies, influencing factors, and effects of teacher leaders’ political interactions. Despite being a political study, this research has important implications for future research on teacher leadership and its linkage with other salient educational issues, reform trends, programs, and activities.

Broadening of political studies on teacher leadership.

The findings of this study were bound by the unique school contexts of Bell Mountain Elementary School. This study was conducted in a suburban, high-achieving, shared-governance elementary school. Future research should extend the study of the power sources, goals, strategies, influencing factors, and effects of teacher leaders’ political interactions into a variety of school contexts, which may include traditional principal-dominated schools, charter schools, professional development schools, rural or urban schools, and low-achieving schools.
Research conducted in these school contexts will contribute to a comprehensive and holistic understanding of how teacher leaders use power to influence others and protect self and group, especially in the area of informal interaction. Moreover, teacher leadership positions in this study were mostly confined to the grade and school level. Future political studies of teacher leadership could target a spectrum of teacher leadership roles that span across traditional grade-level structures, including teacher mentors, program coordinators, and lead and master teachers.

This study found that teacher leaders at this school engaged in leadership interactions on an individual basis and that most of the political interactions took place in formal work groups (e.g., grade-level, NCLB meetings, and school councils). Future political studies on teacher leadership could center on how teacher leaders form and use informal and unofficial groups (e.g., interest groups and coalitions) in political interactions, such as the formation of and access to membership in these informal groups. Furthermore, future studies could grapple with teacher leaders’ use of non-sanctioned means such as bargaining, negotiation, and sabotage to achieve goals. Finally, this study found that most participants did not disclose their personal interests in political interactions; on the contrary, most of them clearly specified the group interests that they sought to protect. Future research could address the lack of understanding of the personal interests of teacher leaders when engaged in political interactions.

*Group development and teacher leadership.*

One important finding of this study is that team building proved to be both the ultimate goal and main strategy of teacher leaders’ political interactions. This finding is consistent with the assertion that less hierarchical organizations, such as shared-governance schools necessitate the use of groups to accomplish tasks (Pfeffer, 2003; Porter, Angle, & Allen, 2003). In addition, Blase and Blase (2002) argued that studies of future group development should devote attention
to collaboration and shared decision making, use of power, and communication. They asserted that the connection between group development and school reform is inherently political and deserves closer examination, which is corroborated by the findings of this study.

The finding of this study describe in detail how teacher leaders, as official team leaders, used power to accomplish tasks and implement external accountability initiatives, to build a collaborative and tolerant internal group environment, to protect group image, to solve or not to solve internal disagreements, and to facilitate shared decision making at the work-group level. Clearly, most of teacher leaders’ political interactions related to group development.

On the basis of the findings of this study, future political or non-political studies on the role of teacher leaders in group development could focus on the following areas:

1. Most teacher leadership positions are revolving and not permanently attached to one individual. There are limited studies on the process of how teachers form the unique identity of teacher leader and on the socialization process in which they transition from teachers to middle-level leaders. Specifically, inquiry could be directed to how teacher leaders learn and internalize the value systems, norms, and behavior patterns of leadership in the group and to how teacher leaders either conform to or change existing group norms.

2. This study found that there were informal sub-groups and cliques within the formal work groups. Future studies might examine the formation of informal sub-groups and their subsequent influence on group dynamics, particularly on how team leaders (e.g., teacher leader) seek to interact with, utilize, or contain sub-groups.

3. This study found that peers have certain expectations for their team leaders, especially in the area of personal traits. Due to the limited range of applicability of this study, future
studies could extensively investigate teachers’ expectations of and preferences for candidates for teacher leadership positions at the group level.

4. Finally, this study found that teacher leaders sought to build a norm of respect, collaboration, sharing, and equality at the work group. Future studies could concentrate on how teacher leaders build collaborative norms at the work group, particularly in the areas of communication, problem solving, conflict resolution, use of social activities and symbols, and intergroup interaction.

*Politics of collaboration and conflict.*

One of the important goals and defining features of the teacher leadership position is to break down teacher isolation and encourage teachers to engage in fruitful collaboration towards improved teaching (Datnow & Castellano, 2001; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001; Hargreaves, 1991; Smylie, 1997; Smylie& Denny, 1990; Wasley, 1991; Whitaker, 1997). This study generated mixed findings about the effectiveness of teacher leaders’ role in collaboration and collegiality, especially taking into account the mediating influence of a slew of accountability and standards-based reforms. The implementation of NCLB at the school perpetuated “contrived collegiality” (Hargreaves, 1991) at the group level as teachers were required to relinquish planning periods to engage in discussions. Despite their best intentions, a significant number of teacher leaders did not achieve spontaneous, flexible, multi-directional, and authentic sharing at the work-group level. Furthermore, compulsory sharing engendered wide-spread frustration and resistance from teachers, which encumbered teacher leaders’ sharing efforts.

On the basis of the findings of this study, future research on teacher leaders’ role in collaboration could direct inquiries in the following areas:
1. Future studies could address the formal and, particularly, informal processes, organizational structures, internal and external conditions, and the normative, political, and cultural school contexts that can either facilitate or constrain teacher leaders’ attempts to foster authentic and spontaneous sharing.

2. This study found that some teacher leaders experienced difficulties in promoting sharing with certain groups, particularly some veteran teachers. Veteran teachers may perceive themselves to have more expert power than the person appointed to facilitate sharing, such as NCLB representatives at each grade level. Meanwhile, NCLB representatives may perceive themselves as having structural power to facilitate sharing. Future micropolitical studies of collaboration could investigate the use and perceptions of power dynamics in the collaborative process, particularly on the work-group level.

3. Although Hargreaves (1991) was highly critical of contrived collegiality and compulsory sharing, the fact is that compulsory sharing and spontaneous sharing will most likely co-exist in K-12 schools. Future studies could investigate the interactions and mutual influences of both compulsory and spontaneous forms of sharing in schools, particularly with regard to the use of power by team leaders.

In terms of the politics of conflict, this study found that teacher leaders would inevitably encounter conflicts in leadership functions. In most cases, teacher leaders cautiously avoided conflict resolution not only by bringing in persons with structural power such as administrators but also having recourse to school structures. Future studies on conflicts could paint a more comprehensive picture of the sources of conflict in teacher leadership functions, particularly at the group and inter-group level, of the conditions and situations that influence them either to solve conflict personally or to transfer the task of conflict resolution to others, and of how
teacher leaders determine the intensity of conflict resolution tactics. For example, this study found that one teacher leader chose confrontational tactics when her positive and unified group image was compromised.

Organizational structures, cultures, and change.

Confirming the assertion that teacher leadership is an organizational phenomenon (Smylie, 1995), this study found that teacher leadership functions were embedded in the intersections of organizational structures and processes, cultures, norms, and educational change initiatives. Teacher leadership positions in this study were attached to operational (teaching), administrative, or information-sharing structures, such as grade levels, NCLB teams, Leadership Team, and School Council. Most teacher leadership positions necessitated the combination of several functions. For example, a significant number of participants engaged in multiple functions of school decision making, grade-level representation, management, maintenance, and promotion of teacher collaboration.

This study found that despite membership in various structures with concomitant functions, teacher leaders usually concentrated on the structure and function that they perceived to be most vital and manageable, which, in most cases, related to peers and teaching. At Bell Mountain Elementary, as in the majority of K-12 schools, the traditional differentiation of school structures into operational, administrative, and supportive units (Mintzberg, 1979) created organizational ambiguity and uncertainty and potentially conflictive situations for teacher leadership positions. Future studies of teacher leadership could investigate teacher leadership in schools with radical structural differences, such as charter schools and professional-development schools.
School organizational culture encompasses the values, beliefs, norms, and behavior patterns of the people who are members of the school community (Chance & Chance, 2002). The school culture at Bell Mountain Elementary closely resembled that of an open and professional community. In the ground rules laid out for the school Leadership Team meeting, there was a prominent focus on consensus-building in the decision-making process and the rejection of personal agenda in Leadership Team meetings. At the group level, all participants also strove to build positive and cooperative interpersonal relationships with peers. As a result, most teacher leaders were uncomfortable with and avoidant of both conflicts and the task of conflict resolution. School culture is influenced by various elements in schools, such as leadership, structures, and sub-cultures within the organization (Chance & Chance, 2002). Futures studies could investigate how teacher leadership functions in various school organizational cultures and how the installation of teacher leadership positions may contribute to school cultures. For example, the subject departmentalization in high schools may create a subculture that intersects with grade-level subculture.

Finally, future research could investigate teacher leaders’ role in organizational change, especially concerning externally mandated reform initiatives. This study found that teacher leaders, whether they liked it or not, were inevitably at the frontline of fostering teacher ownership and implementation of externally mandated change efforts. Departing from the rigidity and uniformity of standards-based change efforts, most participants in this study actually allowed autonomy, individuality, and flexibility for teachers in the implementation of changes. In fact, this study found that there were inherent contradictions between standards-based accountability reform and teacher leadership initiatives aimed at building a professional community at schools (Devaney, 1987; Lieberman, 1988; Little, 1988; Silva, Gimbert, & Nolan,
Chance and Chance (2002) found that schools responded to the implementation of external changes by superimposing them on existing school structures and positions, which was also the case at Bell Mountain Elementary School. Future studies of teacher leadership could examine the link between teacher leadership and reform efforts, the design of nuanced teacher leadership roles that address different functions, how teacher leaders use power to initiate spontaneous change, and, more significantly, how teacher leaders contextualize the values, beliefs, relationships, and practices conducive to the institutionalization of accountability reform initiatives at schools.

**Implications for School Practitioners and Policy Makers**

Although this study was conducted only in one elementary school, its findings still have potential significant implications for school practitioners and policy makers at large. This study generated important findings about how teacher leaders use power to influence others and protect self and group through interactions with school structures, processes, actors, cultures, and norms. The findings of this study suggest that principals should engage in the following areas to facilitate teacher leadership development in schools.

First, principals should pay close attention to the selection and qualifications of teacher leader candidates. This study found that teacher leaders mainly utilized personal power (e.g., expertise and emotional qualities) in leadership functions. Accordingly, principals should select and develop candidates with instructional and organizational expertise, commitment, and excellent interpersonal and communication skills. For example, principals can initiate specific professional development programs for teacher leaders in these areas. Furthermore, this study found that teachers were most fitted to choose the most qualified candidates for leadership.
positions. Consequently, principals should encourage teachers to volunteer for leadership positions and to select and elect the most qualified candidates for teacher leadership positions.

Second, principals, as the only persons with comprehensive power sources and bases, could provide wide-ranging support and grant autonomy for teacher leadership development. This study found that due to limited position power, teacher leaders particularly needed support from principals in the following areas: conflict resolution, management of intergroup affairs, and maintenance of staff stability in work groups. Although principals may be pressured to exercise more control in the implementation of standards-based reforms, it is critical for them to grant autonomy to teacher leaders so that they have the freedom and space to build a social, cohesive, and collaborative team.

Third, principals should critically reflect on and improve school structures and processes to facilitate teacher leadership development. This study found that teacher leaders needed extensive formal and, more critically, informal interactions to build group norms, interpersonal relationships, and communication requisite to the goal of team building. Lambert et al. (1995) argued that there are three school structures critical to teacher collaboration: groups, places, and events. Findings from this study suggest that informal interactions rather than formal interactions may well determine the success of team building. Thus, principals should create time, place, and activities for teacher leaders to interact with peers in informal settings. In addition, principals should reduce the overload in teacher leadership functions and create conditions for teacher leaders to engage in the functions that they perceive as most relevant and vital, such as working with peers towards improved teaching and learning.

Since the mid-1980s, state and federal policymakers have shifted their attention to accountability and standards-based reform in schools, particularly through NCLB initiatives. As
a result, there have been increased mandates, testing, rewards and punishment, and progress expectations for local schools. However, this study found that mandated accountability initiatives did not sit well with front-line policy implementers such as teacher leaders and teachers. What is a worse, accountability initiative may well jeopardize the development of authentic and spontaneous teacher collaboration towards improved teaching and learning. Based on the findings of this study, policy-makers should improve the design and implementation of standards-based reform in the following areas: (a) accountability initiatives should take into account the mediating factors of local school contexts and grant leeway for local schools to develop individualized implementation plans, (b) state and federal educational agencies should also provide support, resources, professional development programs, and monies for teachers to implement accountability initiatives. Without systemic support and resources, schools will only engage in superficial implementation through superimposing change initiatives on existing school structures, and (c) state and federal policy makers should recognize the role of teacher leaders in reform initiatives. As leaders of peers, teacher leaders can contribute significantly to the building of a professional community conducive to teaching and learning in schools. When installing new teacher leadership programs, policy makers should take into account the organizational contexts of schools and allow these programs to be local, fluid, and context specific.

**Implications for Higher Education**

Most educational administration and leadership preparation programs in colleges and universities concentrate on the preparation of candidates for the positions of principal and superintendent. These programs usually prepare teachers to leave teaching and take on exclusively administrative positions. However, successful instructional leadership requires that
all teachers in schools exercised leadership in school. The findings of this study suggest that colleges and university should prepare teachers for distributed instructional leadership in schools, particularly for teacher leadership roles.

University leadership programs should offer programs and training for teacher leadership positions. This study suggests that future teacher leaders critically need a knowledge base and training in the following areas: conflict resolution, team building, consensus building, communication and interpersonal interactions, group development and dynamics, organizational diagnosis, and the building of spontaneous collaboration. Teacher education programs should prepare students not only to be effective classroom teachers but also team players willing to work with colleagues towards instructional improvement and take on leadership roles at the group and school levels.

Traditional principal preparation programs should raise awareness of the importance of teacher leaders for future school principals. These programs should educate future principals to develop and support teacher leadership in schools. Leadership programs should prepare future principals to develop working relationships with teacher leaders, to create time, space, and conditions for teacher leadership development, and to develop leadership abilities in all teachers by increasing the reach, availability, and functions of teacher leadership in schools. Finally, leadership programs should instill in future principals the values of teacher empowerment and power sharing, which are critical indexes of the success of teacher leadership.
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RESEARCH STUDY CONSENT FORM

I agree to participate in the research titled, The Micropolitical Perspectives of Teacher Leaders in an Elementary School, which is being conducted by Fengning Du, Program of Educational Leadership, University of Georgia, under the direction of Dr. Joseph Blase, Program of Educational Leadership. I understand that this participation is entirely voluntary; I can withdraw my consent at any time without penalty and have the results of the participation, to the extent that it can be identified as mine, returned to me, removed from the research records, or destroyed.

The following points have been explained to me:

1. The reason for the research is to describe teacher leaders’ experiences with school-level politics in an elementary school. It is hoped that information gathered from this study will help the work of future teacher leaders and the design of organizational structures and processes conducive to future teacher leadership development and performance. The benefits that I may have from participating in this study are: an opportunity to reflect on my experiences of organizational politics in performing teacher leadership positions and knowledge that the information gained from this study will help future teacher leaders.

2. The procedure are as follows:
   a. The researcher will interview participants, individually, at a place of convenience to the participants for approximately 1 hour. Interviews questions will be semi-structured and will focus on the participants’ experiences with organizational politics in their school. Interviews will be audiotaped with the participants’ permission.
   b. The researcher may conduct follow-up interviews in person, or over the Phone in order to ask for clarification or additional input. Follow-up interviews will last approximately 15 to 45 minutes.
   c. The researcher may observe the participants once or twice when the participants are engaging in teacher leadership activities, such as leadership team meetings.

3. No discomforts or stresses are foreseen.
4. No risks are foreseen.
5. The results of my participation will be confidential, and will not be released in any individually identifiable form without my prior consent, unless otherwise required by law. Audiotapes of any interviews will be strictly confidential, labeled with pseudonyms, and destroyed following the study, by December 31, 2004.
6. Do you agree that data collected from you be used for publication purpose? Y_ N_
7. The researcher will answer any further questions about the research, now or during the course of the project, and can be reached by telephone at (706)548-2985 or by email: dufn@uga.edu
8. I understand the procedures described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

_________________________________________  ____________
Signature of Researcher        Date                          Signature of Participant      Date
For questions or problems about your rights please call or write: Chris A. Joseph, PH.D., Human Subjects Office, University of Georgia, 606A Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, GA 30602-7411; Telephone (706) 542-6614; E-Mail Address IRB@uga.edu.