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The Role of Department Chairs as Instructional Leader in New Jersey Secondary Schools that Practice Distributed Leadership

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The Role of Department Chairs as Instructional Leader in New Jersey Secondary Schools that
Practice Distributed Leadership

by

Carlaina Bell

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
Doctor of Education
Department of Educational Leadership, Management and Policy
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Carlaina Bell, has successfully defended and made the required modifications to the text of the doctoral dissertation for the **Ed.D.** during this **Fall 2017**.

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ABSTRACT

Today, there is a greater emphasis on school improvement, and school leaders are increasingly being held accountable. The research states that successfully managing a school's instructional program is essential for student academic success. This study explored department chairs working with the support of their principals to manage the school's instructional program employing a distributed leadership organizational structure.

This study was designed to engage department chairs in conversation about instructional leadership in hopes to gain clarity about their understanding, practice, and the factors within their schools that support them as instructional leaders. The results confirmed the existing research that department chairs are best equipped to promote professional growth among their department members.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my father

Edward Bell

Who made me believe that this was possible

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades there has been a growing body of research that suggests that successfully managing a school's instructional program is key for student academic success (Blasé and Blase, 1999; Marks and Printy, 2003; Leithwood, et al., 2004, 2010; Hallinger, Lee & Walker, 2012). This study will explore department chairs working with the support of their principals to manage the school's instructional program employing a distributed leadership organizational structure. It will closely examine the roles, perceptions, and strategies of department chairs to promote growth among teachers and improve instruction in the classroom.

There is no longer a question if school leadership impacts student achievement; researchers are investigating how it impacts (Louis et al., 2010; Leithwood et al., 2004, 2010). The effects of principals and other school leaders on student achievement are second only to teacher effects (Farley-Ripple, Solano & McDuffe 2012, Leithwood et al., 2004, Louis et al., 2010). Upon closer examination studies reveal that the impact is directly connected to the leader's ability to successfully manage the school's instructional program. "Instructional Leader" is the role deemed necessary for school leaders who want to successfully manage and improve the quality of their schools. However, the method by which school leaders become instructional leaders is challenging and unclear.

In the 2010 Wallace Foundation 6-year research project about the impact of leadership on student achievement, principals and teachers agreed that a leader in instructional practice is able to: focus on the school goals and expectations for

achievement; keep track of teacher's professional development needs; and create structures and opportunities for teachers to collaborate (Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom and Anderson, 2010).

More specifically, when teachers were interviewed in the study about practices of high-scoring principals (those who are considered to be instructional leaders), they identified the following practices to be instructionally helpful: giving direct feedback about instruction; visiting classes regularly; sitting in on planning meetings; and providing professional development opportunities about instruction.

Context of the Problem

Education is widely believed to be crucial to the success of individuals and countries in today's global environment. The education terrain has shifted and the existing structures and boundaries of schooling are eroding. Education is being transformed through the Internet, GOOGLE and the demands of a 24/7-generation (Harris, 2008). Within the United States education reform has been the center of political platforms and policy agendas. It led to the creation of the controversial No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, followed by the 2015 Every Student Succeeds Act, both aimed at improving student learning and the quality of American schools. School leaders are increasingly being held accountable, and high-stakes, standardized testing has become a routine part of the school experience (Zhao, 2012).

In Duncan and Murnane's 2014 book, *Restoring Opportunity: The Crisis of Inequality and the Challenge for American Education*, they examined school reform.

They concluded that one research-proven strategy to combat the negative effects of inequality within American schools is an emphasis on quality instruction. With this greater emphasis on school improvement, it is relevant and timely to examine educational leadership and its impact on student achievement.

Problem Statement

The role of the principal has evolved. Previously, principals were responsible for managing their schools and managing their staff. Their responsibilities included developing rules and regulations; attending to the operation of the building; and managing the budget. Beck and Murphy identified dominant metaphors to describe the changing dynamics of principalship: 1920s values broker; 1930s scientific manager; 1960s bureaucratic executive; 1970s humanistic facilitator; and 1980s instructional leaders (Beck and Murphy, 1993). Since the late 1970s, successful schools are defined as those that possess a culture of learning with high achievement standards, a high level of professionalism among teachers and clear policies that consider the whole child (Lezotte, 2001; Neumerski, 2012).

Along with this shift originated the term *instructional leader*. The role of the principal expanded from manager to instructional leader, and instructional leader has remained the dominant metaphor (Reitzug et al., 2008). However, what did not emerge was a clear definition of what an instructional leader is, what she must do to make a school effective, and how she would do this work (Costanza, Tracy & Holmes 1987; Neumerski 2012). Creation of opportunities for collaborative inquiry, reflection, professional growth, and development of professional learning communities were also

added responsibilities to the principal's job description (Reitzug, 1994 Marks & Printy, 2003). One of the significant obstacles to be considered is how can middle and high school principals be expected to provide substantive support for instruction, given the multiple disciplines that are taught at those grade levels (Louis et al., 2010)?

Principals who were identified as successful instructional leaders frequently observed classroom instruction for short periods of time and completed 20-60 observations weekly (Louis et al., 2010). The visits were spontaneous and focused on learning and professional growth and were followed up with direct and immediate feedback. These principals described how "they meet each teacher where they are, by finding something good in what they are doing and then providing feedback in an area that needs growth" (Louis et al., 2010, p. 86).

A study of early career principals in Brigadoon High School in Texas highlights campus-wide issues that call for the principal's leadership which are often beyond her expertise. While this study was done to examine principal career longevity, its findings showcase the magnitude of a principal's job and identify five challenging experiences that principals have to negotiate: lack of understanding of principalship; overemphasis on technical rather than instructional work; dealing with multiple tasks and unanticipated negative events; loneliness and fear of failure; and uncertainty with staff relationships (Malley, Long, & King, 2015). Given the scope and magnitude of a principal's job, one has to ask how is it possible to manage the school and lead the school's instructional program?

Harris claims that the "revolving door" of leadership succession creates instability within schools but also lays the blame of failure with individuals. This perpetuates the

cycle of a misguided view that all a school needs is the “right type” of leader to affect school performance, the “right individual” to make everything better. Leadership is viewed narrowly as an “individual set of traits or capabilities” instead of a shared organizational responsibility. It almost guarantees burnout or high turnover (p. 23, 2008).

An achievable solution may be to share the management of the instructional program with other school leaders. According to Gold, department chairs are in the unique position of being the most influential people in a well-organized secondary school under two conditions: if their role is properly defined and their responsibilities are clearly delineated (1998). Department chairs, by the nature of their job description, have the curricular and pedagogical expertise to lead their department members’ professional growth in instructional practice. Moreover, the department head position is a direct extension of the school’s administration. Chairs are the experts in their disciplines and remain in the classroom (Costanza, Tracy, Holmes, 1987; Turner, 1996). According to Gold, they have the most potential to increase school effectiveness because they are positioned to have unparalleled direct, daily contact with teachers and students (1998). Furthermore, departments within a school serve as a natural learning community for faculty. Teachers are more apt to incorporate new techniques into their instructional practice when the techniques are introduced in a community where they identify and the affiliation is strong (Printy, 2008).

Similarly, in the Wallace Foundation leadership study (2010), researchers found principals frequently delegated instructional leadership to department chairs, and chairs were well situated for instructional leadership. However, when they interviewed teachers they did not find evidence of department chairs acting as instructional leaders in the form

of on-going classroom visits and conversations about instructional practices, particularly in secondary schools (middle and high schools). These findings conclude that the role of department chair needs to be radically redefined. "Department heads should be regarded, institutionally, as a central resource for improving instruction in middle and high schools" (p. 92). The Wallace evidence confirms that many department chairs are entrenched in managerial roles, which is a waste of a potential resource for instructional improvement. The leadership study suggests that a redefinition of the department chair role could help schools solve the historical problem of inertia in secondary schools.

Another barrier to employing department chairs as instructional leaders is their role ambiguity. They are simultaneously expected to be manager and leader performing tasks related to both roles, providing the link between teacher and administrator expectations. However, it is their "middle" or "between" position that makes the role of department head challenging and riddled with frustration (Weller, 2001).

Department chairs could be a central resource for improving instruction, but few enjoy this assignment as they are entrenched in roles that are managerial and poorly defined. "They walk a tightrope between the maintenance of survival needs of the school and the human and professional needs of the people within it" (p. 9 Koehler, 1993). If schools were able to restructure the role of department chairs to position them to work with principals and share the responsibility of managing the instructional program, the quality of instruction may improve, thereby positively impacting student achievement.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the role of middle and high school department chairs and their ability to share the management of the instructional program with their principals using a distributed leadership model. More specifically, this study will explore the perceptions and strategies of department chairs to promote professional growth and quality instruction among faculty. This study will contribute to the body of knowledge because there is a lack of current research on department chairs serving as instructional leaders.

Research Questions

The following questions will guide this study:

- How do department chairs in schools that incorporate distributed leadership describe the role of department chairs as instructional leaders?
- In what ways, if any, do department chairs in schools that incorporate distributed leadership lead their departments in instructional practice?
- How do department chairs who perform as instructional leaders explain the factors that allow them to lead in this way?

Conceptual Framework

The theory of distributed leadership serves as a framework for analysis of department chairs' perceptions of the role of a department chair and the leadership structure within a school. Distributed leadership practice has generated significant

interest among researchers. In its simplest definition distributed leadership is shared leadership: when a school moves from one school leader to leadership as a function of the school as a whole. Harris describes distributed leadership as locating leadership closer to learning and teaching (2008). While not completely synonymous, other terms include parallel leadership, collaborative leadership and teacher leadership (Whitby, 2014). Robinson (2008) concluded that distributive leaderships consisted of two main concepts: task distribution and distributed influence processes.

Distributive leadership is more than an organizational structure; it is a mindset of shared responsibility, which produces initiatives serving a common purpose. It requires trust, openness and support between all parties involved (Whitby, 2014). Social interaction is a critical component. How leaders interact with others and the reciprocal nature of those relationships is more important than the precise leadership role or duties (Harris, 2013).

There is growing evidence that distributed forms of leadership positively impact organizational development and change. It is viewed as a strategic lever for building capacity for change (Fullan, 2009; Kruger, 2009). Schools that put an emphasis on improving instruction through shared or collective professional development have greater opportunities for success (Leithwood et al., 2006). This significantly challenges the traditional notion of the singular leader and suggests that broad-based involvement is superior (Harris, 2008).

When leadership is shared between the principal and teachers, working relationships are stronger and student achievement is higher (Louis et al., 2010). Successful leaders rely on contributions from others within their organizations. In order

to effectively manage the school's instructional program, principals could delegate some of that responsibility to department chairs. Sharing the visions and the decision-making fosters a culture within the school that is one of expectation of cooperative problem solving and instructional excellence (Costanza, Tracy, Holmes, 1987).

Research Design and Methodology

This study will use a qualitative narrative research approach and seek to gain more insight into the role of department chairs and their shared responsibility of the instructional program with their principals. Creswell describes narrative research as studying individuals, gathering data through the collection of their stories, reporting experiences and chronologically ordering the meaning of those stories (Creswell, 2007). Denzin and Lincoln (2005) state that qualitative inquiry is a set of interpretive methods used to "study things in their natural settings attempting to make sense of, or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (p. 3). This is the appropriate approach for my study because I want to discover how department chairs understand and experience their roles. I also hope to identify the ways in which instructional leadership is a shared responsibility between principals and department chairs. This study will examine the relationships between principals and department chairs and identify the policies and structures in place that support how department chairs function. By interviewing department chairs across 3 schools that practice distributed leadership, a deeper understanding of a school's culture and vision for leadership will be obtained.

In order to address the research questions, a criterion sampling approach will be used to interview department chairs from 3 private schools that practice distributed

leadership in person. Colleagues, fellow doctoral students and professors assisted to identify schools that successfully practice distributed leadership and use department chairs as co-leaders of the instructional program. A clear definition of distributed leadership, my research questions, and interview questions were provided as a framework to assist with the identification of appropriate schools. After a list of 6 potential schools was compiled, I selected the 3 schools based on which schools most closely practice distributed leadership according to the definition and the schools' willingness to allow me to interview the department chairs and provide data for this relevant study. Originally, my intention was to include public schools in the study; however, when contacting the schools, I discovered, that many public schools are moving away from the department chair position and relying on district-level department coordinators to lead departments. While the schools did incorporate a distributed leadership structure, the job description of department coordinator did not match the job description of a department chair. Department coordinators do not teach classes and are responsible for a discipline within a district across several schools. For this reason, I limited my study to private schools that maintain the traditional structure of a department chair position. Consent was obtained first from Heads of School followed by Principals by emailing a letter of solicitation which included a description of the study, the research questions and a copy of the interview questions. Once permission was granted to include the school in my study, department chairs were emailed the letter of solicitation. Upon their consent, an administrative assistant scheduled the interviews. Eighteen department chairs were contacted and 16 agreed to participate in the study. The chairs were leaders of departments in secondary schools, grades 6-12. In order to capture a thorough

understanding, chairs from private schools across all disciplines were interviewed. All interviews were approximately 30-45 minutes in length and took place at the participant's school. Existing research and knowledge gained from the literature review and the theoretical framework served as a foundation for the creation of the interview questions.

Through this design I intended to explore department chairs' perceptions about the role of a department chair and instructional leadership. The relationship that exists between department chairs and their principals was closely examined. The department chair's professional responsibilities, their leadership styles and the characteristics of their jobs and the structures within the school that support them in their role as department chairs were clarified.

In order to ensure that the same general information was collected from interviewees, the interviews were semi-structured and open-ended. Interview questions were based on the existing research captured in my literature review that addressed my research questions. The questions fell under 3 segments: 1) explanation of responsibilities; 2) examples of leadership in instructional practice; and 3) the leadership culture and structure of the school. Interview questions elicited responses that enabled me to identify commonalities and differences in the professional arena of department-chair leadership. Follow-up questions and probes were used to clarify and expand responses so that the responses were directly connected to the research questions. Prior to the interviews, a jury of experts consisting of fellow school leaders tested the reliability of my interview questions to guarantee that they produce useful data. Revisions to the questions were based on feedback from the jury.

Additionally, public documents related to the overall school culture and organizational structure that offer insight into the leadership structure and job responsibilities of department chairs were collected when available. Examples included the school leadership organizational chart, the department chair job description, the school mission statement and documents related to professional development.

Significance of the Study

There is wide held agreement that the contributions of leadership affect school improvement. Leaders must find meaningful, productive ways to help teachers improve the quality of their teaching. This study may provide insight into schools that successfully use department chairs in the management of the instructional program. It will identify the organizational structure and school policies that foster shared leadership between principals and department chairs. It will clarify and elaborate the leadership skills and methods that department chairs employ to design curriculum, work on pedagogy, give feedback to their departments members about instruction, and promote adjustment to practice: all tenets of successful management of the instructional program. I hope to contribute to the ongoing conversations about shared leadership; productive use of department chairs; and the implications for school improvement.

Delimitations and Limitations

The limitations to this study are as follows:

1. The sample size, though purposeful, is small. By only including 3 private schools, generalizations cannot be made about the experiences and perspectives of all department chairs in New Jersey.
2. Potential for researcher bias in interpreting participant responses. Because the researcher works closely with department chairs in her professional role, she possesses a lot of professional experience connected to this topic.
3. Potential for respondent bias when responding to interview questions. There may be instances when a participant is unwilling or unable to honestly answer an interview question.

The delimitations to this study are as follows:

1. Only department chairs grades 6-12 in New Jersey were interviewed. Principals were not interviewed about their working relationship with department chairs and their role in supporting chairs as instructional leaders.
2. Elementary schools were not included because the leadership structure and organizational structures can be significantly different than secondary schools.
3. Faculty members were not interviewed about their experiences and perceptions of their department chairs; therefore, number of data points and the ability to cross-reference and validate my research using their perspectives is limited.
4. Due to the decreased use of department chairs in public schools, only private schools were used.

Definition of Terms

Instructional leader: the school leader who manages curriculum and instruction.

Responsibilities include: 1) constructing and selling an instructional vision; 2) developing and managing a school culture conducive to conversations about the core technology of instruction by building norms of trust, collaboration, and academic press among staff; 3) procuring and distributing resources, including materials, time, support, and compensation; 4) supporting teacher growth and development, both individually and collectively; 5) providing both summative and formative monitoring of instruction and innovation; and 6) establishing a school climate in which disciplinary issues do not dominate instructional issues (Spillane).

Distributed leadership: the formal and informal forms of leadership practice within its framing, analysis and interpretation. It is primarily concerned with the co-performance of leadership and the reciprocal interdependencies that shape that leadership practice (Spillane).

Distributed leadership in schools: a set of functions or equalities shared across a much broader segment of the school community that encompasses teachers and other professionals and community members both internal and external to the school (Copland, 2003).

Principal: the person who has controlling authority of a school. Responsibilities include: 1) shaping a vision of academic success for all students, one based on high standards; 2) creating a climate hospitable to education in order that safety, a cooperative spirit and other foundations of fruitful interaction prevail; 3) cultivating leadership in others so that teachers and other adults assume their part in realizing the

school vision; 4) improving instruction to enable teachers to teach at their best and students to learn at their utmost; 5) managing people, data and processes to foster school improvement (The Wallace Foundation).

Department Chair: the faculty member who serves as the academic leader and administrative head of a department.

Summary

Chapter I of this study began with the impact of school leadership on student achievement. It highlighted the importance for principals to be overseers of the school's instructional program. Next, it placed the importance of managing the instructional program within the context of recent efforts at school reform in America. The chapter then described the problem and stated the research questions. It provided an overview of the conceptual framework, stated the significance of the study, and described the delimitations and limitations of the research. Lastly, it defined key terms. Chapter II will review the related literature connected to the changing roles of principals, the importance of managing the instructional program and the examination of the role of department chairs and related challenges.

Chapter II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

There is a body of literature on the role of department chairs and the limitations and challenges with regard to instructional leadership. There is not a significant nor current body of research with department chairs successfully acting as instructional leaders. This chapter will begin with a brief overview of the current state of literature essential to this study. A description of the methodology for the literature search will be provided, followed by the limitations of the literature review. Subsequently, I will provide the criteria for inclusion and exclusion of literature. Furthermore, a review of the theoretical framework of this dissertation will be provided which is focused on distributive leadership and its impact on school leadership. The examination of literature will begin with studies that provide empirical data that prove leadership has an impact on student achievement followed by the changed role of today's principal whose primary role is now instructional leadership. This chapter will define instructional leadership and the role it plays in school improvement. Lastly, this chapter will clarify the role of department chairs and consider the possibility that department chairs are a viable option for sharing the responsibility with principals to manage the instructional program.

Current State of Literature

This literature review will focus on the importance of principal leadership, instructional leadership, the role of department chairs and distributed leadership as a practice. Current literature reveals that principals have significant influence over their

faculty, and successful principals use that influence in the area of instruction. This review will also look closely at the job responsibilities of department chairs and the possibility of department chairs serving as instructional leaders along with the barriers that prevent them from doing so. However, while there is an abundance of literature that defines distributed leadership and supports it as a positive leadership structure for schools, there are few studies with empirical data that can point to distributed leadership as the sole reason for improved student achievement.

Review Methods

In order to research literature connected to department chair leadership, I used the Sage Journal online database; the general catalog at Seton Hall University's Walsh Library; and print and online editions of journals, books and conference papers. Additionally, I used Google Scholar to locate resources that were not available through Seton Hall databases. The following keywords were used to locate literature in the databases listed above: leadership; leadership and student achievement; distributed leadership; principals; principals and distributive leadership; instructional leadership; department chairs; and department chairs and instructional leadership.

After reading a prominent study about the impact of leadership on student achievement and the challenges of principals, I began to focus on the role of principals and the call to be instructional leaders. From there I began to read about the theoretical framework of distributed leadership as a solution for principals who bear the burden of managing their schools and the instructional program. This lead to reading about the role of department chairs as instructional leaders.

Criteria for Inclusion and Exclusion of Literature

In carrying out my search for literature and preparing this review, I included literature of the following types:

- peer-reviewed studies from journals;
- evidence-based commentary in peer-reviewed journals;
- books and book chapters that approach the topic from a theoretical framework;
- conference papers

Examination of Current Literature

The Impact of Leadership on Student Achievement

Research has shown that leadership impacts student achievement. Rich studies with empirical data exist that connect leadership and student achievement (Louis et al., 2010; Leithwood et al., 2004; Farley-Ripple, Solano & McDuffe 2012; Printy 2008). Leadership is second only to teacher impact on student achievement. Comprehensive findings will be presented related to the impact of leadership on achievement and trends and gaps in the existing research will be identified.

Waters, Marzano, and McNulty (2004) completed a landmark study, *Developing the Science of Educational Research*, which provided the foundation for proving that principals influence student achievement. It was a 30-year meta-analysis of research that began in the 1970s. Two thousand eight hundred and ninety-four (2,894) schools were included totaling nearly 1.1 million students and 14,000 teachers. It represented the

largest sample of principals, teachers, student-achievement scores to analyze the effects of educational leadership. The data from their study demonstrated a substantial relationship between leadership and student achievement. The average effect size was .25, which means that as leadership improves, so does student achievement. They were also able to empirically define effective leadership and identified 21 key areas of leadership responsibility that significantly correlated with student achievement.

A second prominent study was completed by The Wallace Foundation (2010). This 6-year study identified the nature of successful educational leadership and provided a clearer understanding of how such leadership can improve student learning and educational practices. This study was also large and comprehensive, including 9 states, 43 districts and 180 elementary, middle and secondary schools. A significant feature of this research that differs from the Marzano et al. study is that the empirical data is both quantitative and qualitative. A major finding is that collective leadership has a stronger influence on student achievement than individual leadership. In the implications for policy and practice the researchers concluded that higher performing schools have greater access to collective knowledge and wisdom embedded within in their communities. More specifically, school leaders have an impact on student achievement through their influence on teachers' motivation and working conditions (Louis et al., 2010). This study concluded that as school districts and leaders focus on improving their teachers' instructional capacity, they should not overlook the influence that leaders possess on classroom practice by "continuing efforts to motivate their teachers, and to align their teachers' work settings with what is known about effective instructional practice (p. 35)."

Printy also completed a study that investigated whether or not school leaders make a difference in how teachers think about their work and in the quality of their classroom instruction. “Such influence could explain important links in the casual chain between leadership and student achievement” (Printy, 2008, p. 188). Printy’s study evaluates the factors that influence learning in high school math and science, allowing teachers to adjust practice to address the needs of students and teach using standards based instruction. One specific focus is whether principals and department chairs influence opportunities to learn. Printy concluded that teachers are more apt to incorporate new techniques into their practice when the learning of the techniques occurs in a community of practice where they identify and the affiliation is strong.

The Challenges Principals Face

As the studies above have indicated, principals play a key role in successful management of their school’s instructional program. However, principals operate within fast-paced environments filled with conflict and contesting issues. Management functions are a significant responsibility for principals; however, effective principals must be “leaders of learning who can develop a team delivering effective instruction” (The Wallace Foundation, 2010). Principals are expected to understand the tenets of quality instruction and to have sufficient knowledge of the curriculum to ensure that the correct content is being delivered to all students. It is a big assumption that principals know the curriculums for all disciplines and are capable to give feedback on instruction to all teachers of all disciplines (Louis et al., 2010).

Another challenge is the amount of time it takes for principals to be instructional leaders. Principals who were identified as successful instructional leaders frequently observed classroom instruction for short periods of time and completed 20-60 observations weekly (Louis et al., 2010). The visits were spontaneous and focused on learning and professional growth and were followed up with direct and immediate feedback. These principals described how “they meet each teacher where they are, by finding something good in what they are doing and then providing feedback in an area that needs growth” (Louis et al., 2010, p. 86).

A study of early career principals in Brigadoon High School in Texas highlights campus-wide issues that call for the principal’s leadership which are often beyond her expertise. The complexity of long term and short-term issues that call for a principals’ attention is presented. It examined early stage career circumstances of a novice principal. Less than 30% of newly hired secondary principals remain for 5 years (O’Malley et al., 2015). While this study was done to examine principal career longevity, its findings showcase the magnitude of a principal’s job and identify five challenging experiences that principals have to negotiate: lack of understanding of the principalship; overemphasis on technical rather than instructional work; dealing with multiple tasks and unanticipated negative events; loneliness and fear of failure; and uncertainty with staff relationships. This study exemplifies the magnitude and complexity of a principal’s day-to-day responsibilities. All of which garner the attention of a principal and make it difficult to focus on instructional leadership (O’Malley et al., 2015).

Similar to Mallet’s study, Harris in her book, Distributed School Leadership, underscores that high principal turnover negatively impacts the successes of schools. The

revolving door of leadership succession not only creates instability within schools but also connects the failure to individuals. This perpetuates the cycle of a misguided view that all a school needs is the “right type” of leader to affect school performance, the “right individual” to make everything better. Leaders are expected to be superheroes able to affect change through sheer force of will, character and charisma. Leadership is viewed narrowly as an individual set of traits or capabilities instead of a shared organizational responsibility. This perspective contributes to burnout or high turnover encouraging leaders to leave schools in the same state that they inherited them (2008).

Leadership should be seen as the collective capacity to do useful things and leadership responsibility should be shared beyond the principal (Senge, 1990). This conceptualization of leadership is premised on the idea that contemporary organizations thrive on collaboration and teamwork. Harris’ central proposition is that effective school leadership equates with capacity building. “Capacity-building approaches are more likely to generate the foundation for improved performance in schools and school systems, and that this is best secured through broad-based, distributed leadership (p.24).” The theory of distributed leadership will be discussed more thoroughly as the theoretical framework for this dissertation.

Principals Called to Be Instructional Leaders

Much has been written about the importance of principals as instructional leaders. The advocacy for principals to be instructional leaders has an extensive and checkered history. The checkered history can be attributed to the gap between the need for instructional leadership and the minimal practice of it by principals (Hallinger & Murphy,

1987). The term *instructional leadership* was coined in the 1980s during the effective schools movement. At this time principals were viewed as the primary source of educational expertise. There was an effort to standardize the practice of effective teaching; therefore, the principal's role was to maintain high expectations for teachers and students; supervise classroom instruction; coordinate the school's curriculum, and monitor student progress (Marks & Printy, 2003). For principals, the focus shifted from being an inspector of teacher competence to being a facilitator of teacher growth. Principals were expected to promote collaborative inquiry with teachers; opportunities for reflection; discourse and professional growth; and professional learning communities (Marks & Printy, 2003). In the 2008 phenomenological qualitative study conducted by Reitzug and West, 20 principals were interviewed, and all but a few talked extensively about improving instruction and achievement in their schools.

Among the 24 principals that Marks & Printy studied, many characterized their instructional leadership as *organic instructional leadership* where they develop a supportive environment in which teaching and learning can be extensively and intensively studied and discussed. Principals make it possible for inquiry and discourse to occur and create and develop structures and processes that promote inquiry and discourse. These findings are identical to the findings of the Louis et. al study of 2010: that the principal role as instructional leader is one of that supports growth of teachers.

In Marks' and Printy's study of 24 schools they examined leadership relations between principals and teachers and the potential of active collaboration around instructional practices to enhance the quality of instruction and student performance. In this study, instructional leadership is defined as an active collaboration between

principals and teachers on curriculum, instruction and assessment with principals seeking out ideas, insights and expertise from teachers. Moreover, the emphasis that instructional leadership is a shared responsibility supports distributive leadership theory. The principals and teachers share the responsibility of professional and curricular and supervision of instructional task development. Thereby the principal is not the sole leader of the instructional program but the leader of instructional leaders.

In this model of instructional leadership, teachers assume responsibility for their professional growth and instructional improvement. The principal is less of an inspector of competence and more of a facilitator of growth (Poole, 1995). The principal remains the leader of the school, but teachers who have the expertise work collaboratively with the principal. They work together to seek out alternatives rather than directives and create learning communities in service of the students. When teachers are able to interact with the principal in these collaborative exercises, they report positive changes in their pedagogical practices (Blase & Blase, 1999).

This study also included an examination of the types of leadership that impact the quality of instruction and student performance. Printy and Marks defined transformational leadership as:

Transformational leadership, put briefly, provides intellectual direction and aims at innovating within the organization, while empowering and supporting teachers as partners in decision making (Conley & Goldman, 1994; Leithwood, 1994, p. 371).

Transformational leadership includes problem finding, problem solving and collaboration with stakeholders with a goal on organizational improvement. Participants'

level of commitment to the organization is increased by encouraging them to reach their fullest potential by supporting them in transcending their own self-interest for the greater good of the organization. By fostering collaboration and a process of continuous inquiry into teaching and learning, transformational leaders contribute to organizational effectiveness (Fullan, 1991; Leithwood et al., 1996, 2010). Printy & Marks concluded that when transformational leadership is combined with shared instructional leadership the influence on school performance is substantial.

The Blase & Blase Study (1999) was one of the first studies that focused on determining teachers' perceptions on effective instructional leadership; more specifically what characteristics of school principals positively influence classroom instruction. Eight hundred nine (809) teachers were surveyed, and the cornerstone of effective instructional leadership was principals talking with teachers in and outside of instructional conferences. Dialogue encourage teachers to "become aware of and critically reflect on their learning and professional practice" (p. 359). Talking took the form of: (1) making suggestions; (2) giving feedback; (3) modeling; (4) using inquiry and soliciting opinions; and (5) giving praise. The second key finding to effective instructional leadership was principals promoting teachers' professional growth with respect to teaching methods and collegial collaboration about teaching and learning. Methods of promoting growth included: providing staff development opportunities; providing time for collaborative endeavors; encouraging teachers to observe other teachers; advocating coaching relationships; and implementing action research. The data from this study corroborate the studies conducted by Marks and Printy, Poole, Louis et. al & Leithwood: collaboration between principals and teachers has a positive impact on instructional practice.

Hallinger is another researcher who conducted noteworthy studies which helped set the stage for understanding the link between principal leadership and student achievement. In the 1990s much of his research focused on the indirect ways in which principal behaviors were a major predictor of school effectiveness. His findings: “the principal’s role in shaping the school’s direction through vision, mission, and goals is the primary avenue of influence “ (p.187). More recently Hallinger has expanded his research to include principals and instructional leadership. In the qualitative 2012 case study conducted by Hallinger, Lee, and Walker, the researchers examined how instructional leadership responsibilities are distributed in international IB schools in East Asia and whether or not they contribute to school-wide success. While IB schools are well resourced with strong faculties and supportive parental communities, some are failing to achieve the full benefit of IB programs. In Hallinger’s study, distributed instructional leadership emerged as an explanatory factor contributing to the schools that were successful. Similarly, to Marks and Printy (2003) Hallinger et. al concluded that in these international schools, formal leaders acted as facilitators of instructional leadership by mobilizing the collective resources of school members and fostering it through collegial interaction (Hallinger, Lee & Walker, 2012). Their data described “a complex web of interaction among formal and informal leaders centering on IB program implementation within and across organizational units” (p. 687).

Role of the Department Chair

As stated previously, the current trends in education call for an increased need for principals to become instructional leaders; however, the principal’s myriad of

management and business responsibilities for which they are accountable have not diminished. Because principals are charged with the enormous task of the overall management of the instructional program and the day-to-day needs of the school, this led to the creation of the department chair role. Principals cannot be instructional experts in every discipline. However, the job responsibility of department chairs brings them in frequent contact with teaching faculty. Much of the research about department chair leadership was conducted by Sergiovanni in the 1980s. His studies showed that high school principals relied on department chairs to communicate administrative policy and implement school programs to their departments. Chairs were also consulted when administrators needed to get the pulse of faculty. Sergiovanni advocated that chairs have direct influence in affecting school policy decisions related to curriculum and instruction because of the expertise of the academic subject area (Sergiovanni, 1984).

Department chairs have the capability and subject-specific expertise that enable them to directly influence the instructional program. They can define curriculum and objectives, help shape the classroom culture and impact teaching styles, all of which positively impact instruction in their departments which leads to improved academic achievement (Costanza, Tracy, Holmes, 1987).

One of the first studies to recommend that schools expand department chair supervisory responsibilities to include more curriculum development and implementation was completed by Costanza, Tracy and Holmes in 1987. They studied a school in Ohio that recreated the role of department chair in an effort to create a group of instructional leaders that would remove the barrier between managerial responsibilities of the school administration and classroom practice. "Such a change was intended to gradually move

the culture of schools toward a shared emphasis on educational excellence” (Costanza, Tracy, Holmes, 1987, p. 78). For the initial phase of the program, the school district employed educational consultants and provided off-site leadership training for department chairs. The skills were defined by the consultants based on the job description which included: classroom observation, feedback and goal setting. After one year, the program effects were evaluated through observations by senior level administrators and the consultants, and surveys and self-evaluations of the department chairs. In all skill areas identified in the surveys and self-evaluations, the group average mean scores increased. Some of the skills included were: curriculum development, staff leadership, supervision and financial planning. A limitation of this study is that the data were collected after only one year into the program; however, preliminary results suggest that department chairs “can and will exert a positive impact on the educational program if given support and training.” (p. 82). They can be an integral part of the instructional improvement process.

Similarly, in Printy’s study (2008) she was able to conclude that “departmental leadership is the most influential factor in determining the quality of teacher’s participation in communities of practice” (p. 214). While this study was not performed to examine the ability of department chairs to directly affect instructional practice, it highlights the influence that department chairs have over their members in participating in successful learning communities.

From Printy’s study it is clear that the expectations outlined by school leaders are critical influences on teachers’ participation in learning communities of practice. Such expectations motivate teachers and cue them that learning is beneficial to the instructional

program. School leaders can create the conditions for rich interactions and learning opportunities thereby encouraging instructional growth of faculty.

Department Chairs Underutilized as Instructional Leaders

While department chairs are capable and strategically placed to be instructional leaders, they are underutilized (Weller, 2001). Perhaps because the role is ambiguous as chairs live in a zone somewhere between administrators and teachers (Weller & Weller, 2000). They often lack clear direction in trying to merge teaching and administrative tasks. Additionally, they have little authority and often avoid evaluating department members even though they may know more about their colleague's teaching than the principal (Weller, 2001). Researchers found that chairs are perfectly situated to lead change if they are granted real authority and are not overwhelmed with small administrative issues (Mayers and Zepeda, 2002). Chairs found it difficult to attend to instructional supervision demands while still having to complete all the clerical tasks, mainly because these tasks ate into the time they needed.

A year later than the Weller study (2002) Mayers and Zepeda completed one of the few studies that examined the perspectives of the department chairs on their work during a time of substantial change within a southeast high school. It substantiated much of what Weller discovered: role ambiguity, lack of authority, underpreparation and underutilization. Five department chairs were studied for 1 year. "The images of department chairs as reported in the literature have not cast a positive light on their work, and they have been characterized as paper pushers" (p. 50). In this study, the principals' vision of the department chairs' work included: conducting classroom observations,

giving feedback and teaching demo lessons, all of which were outlined in the job description. The official job description of chairs included the language that chairs were expected to be "instructional supervisors for departmental programs and curricular leaders on the school's administrative team" (p. 55). However only 2 of 17 listed tasks in the written job description were related to instruction or curriculum. This suggests that not only is there conflict between the job description and the assigned tasks, but if a department chair is completing the assigned tasks, there would be little time to fulfill the role as instructional and curricular leader. Department chairs have difficulty navigating the responsibility to be instructional leaders while meeting the clerical demands of their department. In contrast, they spend a significant portion of the day burdened with paperwork, budgets, finding substitute teachers, counting textbooks and other responsibilities of clerical support staff. This discrepancy between what is expected and the reality of their work stifles their productivity. A delimitation of this study is that the school was chosen for the study based on the significant change factor: it was an implementing a new block schedule. Characteristics of department chair leadership (such as organizational structure and years of experience) were not taken into consideration so the findings are limited to leading during time of change.

Similarly, in the Wallace Foundation leadership study (2010), researchers found principals frequently delegated instructional leadership to department chairs and chairs were well situated for instructional leadership. However, when they interviewed teachers they did not find evidence of department chairs acting as instructional leaders in the form of on-going classroom visits and conversations about instructional practices, particularly in secondary schools (middle and high schools). Their findings conclude that the role of

department chair needs to be radically redefined. “Department heads should be regarded, institutionally, as a central resource for improving instruction in middle and high schools” (p. 92). Their evidence confirms that many department chairs are entrenched in managerial roles, which is a waste of a potential resource for instructional improvement. The researchers of the Wallace Foundation believe a redefinition of the department chair role could help schools solve the historical problem of inertia in secondary schools. When teachers described the role of their department chairs, they described someone who is in charge of the departmental budget and someone who attended team - leadership meetings called by the principal (Louis et al., 2010). They did not find any evidence in their interviews that department chairs were providing instructional leadership “in the form of on-going classroom visits and dialogues about instructional practice” (p.89). The study stated that department chairs appear to be particularly well-situated to offer leadership to their colleagues but that potential for leadership appears to be a “squandered resource” (p. 91). The researchers stated that this discovery about the underutilization of department chairs is worth further investigation.

Another significant obstacle identified by Mayers and Zepeda to chairs serving as effective instructional leaders was the lack of time and the conflicting needs of trying to balance their own teaching responsibilities while simultaneously assisting department members with their teaching. Chairs stated that being forced to combine departmental tasks and instructional planning into an insufficient time period (90 min) hampered the quality of their own instruction, thereby exasperating the tension between their multiple hats. In the end, commitment to students often wins out. Additionally, they had little to

no guidance. “Essentially the department chairs were left to their own devices to do the best they could without administrative support (p. 59).”

The Mayers and Zepeda study emphasizes that in order for department chairs to be effective in all aspects of the job, especially amidst change, the principal must provide the “scaffold” that will support department chairs as instructional leaders. The scaffold must include: (a) clear job articulation; (b) professional development for department chairs; and (c) resources, primarily time, to do the job.

Weller surveyed 200 department chairs in suburban, urban and rural schools to clarify what are their responsibilities and what skills and knowledge are essential for effective job performance. The survey findings support the literature regarding role ambiguity, multifaceted responsibilities and underuse among chairs.

According to Weller’s study, the primary knowledge and skills needed to perform the job of department chair included: command of subject matter, communication skills, strong leadership skills, flexibility and diplomacy. Having a good command of the subject establishes respect and credibility among department members. They have to be more than just excellent teachers. Chairs must be knowledgeable about the latest trends in their fields (Weller, 2001). What is important to note about this study is that instructional leadership was mentioned by less than 30% of the respondents as an essential skill. One of the primary reasons for the low response rate (30%) with respect to instructional leadership was lack of time. Conversely when asked what do department chairs think their role as department chair should be, nearly 85% believed that they should be improving classroom instruction, developing curriculum, planning professional development, and supervising faculty. Comparable to the Mayers and Zepeda and

Wallace Foundation studies, there is a gap between the ideal role of a department chair and the reality of the actual work.

When chairs were asked to identify what it would take to make them more effective leaders of their departments, among the top responses was: authority to accomplish their assigned tasks. Sixty-eight percent of respondents indicated that there was a lack of line authority. The ability to make decisions related to budget, hiring and firing and granting tenure would allow them to “get things done” when persuasion failed (p. 76). That level of authority would be an incentive for department members to take suggestions by the chair more seriously. In addition to having authority to make department decisions, 43% of the respondents indicated the need to be able to contribute to school-wide decisions.

When asked about job preparedness, more than 70% percent of respondents felt that they had no formal training from their school system before being appointed department chair. “More than 65% responded that they ‘learned on the job’ or they did as ‘their predecessors did’ (p. 77).” Some pointed to graduate courses and workshops. All are inadequate for this leadership role if a school wants to get the most out of its department chairs.

Conceptual Framework

Distributed Leadership

There has been a sizeable debate, speculation and interest about the positive effects of distributive leadership. Harris considers the implication to those in formal leadership positions in schools. Distributive leadership requires a fundamental change in

the way leaders behave and view their jobs. It is an intentional “brokering, facilitating and supporting the leadership of others” (Harris, 2013 p. 547). Evidence shows that school leaders recognize the limitations of existing structural arrangements to secure organizational growth and transformation (Harris 2013; Fullan 2009).

In the Hallinger et. al study one principal stated that “the leadership challenge was to ensure that at the end of the day the whole would be greater than the sum of its parts” (p. 687). Lambert asserted in his study, *A Framework for Shared Leadership*, “the days of the lone instructional leader are over. We no longer believe that one administrator can serve as the instructional leader for an entire school without the substantial participation of other educators” (p. 37).

In Sergiovanni’s book, Moral Leadership, he writes that if schools want to improve, they will have to give more attention to the more subtle, high leverage points: 1) expand the value structure underlying the way leadership is understood and practiced; 2) expand the bases of authority for the practice of leadership. While Sergiovanni never uses the term “distributed leadership” he calls principals to be “leaders of leaders” which invokes the same distributed leadership principles. As leaders of leaders, principals work hard to “build up the capacities of teachers and others, so that direct leadership will no longer be needed’ (p. 123). This is achieved through team building, shared decision making, valuing collegiality and leadership development. (Sergiovanni, 1992).

Consequently, many principals are restructuring leadership structures and processes in their schools. As schools become more complex environments, the talents of many are more productive than the talents of few. Meeting 21st century educational needs will require greater leadership capability and capacity. A distributive leadership

approach that develops leadership capability and capacity in others creates the ability to respond quickly to the shifting and changing dynamics within a school (Harris, 2013).

One of the first and now well-known researchers on the topic of distributed leadership is James Spillane. According to Spillane, distributed leadership perspective recognizes that there are multiple leaders (Spillane et al., 2004) and that leadership activities are widely shared. A distributed model of leadership focuses upon the interactions, rather than the actions, of those in formal and informal leadership roles. It is primarily concerned with leadership practice and how leadership influences organizational and instructional improvement (Spillane & Camburn, 2006).

According to Leithwood (2008), distributed leadership enhances opportunities for organizations to benefit from the capacities of all its members. “It permits members to capitalize on the range of their individual strengths” (p.530). Through greater participation in decision making, a higher commitment to organizational goals and strategies may arise. In this empirical study, collective leadership explained a significant variation in student achievement across schools. Higher achieving schools followed a more distributed structure awarding leadership to all school members then lower-achieving schools (Leithwood, Mascall, 2008).

In the Wallace Foundation study (2010), collective leadership was found to have a stronger influence on student achievement than individual leadership. Their definition or understanding of collective leadership overlaps with Rowan’s:

A shift away from conventional, hierarchical patterns of bureaucratic control toward what has been referred to as a network pattern of control, that is a pattern of control in which line employees are actively involved in making organizational decisions and staff cooperation and collegiality supplant the hierarchy as a means of coordination work flows and resolving technical difficulties. (Miller & Rowan, 2006, p. 219-220)

An additional key finding is that when principals and teachers share leadership, teachers' working relationships are stronger and student achievement is higher.

However, Leithwood also pointed out that as desirable as this approach to leadership is, there is the possibility of hints of anarchy, unrealistic time demands and problems with coordination. Hairon and Goh performed a study that examines closely the nature and dimensions of distributed leadership. In their article, they find that while distributed leadership continues to be the most favored normative model of leadership, the understanding of distributed leadership in educational leadership is broad and somewhat contested (Hairon and Goh, 2014). The meaning is illusive and the term is used interchangeably with shared leadership, delegated leadership and democratic leadership even though these terms are not synonymous to the definition that Spillane offered. Hairon and Goh write, "The lack of clarity in the definition of DL has also contributed to the elasticity that educational leadership researchers bestow on the term 'leadership' (p. 694)." Another concern is that distributed research is in its adolescence stage and the distributed perspective in education is less developed than the conceptual frameworks. This study concluded distributed leadership does have the potential to positively contribute to the theory of school leadership and school improvement; however, it requires a clearer and sharper understanding of the essence or construct of distributed leadership.

Summary

This chapter began with a description of the impact of leadership on student achievement and the changing roles of principals and the demand for principals to manage the instructional programs in their schools. Next, the chapter provided an overview of the current state of the literature on the role of department chairs followed by a discussion of the methodology used for this review, its limitations, and the criteria for inclusion and exclusion of literature. This dissertation uses the theoretical lens of distributed leadership to examine the feasibility of department chairs serving as instructional leaders of their departments, sharing in that leadership responsibility with principals. Chapter III will explain the methodology that will be used in this dissertation.

Chapter III

METHODS

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the role of department chairs and their ability to share the management of the instructional program with their principals. More specifically, this study will explore the perceptions and strategies of department chairs to promote professional growth and quality instruction among faculty. This study seeks to examine the working relationships between principals and department chairs and identify the structures, policies and practices in place that support department chairs as instructional leaders. This study will be guided by the following questions: 1) How do department chairs in schools that incorporate distribute leadership describe the role of department chairs as instructional leaders?; 2) In what ways, if any, do department chairs in schools that incorporate distributive leadership lead their departments in instructional practice?; 3) How do department chairs who perform as instructional leaders explain the factors that allow them to lead in this way? This chapter begins with a description of the methods used to answer the research questions. Following the design study, I describe the sampling method detailing how participants were selected. Next, I explain how data was collected, analyzed and validated. This chapter includes specifics about the set limitations and delimitations and concludes with a brief statement about my role as researcher.

Design

I used a cross case analysis approach of 3 cases in order to examine data from several participants who share the experience of serving as department chairs in a school culture

where the management of the instructional program is a shared responsibility. It also enables case study researchers to explore combination of factors that may have contributed to the outcomes of the case, make sense of puzzling or unique findings, and or further articulate the concepts, hypotheses, or theories discovered (Ragin, 1997). Because this study involves examination of perspectives, a semi-structured, open-ended interview is an appropriate method to capture the participants' accounts. Bogdan and Biklen (2003) state "the interview is used to gather descriptive data in the subjects' own words so that the researcher can develop insights on the subjects interpret some piece of the world (p.95)."

Sampling

In order to investigate how department chairs understand and experience their roles and identify the ways in which instructional leadership is a shared responsibility between principals and department chairs, I used a criterion sampling approach. I interviewed 16 department chairs from 3 private, secondary schools (grades 6-12) that practice distributed leadership. In order to capture a thorough understanding, chairs from private schools across all disciplines were interviewed. I took advantage of my professional network, fellow doctoral students and professors to assist me in identifying schools that successfully practice distributed leadership and use department chairs as co-leaders of the instructional program. A clear definition of distributed leadership, my research questions, and interview questions were provided as a framework to assist with the identification of appropriate schools. After the list of 6 potential schools was completed, I selected the 3 participant schools based on which schools were most closely

aligned with the definition of distributed leadership and those schools who could provide me access to several department chairs. I had to eliminate the use of 2 public schools, due to their restructuring of departmental leadership. They used district coordinators who led departments across several schools but did not teach. The job description and responsibilities of district coordinators do not align with the study. Additionally, I relied on the professional opinions of my colleagues and cohort members to gauge the schools' willingness to participate openly and honestly in the study. After consent was obtained from headmasters, principals and department chairs, I used a school administrative assistant to schedule interviews. Each department chair was assigned a number to protect their anonymity.

Profiles of the Selected Schools

The Apple School

The Apple School is an independent, coeducational day school serving students from over 90 communities and nine counties in northern New Jersey. There are approximately 600 students in grades 6-12. There are close to 100 faculty members, of whom the majority hold advanced degrees. Tuition is approximately \$40,000. The Apple School is accredited by the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools and the New Jersey Association of Independent Schools and is approved by the New Jersey State Department of Education.

The Banana School

The Banana School is an independent, coeducational day school located in central New Jersey. The rigorous and broad Pre-K through 12th grade program is designed for motivated and academically talented students. There are nearly 1000 students enrolled Pre-K -12. Close to 75% of faculty hold advanced degrees. Tuition in grades 7-12 is approximately \$35,000. The Banana School is accredited by the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools and the New Jersey Association of Independent Schools.

The Cherry School

The Cherry School is a private, Catholic school in northern New Jersey. It is coeducational through grade 6 and all-girls 7-12 grades. There are more than 500 students enrolled. Tuition in grades 7-12 is approximately \$38,000. The Cherry School is accredited by the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools and the New Jersey Association of Independent Schools.

Participant Bios

After the schools were selected for the study, all participants received a letter of solicitation. After the participants agreed to participate in the study, interviews were scheduled via a school administrative assistant. To protect each subject's confidentiality, the researcher gave each subject a numeric code to protect his or her anonymity.

Participant 01 is the World Language Department Chair at the Apple School. He worked at the Apple School for 2 years before being appointed the department chair. He

was among 3 candidates from the department considered for the position which caused him some anxiety. There has been some pushback to the changes he has implemented. Participant 01 is currently in his third year serving as chair. The World Language Department is large, approximately 15 teachers in grades 6-12.

Participant 02 is the English Department Chair at the Apple School. He is a veteran teacher of 15 years having worked abroad in England and New York city prior to working at the Apple School. He was hired as the department chair and is in his second year of service. The English department consists of 15 teachers, and 80% are in the earlier stages of their teaching careers; therefore, he spends a lot of time being an instructional coach.

Participant 03 is the Math Department Chair at the Apple School. He is a veteran educator with over 30 years of experience in public and private schools in teaching and administration. The math department is currently undergoing a large scale curricular change that has been the focus for Participant 03 for the last year and a half.

Participant 04 is the History Department Chair at the Apple School. He began his career and has worked at the Apple school for 17 years. He is in his 6th year as department chair. Prior to being chair, he asserted himself as a leader by serving on task force committees and beginning a mentorship relationship with the Headmaster.

Participant 05 is the Science Department Chair at the Apple School. He has 14 years teaching experience and has been at the Apple school for 7 years. Due to his interest in curriculum, he was strongly interested in the position when it became available. Fostering positive relationships within his department has been a key goal because he

was promoted to chair among his colleagues. He wanted to maintain the collegiality that he had prior to being promoted. He is in his third year serving as chair.

Participant 06 is the Humanities Department Chair at the Banana School. She has been at the Banana school for 15 years beginning her career as an English teacher and then History Department chair. The Banana School did some restructuring and decided to create a Humanities department in the middle school. The department consists of 8 teachers. Participant 06 attributes their high level of collegiality to the small size.

Participant 07 is the Science Department Chair at the Banana School. He served as department chair at a boarding school prior to coming to the Banana School upon completion of his Master's degree. He was hired as the Science department chair at the invitation of the Middle School principal whom he knew. He is completing his first year as chair. The department is large, grades 5-12. Participant 07 is the youngest and newest chair at the Banana School; however, due to his prior relationship with the principal was one of the exemplar models as a chair who shares in the leadership of the instructional program with the principal.

Participant 08 is the Math Department Chair at the Banana School. She was appointed as a maternity leave replacement and asked to stay on in the position to help transition the returning chair. She began her career in the business world and transitioned to education due to job dissatisfaction with corporate America. Her focus for the department this year has been the scope and sequence, creating more cohesion between the grade levels.

Participant 09 is the History Department Chair at the Banana School. He is an alumnus of the school who worked in finance before transitioning to education upon

getting a Master's Degree in History. He teaches Economics and History and is in his second year as department chair. The History department is grades 9-12, but he works closely with the Humanities Department Chair of the Middle School.

Participant 10 is the Library Department Chair at the Banana School. While her department is small (5 members), it spans all 3 campuses. She has 19 years of school library experience and has served in other leadership roles, such as Dean of Students. She described the academic/ curricular piece as her "calling" so becoming Library Department Chair was a good professional fit.

Participant 11 is the returning Math Department Chair at the Banana School. Her entire 33-year career in education has been served in private schools in New Jersey. Due to her expansive career, she has born witness to the change in role for department chairs and was passionate about her task of developing people.

Participant 12 is the World Language Department Chair at the Cherry School. He began his teaching career in private schools in New York. He is in his first year as department chair at the Cherry School. As a new chair, he was honest about mistakes he has made, but being new to the school gave the interviewer a fresh perspective on the culture of leadership at the school.

Participant 13 is the Computer Science Department Chair at the Cherry School. She began her career at the Cherry School in 2004 as a computer science teacher. The department is small, and she was appointed chair without an interview process when the previous left. However, she has been department chair at her previous school. Because the field of computer science is always changing, Participant 13 feels that while her department is small her task is no easier than the academic chairs.

Participant 14 is the Creative Arts Department Chair at the Cherry School. He is the most senior department chair in the study, working at the Cherry School for 37 years. He has been the department chair for at least 15 years (since the department's inception). Like Participant 11, Participant 14 has witnessed the school's change in leadership structure and gave significant insight into the role of department chair.

Participant 15 is the History Department Chair at the Cherry School. He is in his sixth year as chair and has worked at the Cherry School for 10 years total. The previous chair remains in the department and serves as a resource. In fact, all of the department members were his colleagues prior to his new role. He described this as a benefit, not a challenge as one might expect.

Participant 16 is the Physical Education and Health Department Chair at the Cherry School. She is a veteran teacher, coach, athletic director and has a Master's Degree in Wellness. She has been the chair for 10 years. She is dedicated to a wellness curriculum and making sure that the PE teachers are as skilled at delivering instruction as academic teachers.

Data collection

This study employed in-depth interviewing as its primary method of data collection. An open-ended inquiry approach was used to seek clarity about department chairs' understanding of the role of department chairs as instructional leaders; the ways in which department chairs lead instructional practice; and the school structure that supports their leadership. The use of in-depth interviewing and open-ended questions allowed respondents to use their own frame of reference when answering questions. The use of open-ended questions guided respondents to narrating their experiences and perceptions

about department chair instructional leadership. Topics that were explored through open-ended questions included: 1) explanation of responsibilities; 2) examples of leadership in instructional practice; and 3) the leadership culture and structure of the school.

In addition to in-depth interviewing and open-ended questioning, the researcher employed two principles that Bogdan and Biklen (2007) identify as indicators of high-quality qualitative research: (1) that every respondent be made to feel relaxed and open so as to be able to address the topic in a meaningful way; and (2) that the researcher be flexible in responding to the immediate situation in front of her rather than following a predetermined script or set of procedures. The first principle was achieved by beginning the interview with a “soft-ball” question that allows the respondent to describe his professional background (i.e. years of experience, description of the department, etc.) that may likely include achievements making the respondent feel like an “expert” (p.107). The second principle was achieved through the skills of deep listening and asking probing questions that advance the participant responses. Establishing trust between the researcher and the respondent is critical to gathering accurate data.

A semi-structured, open-ended interview protocol of 11 questions was used to collect data to compare across the participants and ensure that the same information was collected. The potential interview questions were developed using existing research and the knowledge gained from the literature review and with the theoretical framework of this study as the foundation. Creswell (2003) describes the role that theoretical perspectives for qualitative researchers by stating “they provide a lens (even a theory) to guide the researchers as to what issues are important to examine (e.g., marginalization, empowerment) and the people that need to be studied” (p. 131). Follow-up questions and

probes, elicited additional details, clarification, and elaboration on topics relevant to the study from the participants (Bogdan and Biklen, 2003). Prior to the interviews, a jury of experts consisting of fellow school leaders and doctoral advisors tested the reliability of my interview questions to guarantee that they produced useful data. Table 1 connects the study's research questions with the corresponding interview questions.

Table 1

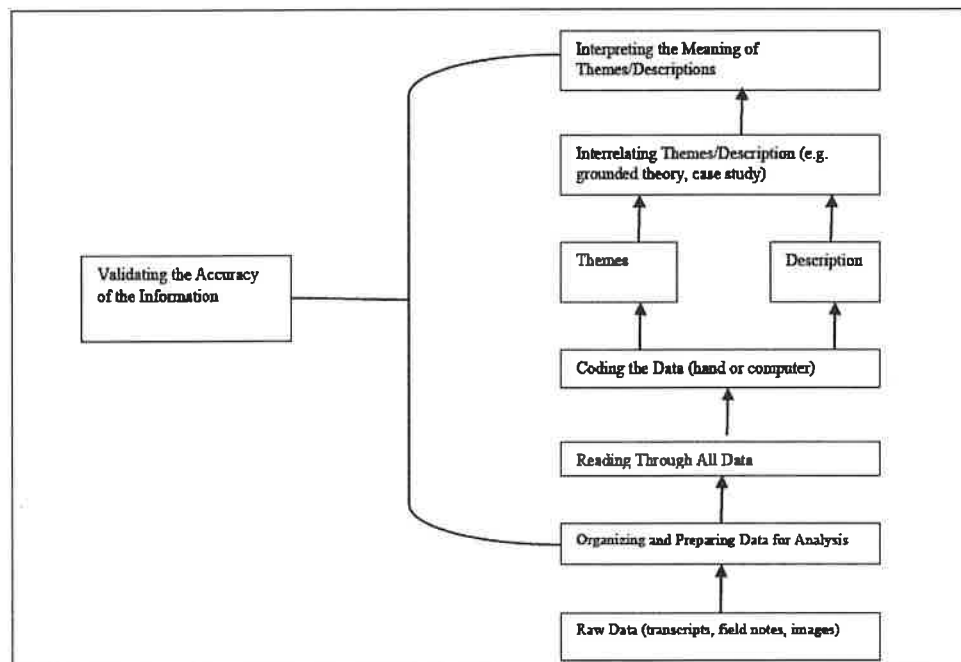
Preliminary Question- 1. How were you appointed to this position?

Research questions	Corresponding interview questions
1. How do school department chairs describe the role of department chairs as instructional leaders?	2. How would you describe your relationship between yourself and your department members? 3. What is your definition of an instructional leader?
2. In what ways, if any, do department chairs lead their departments in instructional practice?	4. What are your main responsibilities? 5. In what ways are you an instructional leader for your department? 6. How are you involved in professional development for teachers? 7. Are there obstacles to doing your job in the way you intend?
3. How do department chairs who perform as instructional leaders explain the factors that allow them to lead in this way?	8. How would you describe your relationship with the principal? 9. What professional development exists to support you as department chair? 10. How would you describe the culture of leadership at your school? 11. If you could wave a magic wand to make one change to your job, what would it be?

Data management and analysis plan

The data management was structured and systematic to ensure the accessibility, storage and retrieval of the data adding validity to the study. All interview data was kept electronically on a USB key and locked in a secure physical site. Backups of the USB key were regularly performed. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed by an outside agency. Every interview file was named by a number. All school documents were electronically scanned and stored on the computer as well. In addition to electronic copies of the data, print copies will be maintained for reading, jotting down notes and possible codes.

The researcher followed the Creswell's analysis process as outlined in the figure below:



Data Analysis in Qualitative Research (Creswell, 2009)

Bogdan and Biklen (2007) stress the importance of taking a break in between data collection and analysis. This allows the researcher to distance herself from the details of the fieldwork and put relationships between the researcher and participants in perspective. The data for this study was analyzed using a systematic approach of examination, synthesizing, and identification of patterns. All interviews were read as a complete set of data twice with a substantial “rest” period between readings.

Field notes and reflective memos

Field notes included written notes and initial thoughts or questions of the interviewer throughout the course of the interviews. The information was recorded prior to and after the interviews as needed. However, some memos may have been added for clarification during the interview to capture the respondents’ mannerisms and cues that can only be detected visually. Reflections by the researcher were also gathered throughout all phases of this study and recorded on a notepad and transcribed and stored using the same methods described above.

Coding Scheme

Certain steps were followed when creating coding categories from the data gained during the interviews. First, all transcripts were read for accuracy and coherence with the raw data. While reading, a preliminary list of potential coding categories was made. Initially open coding was used to organize the data into chunks to help interpret meaning and uncover congruency among participant responses. Next, by comparing responses and identifying patterns between responses, codes were assigned and categorized to identify emergent themes. As the coding process evolved, a formal feedback loop of peers was created with whom perceptions were shared to keep the researcher on track and

prevent getting lost in the data. Once the coding and categorizing process was completed, memos were created to make the researcher's thinking visible and assist the reader in interpreting the codes and categories. Lastly the data was interpreted by explaining the important aspects and defining the valuable lessons learned from the study. Connections about the findings to literature and relevant theory were made. The final stage of the coding process identified any potential implications for school leadership and illustrative quotes and examples offered by participants.

Potential Organizing Themes /Codes

1. Job responsibilities
2. Feedback to teachers
3. Professional development/ Training
4. Meetings structure
5. Accountability
6. Time
7. Methods or Practices (Instructional)
8. Relationship with principal
9. Relationship with department members
10. Culture
11. Distributive leadership
12. Resources/ Support (for department chair)
13. Leadership structure

Validity and Reliability

Creswell and Miller (2000) define validity as "how accurately the account represents the participants' realities of the social phenomena and is credible to them" (p. 124). Procedures for validity are the methods used by researchers to establish the credibility of their study. Creswell and Miller assert that validity does not refer to the data but to the inferences drawn from them. In order to ensure validity, I employed 3 of Creswell's and Miller's validity procedures: 1) peer debriefing, 2) audit trail and 3)

research reflexivity. I made note of both the common and atypical characteristics that surfaced in the interviews. As I interpreted the interviews, I used peer debriefing consistently to determine if my emerging insights are apparent to others. I established an audit trail by using Creswell's and Millers techniques of documenting the inquiry process through journaling, memoing, keeping a research log, developing a data collection chronology, and recording data analysis procedures so that my process of collecting, analyzing and interpreting the data can be reviewed by an external party. Lastly, I practiced reflexivity by including a *Role of the Researcher* section to reveal any underlying biases I possessed that may have influenced how I conducted my research and interpreted the data.

In order to ensure reliability, I followed the procedures outlined by Gibbs (2007). I checked the interview transcripts for accuracy to make sure they did not deviate from the participants' message and ensured that the definition and meaning of codes did not differ from the coding process. Additionally, I engaged in member checking by giving each respondent a copy of the transcript of the interview for verification. I accomplished this by consistent cross-referencing of the transcripts with the codes, writing memos about the codes and their definitions, and using an external person as a cross checker to see if her coding of a passage matches mine.

Role of the researcher

My interest in department chair leadership grew out of my professional experience. I have been an educator my entire life; subsequently, it is the only profession I know. I have worked in many capacities within middle and high school. I began my

career as a teacher, and then advanced to administrative roles such as grade dean, department chair and my current position as Assistant Head of Middle School. In my current role, I work closely with my school's department chairs supporting them in achieving their goals while teaching them how to lead. Bogdan and Biklen state that a researcher's personal history and experiences can influence the ways in which they collect, interpret and analyze data (2007). Therefore, it is a necessary step to consider and be transparent about how their subjectivity and bias can affect their studies. Through my working relationship with department chairs, I have a personal interpretation of department-chair, instructional and distributed leadership.

In an effort to minimize researcher bias, I wrote reflective memos during all phases of data collection and analysis. All memos were transcribed and coded. This enabled me to compare my personal interpretations of the data to preliminary results and identify instances where validity may be questionable.

CHAPTER IV

DATA ANALYSIS

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present the findings and analysis from the study which consisted of a series of 16 interviews conducted in three different schools coded The Apple, Banana and Cherry Schools. All participants in the interviews are department chairs at private schools, grades 6-12, in New Jersey. Each department chair was asked the same questions and the responses were audio-recorded with the participant's permission. Following the interviews, each recording was downloaded, saved on a USB and transcribed by an outside service (Rev.com). Once the coding was completed, similar codes were combined into themes. The themes, which emerged from the experiences of department chairs acting as instructional leaders, were explicated from the text of the sixteen participants in the research study. All interviews were reviewed for validity according to the procedures explained in Chapter III.

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the role of middle and high school department chairs and their ability to share the management of the instructional program with their principals using a distributed leadership model. This study addressed the following research questions:

1. How do department chairs in schools that incorporate distributed leadership describe the role of department chairs as instructional leaders?
2. In what ways, if any, do department chairs in schools that incorporate distributed leadership lead their departments in instructional practice?

3. How do department chairs who perform as instructional leaders explain the factors that allow them to lead in this way?

Every effort was made to maintain the strict confidentiality and anonymity of the respondents. All department chairs were identified using a number. The sixteen department chairs in the study were serving as chairs during the 2016–2017 school year. The semi-structured, in-depth, face-to-face interviews were conducted during the spring of 2017. The findings in this chapter represent the overarching themes that emerged from the interviews. The narrative of each participant's experience describes the nuances, successes and challenges of being instructional leaders for their departments in schools that practice a distributed leadership model.

Themes from Research Question 1

Research Question 1: How do department chairs in schools that incorporate distributed leadership describe the role of department chairs as instructional leaders?

Findings

The themes that surfaced from the narratives of the respondents illustrate a deep understanding of instructional leadership and the importance it plays in the successful pedagogical advancement of their department. The department chairs viewed instructional leadership as a priority responsibility of being a department chair. Lastly, their responses highlight that their success as instructional leaders is very much dependent upon and sustained through the positive relationships they establish with department members.

Interview questions (see Appendix A) Numbers 2 and 3 were designed to address Research Question 1 by asking respondents to define instructional leadership, explain the role it plays as part of their main responsibilities and describe the relationships they share with their department members.

Instructional Leadership

Instructional leadership is a term with which department chairs had a deep understanding. Department chairs are uniquely qualified to be instructional leaders, due to their pedagogical and curricular expertise. Because department chairs are still in the classroom, they are proximate to teaching and learning, they have daily contact with teachers, and they understand the intricacies of their school's culture. When asked to define instructional leadership, Respondent #1 stated: "Somebody who stays abreast, keeps abreast of the best practices in pedagogy in whatever field they're focusing on."

Respondent #11 stated:

Sure, I think an instructional leader has a firm grasp of the big picture, so we're talking about curriculum, pedagogy, management, has a firm understanding of the culture and the processes involved in the school.

Several respondents highlighted that their instructional leadership takes on the form on modeling and coaching. Department chairs respect their department members as quality educators and, therefore, attempt to get buy-in from through collaborative conversations rather than mandating practice. Respondent #11 continued by saying:

I also think that an instructional leader to quote a well-worn out phrase, "leads from behind." I take to heart the idea of servant leadership, my job isn't to tell you what to do, my job is to help you get there by doing with you and for you. Rather than just saying it to you. So, I think an instructional leader models what other people should be expected to do. Is willing to do anything they're asking anybody else to do and then some.

Respondent #6 stated:

I find it's engaging the people in my department in conversations around that to help them process it... Since some of those changes are about instructional strategies, I think it's important to bring them tools that they need, individually understand what some of them need, and help them own it for themselves, that they embrace it and it's not just something we force upon them..... I think it's a lot of coaching and not prescribing. Nobody likes to be ordered around.

Respondent #8 stated:

I think I would define it as one who leads by example, one who models not only ... Who models what they do in the classroom in their department meetings. If I were looking for my department to implement or integrate something new into to their classrooms or into their curriculum, I would want to model that first for them as a part of our meeting time and help them see what the possibilities are and then really brainstorm on how they can leverage this pedagogical tool or technology into the work that they currently do. So, how does it enhance their teaching and how would it enhance student learning?

A core aspect to instructional leadership is observing classes and giving timely, constructive feedback to teachers about their teaching. Department chairs encourage on-going conversations about instruction and help teachers perfect their craft. When asked to define instructional leadership, Respondent # 16 stated:

Formal and informal observations, then write the observation evaluation that then she gets and then [deleted name] gets. Informal ones are where, "Can you just come on in?" I have too many kids to be doing this activity. Is there another way to be doing it? What's the better thing to be doing?" There is a lot of that and just a lot of sharing about what exactly we do.

Respondent #2 stated:

I think instructional leadership is really about coaching and mentorship. It's not really about ... sort of like this didactic, evaluative angle, like you're ... You know I don't think of myself who simply is evaluating your performance, but what I'm doing is trying to help you be the best that you can be. Now of course, if there are ... and I think this should be a very rare case in independent schools such as this, but if there are issues or problems, of course then I'll have an evaluative role.

Respondent #4 stated:

I think being in my position as a chair, doing both the personal aspects, making sure you're there to mentor, to evaluate, provide guidance both when it's asked for as well as when you recognize that it's needed, as well as leading the department overall. Not giving them busy work tasks, but tasks that engage them in the overall needs of the department.

Instructional Leadership is a Priority

In addition to possessing a deep understanding of instructional leadership, department chairs view it as a priority. Their narratives underscored their belief in the significance of investing in the growth of their department members and themselves. Even though department chairs are responsible for managing a lot of administrative tasks, they do not lose sight of quality teaching; perhaps because they remain the classroom.

Both Respondents #11 and #3 illustrated this point:

The main responsibility is developing the teaching talent within the department, that is the number one mission. That can get lost in a lot of administrative where you are dealing with parent needs, which you need to deal with. You're dealing with trivial sort of supply needs filling out paperwork, dealing with budgets, returning receipts, all that sort of stuff.

As a department chair here, my main responsibilities ... I like to think of my main responsibility to be an instructional leader. To sort of think about what it is that we're doing and how we can improve upon that.

Respondent #3

My experience oftentimes in public school, particularly, was that the administrative jobs were managing jobs, but I really felt strongly that not only at the supervisory level, but at the administrator level, that the instructional leadership was the key, so I was very much into professional development.

Sometimes chairs were directed by school leaders to make instructional leadership a priority, supporting a distributed leadership model which will be addressed in Research

Question 3. Respondent #9 stated:

However, the other thing that happened was, I asked the Head of School what the job was. I said, "How should I spend my time?" And he said 80% of your time should be developing people. Eighty percent.

Collegiality and Trust

The last theme that became apparent was the importance of chairs establishing collegiality and trust with the department members. Teaching is a personal craft, and in order to be in the position to offer feedback and suggest changes in pedagogy and curriculum, it is imperative that faculty members trust their department leader. Giving constructive feedback must come from a place of respect and care. Evident in their responses is the importance of cultivating positive, collegial relationships. Respondent #2 stated:

I think trust has been the major one. Having been on the other end of it with department chairs you didn't trust, not me personally, but just their instinct was not to trust, was to micromanage everything. I think my relationship with my teachers is I trust them to be doing what they ought to be doing, and then I can guide.

Respondent #3 stated:

Even when I was a supervisor as an assistant principal or principal I always felt that it was important to have a collegial relationship with those people that you supervise, because I think the most important thing about supervision is to help your department to improve their teaching. I think the best way to do that is really to be more collegial about that aspect of what I'm doing.

Summary of Research Question 1

Based on the data gathered from the respondents, department chairs demonstrate that they have a thorough understanding of and a belief in instructional leadership. Their

stories offered thorough definitions that encompassed all of the aspects of instructional leadership from providing opportunities for ongoing conversations about instruction to observing teachers and giving feedback on instruction. They easily gave examples of one-on-one situations when they had to support and guide faculty who were struggling in a particular area. They recognized the role instructional leadership plays within the context of their jobs, and they treated the responsibility of helping to manage the instructional program seriously.

Department chairs endeavor to create strong professional relationships grounded in trust, shared learning experiences and collaboration with their department members. Several respondents described their leadership style as being coaches or servant leaders. They view themselves as facilitators of growth and expressed sincere desires to support their department members' journeys to be the best at their crafts without micromanaging them or giving mandates. Modeling was repeatedly expressed as a method for promoting change and growth.

Several chairs viewed their role as instructional leaders as their most important responsibility when leading the department even though they are responsible for time consuming administrative tasks. They continually ask the question of themselves and their department members, how can we improve teaching and learning?

Themes from Research Question 2

Research Question 2: In what ways, if any, do department chairs in schools that incorporate distributive leadership lead their departments in instructional practice?

Findings

This research suggests that in addition to the department chairs possessing a comprehensive understanding of instructional leadership, they were able to articulate specific examples of the methods they employ. Most found ways to dedicate time to create a culture of collaboration and shared learning through conversations about instruction. They make classroom visits and give informal and formal feedback. They spoke of working with particular teachers to solve instructional problems. Lastly, they recounted ways in which they inspire and promote professional development and growth.

Interview questions (see Appendix A) Numbers 4, 5, 6, and 7 were designed to address Research Question 2 by asking respondents to give examples of how they are instructional leaders of their departments and how they promote growth among faculty members.

Feedback

The first theme that became evident is that instructional leadership has many layers. It can be big picture as department chairs fulfill departmental goals, and it can be specific to working with one faculty member. Department chairs described themselves as coaches and modelers of good teaching practice as they interact with members of their departments to improve teaching and learning. Respondents #2 and 4 gave the following examples of working with new, younger teachers:

So what I've done with [the new teacher] started in September, either in passing or formally, when we sit down for half an hour, I'll say to him, Can you walk me through one of your recent assignments?

Respondent #4 stated:

For example, there's a teacher who's been in my department for a couple years now. She's been using rubrics that were more checklists rather than really good formative rubrics. We worked together last year. I showed her examples of ones that I've used, some from other members of the department, and she's worked really hard over the past 6 months to really update.

Informally visiting classes and offering constructive feedback on teaching are key foundational components of instructional leadership that the respondents practiced. It is how department chairs can assess quality of instruction in their department overall and discover challenges of individual teachers. Respondent #8 discussed coaching and visiting classes: "Not necessarily evaluative systems but more coaching systems. So, sitting in classes, helping them understand their instructional needs per say and how they can improve upon those."

Respondent #3 stated:

Though, as we got into the year here, I'm in the process of really visiting classrooms informally as much as I can, and pretty much have started to do that from now into, really, the next semester, I will be visiting a lot of classrooms. Informally-.... Providing feedback for teachers when I do that, more as just a colleague sitting there observing, and then providing feedback on the teaching process.

Respondent #4 stated:

Informal feedback, for me, has always been for everyone. A lot of times it's either a sort of a pop in. Usually that's just me walking around the hallway, and if I hear something that sounds interesting, I'll peak my head in. Folks here are pretty open to that. I know it's always a little unnerving when somebody just peaks their head in, because it really changes the dynamic of a classroom, especially when you're in the kind of school that has small classes.

Professional Development

The next theme to emerge is that department chairs encourage growth and participation in professional development for teachers which is also a vital element of instructional leadership. Department chairs employ techniques such as encouraging workshop attendance or using department meeting time to discuss and explore pedagogy. Respondent #11 addressed both strategies when asked about promoting growth among the teachers:

Right, so I think one way to do that is when I have a conversation with teachers either toward the end of this year in anticipation for next fall, at the beginning of next fall. Start talking about where are they in their journey, so what were the goals that you set last year, how did you do getting toward them. What are your goals that you've set for yourself in the coming year. What kind of support are you looking for and then being aware of their goals, being able to match that with professional development opportunity or ... That's sort of sending people out. Or trying to find a way to organize or bring somebody in to deal with workshop or other kinds of experiences within the building that would lead people to growth in those areas.

The other aspect is for the departmental emphasis, so for example if we know that one of the things we would like to promote more in our classes is a greater use of algorithmic thinking and coding, then we can workshop within our departments. This is something we see as advantageous, what does this look like in each person's class.

Respondent #3 stated:

...we've brought in [] a math consultant kind of guru. He's been visiting with us the last couple years on varying occasions. He spent a week with us a year ago, coming in, doing workshops, observing our classes, in preparation for this curriculum work, so the math department has had close connections with him, and he's kind of been our consultant on our project.

Creating Learning Communities

A recurring theme was that the department chairs created cultures of learning by using department meeting time, eating lunch together, or just being available to have

collaborative conversations about curriculum and instruction. Creating a culture of inquiry and sharing best practices promotes instructional growth. Respondent #2 stated: "...that sense of the doors are always open. I'm wandering in and out. Everyone's always chatting. Everyone is always stealing ideas. I've worked in departments where you close the door."

Respondent # 8 stated:

I think it's also being a coach and coach meaning, working with other teachers to help continue to develop their strengths and focus really on their strengths. And also to help them become coaches to other teachers and that's where the instructional leadership comes into play with them as well. Because it's not just me providing that instructional leadership. They can provide it for themselves. So, I think it becomes more of a collaborative learning community where we learn and grow from each other and we all are instructors and coaches, kind of working together, sharing knowledge and sharing resources. So, helping to process with them, versus me saying, "This is what you should do," but really asking the questions and using inquiry based learning, just like we do in the classroom in terms of, "What could you have done differently, what did you do well, can you anticipate what will happen?" So, just being that coach, I think, is part of my role.

Respondent #14 simply acknowledges that a department chair does is not always the expert. "I've got that title of department head, but they're as experienced if not more so in their fields. They're helping me too, so it's a two-way street."

Areas that Conflict with Chairs Being Instructional Leaders

A theme that cannot be overlooked is that even in schools that practice distributed leadership where chairs are designated to be instructional leaders, there are challenges that prevent them from dedicating as much time as they would like to leading instructional practice. Their desire to be master teachers themselves and to meet the needs of their own students sometimes impedes managing the instructional program. All of the

respondents shared experiences that detailed challenges they have with time. Many are conflicted between being a good teacher and being a good department chair.

When asked how often can you informally visit classes, Respondent #3 stated:

Good question. Not as often as I would like, to be honest with you. I would say I try to do it once a month, into the department's classrooms for a varying amount of time depending on what's going on. I encourage them to invite me into the classroom if there's something that they have interesting going on, or something that they would really like some feedback on, that maybe it's a new lesson, or a new activity that they're trying, so I encourage them to do that. Some do that. Not all do that, but some would say, "Hey, stop by today. I'm doing a new lesson on whatever it might be." Not enough, though, very honestly.

Respondent #11 stated:

The main thing really is developing your teaching talent. It would make sense that the department chair at least at this institution should try to be as engaged as possible of what people are doing in their classrooms. That's pretty challenging because there's all these other things that can take up time.

Summary of Research Question 2

When expanding the conversation from the definition of instructional leadership to the practice, it became evident that department chairs have multifaceted approaches to inspiring quality instruction and growth among their teachers. They spend time supporting individual teachers whether it is assisting their goal setting, visiting their classes, providing feedback or asking them to share a best practice. It is a significant investment of face-to-face time, encouragement, and on-going conversations with faculty. The stories that the chairs shared underscore the need for the trusting relationships that they cultivate as discussed in the first research question.

On a broader scale department chairs lead instructional or curricular goals for the department as a whole. The examples provided highlight the ways in which department chairs encourage professional development. All schools have money to send faculty members to conferences, but the respondents are actively involved in matching learning experiences to the individual needs of their department members or department as a whole. At times, they lead pedagogical learning experiences during department meetings or they draw on the talent of others to help move an initiative forward.

The theme that department chairs create opportunities for active collaboration around instructional practices to enhance the quality of instruction and student performance repeatedly surfaced in the narratives. The respondents created environments where teachers work collaboratively sharing their expertise. This promoted ownership of their professional growth without top-down directives. Schools that participate in collective professional development have greater opportunities for success and improvement in instruction (Leithwood et al., 2006).

Another theme that became evident was that despite the fact that the chairs understand what it means to be an instructional leader, and they actively fulfill the obligations of being an instructional leader, they are still faced with challenges. Lack of time, partially due to teaching and student demands and partially due to other administrative tasks, is the main culprit for the respondents not being able to do the job in the way in which they feel is optimal. The same factors that give them the expertise to be instructional leaders are the very ones that steal their time.

Themes from Research Question 3

Research Question 3: How do department chairs who perform as instructional leaders explain the factors that allow them to lead in this way?

Findings

Some of the themes connected to the third research question highlight characteristics of the conceptual framework distributed leadership. Admittedly, most of the participants were not formally aware of the term *Distributed Leadership*, but when asked to describe the culture of leadership and the relationship they possessed with their principals and/or other leaders, they described the foundational principles of a distributed leadership structure where the principal and department chair work together to manage the instructional program.

The themes in Research Question 3 speak to the ways in which the respondents overcome a lack of training and professional development for department chairs allowing them to be effective instructional leaders. They look to each other and other school leaders for mentorship and support.

Interview questions (see Appendix A) Numbers 8, 9, 10 and 11 were designed to address Research Question 3 by asking respondents to describe their relationships with their principals, the overall culture of leadership at their schools and the training that exists to support them in their roles as department chairs.

Relationship with the Principal

An apparent theme is that the relationship that the department chairs share with their principals is a key indicator of a distributed leadership structure. All of the respondents revealed their relationships with their principals to be respectful, reciprocal,

and empowering. Many saw their principals as mentors and partners in problem solving departmental issues. When asked to describe the relationship, many respondents included the word *respect*. Respondent #7 stated: "I have a tremendous amount of respect for her {the principal} and I think it's reciprocal. And you know, we work well together. We balance each other out."

Respondent #14 stated:

They treat the adults here, even though they're our bosses, with great respect and dignity, and reverence. They respect what we do, they appreciate all that we do, they have value ... We don't always agree to everything, but I always leave either the principal's office or the head's office knowing that I've been heard, and knowing that my opinion's been respected, whether we're on the same page, not, or there's a difference of opinion.

Meeting regularly with the principal to discuss departmental issues, school initiatives or new ideas allows the respondents to feel valued and participatory in school leadership.

Respondent #2 stated:

So I meet with [] once a month to talk about various issues with particular students in particular classes. The relationship I have with [] actually is splendid. She and I are on the same page, I think, that our ultimate goal is the kid, is the student.

Respondent #16 stated:

She's wonderful. The idea is that every other day six in the eight-day cycle I supposedly meet with her. Life does get in the way there also, but if there is ever, every any conflict, any issue, I would just email her and figure out, let's work together with the problem. I think we get along great.

Additionally, there is a level of collegiality and professionalism. The respondents felt comfortable in their positions as instructional leaders and feel their leadership and

knowledge are appreciated by their principals and vital to the success of the instructional program. Respondent #3 stated:

I feel a very good relationship, a close, collegial relationship, with both [] and [], who are the upper school and middle school heads, which in my experience is kind of a different model...I have to say that in this environment, in this private school environment, that it's very professional, very collegial, and I've found it refreshing and comfortable to work with professionals here. They make it very easy and open to work with them.

Respondent #8 stated:

I think I feel very much empowered by my relationship with her. I sense that she trusts me to do what I think is best and I think that comes with, also with her ability to help me process things, to get to the decision or to the conclusion of what needs to be done, which I think is very real.

Respondent #15 stated: "And she {previous principal} micromanaged things a little more. Not that I have an issue with that, but I think [] is more open in getting input."

Trusted to be the Instructional Leaders

When discussing to whom does the responsibility fall for instructional leadership, the theme that department chairs feel empowered and trusted by principals to be the instructional leaders of their departments became clear. When asked who is responsible for instructional leadership, Respondent #3 stated:

Speaking honestly, I think that here it's mainly the department chairs. I know that the heads, do get out to classrooms. We do have [] who also observes quite a bit, particularly our new staff. Very honestly, I think it's mainly left to the department chairs. I don't see them a lot involved in that aspect.

It's that kind of support that really has allowed us to really move forward under this new program, which we feel pretty strongly about.

If there's any issues, certainly we're the first people they {administrators} come to and discuss, and are part of the decisions that are made in relation to staff, or curriculum issues type of thing.

Respondent #16 stated:

I think we have a lot of opportunities and a lot of encouragement to be leaders in our field. I absolutely feel like if there is some issue coming up, ...we have opportunities. You are encouraged to be a leader. I have never ever felt like my voice was not heard and respected

Respondent #2 stated:

It's very useful for me to have an ally like [] to be able to say, Yeah, that kid's been a nightmare for two years..... It's possible, I suppose, that one might feel it as a, gosh, it might feel like an imposition on my role as the chair. It actually feels incredibly helpful. I'm delighted to have her with me on that way. Yeah, I feel like we're both leading that English department.

Respondent #14 stated:

She's very good in that way. She doesn't act as though she {principal} knows it all, and I've worked with people that have when they didn't.... Often what I find is good here is that our debate, our discussion, usually we wind up in a better place, whether we're at that place in the beginning or in a different place.

Respondent #7 stated:

To be honest, they over time, have given me much more freedom than I thought I would be afforded. And much more, you know, autonomy in my decision making. But I think also that comes with the fact that I've established a constant communication with them.

Culture of Leadership

The narratives demonstrated that not only is distributed leadership an organizational structure for leadership, it an identifying characteristic of the school's culture. It is shared leadership; when a school moves from one school leader as a function of the school as a whole, therefore it can't simply exist between the principal and department chair. This theme was clear as the respondents described how they felt like

contributing members to the academic vision of the school. When asked about the culture of leadership, Respondent #3 stated:

Refreshing, for me. Open and professional, supportive, for sure. Creative. If, as a department chair, or even a faculty member, comes up with some interesting idea of maybe a new course, any type of professional development activity, I mean they're very supported to do that, and open to do different types of things.

Of the 3 schools, The Banana School has the newest distributed leadership structure. In the last 5 years, the school has been transitioning the leadership structure to be more distributed particularly in an effort to empower department chairs. The respondents are candid about the challenges with the transition, but speak favorable about the change in the culture of leadership.

Respondent #7 stated:

It's transitioning. So, I feel like there's sort of this desire to empower department chairs more and to distribute responsibility more broadly.... So it's in progress but I do think that's their direction that they're trying to go, to put some of the responsibility on the chair.

Respondent #10

So, I would say that the culture of leadership is transitional because, at least in the six years that I've been here, there has been this movement to put more responsibility in the hands of the department chairs, and so that to me is a transition from maybe the way things were before.... Well, I think it's really a great way to [run] a school. I think that that chair leadership, but I just think it comes with bumps. Because you got, again that word, transition and change. I think there is no way to do that super smoothly. So along the way, it's been nice to have those department chairs kind of really have a place to meet weekly and just to be able to talk.

Mentorship aids successful leadership skills

Based on the interview data, there is not a lot of professional development support in place for department chairs to prepare them for leading departments. This theme was

true for all of the department chairs. Respondent #13 illuminates this point: "I didn't apply for it, I didn't even really ask for it. It was just like, "Oh well, tag, you're it. You're the department chair." Often there is an assumption that they come to the job with the necessary skill set. However, many respondents mentioned informal mentorship, someone they chose to help them fulfill their roles as leaders of departments. When asked to talk about systems of support or training, Respondent #4 stated:

In terms of evaluating other faculty, managing a budget, that kind of stuff, that was sort of learn through mistake. Fortunately, the person who was chair of the department before me was promoted to another administrator position so he was still here and I have a good relationship with him, so I went to him a lot, especially my first two years, seeking guidance.

Respondent #5 stated:

I have a good friend who was a department chair who I coached with as well and she was a department chair for math up until she had a baby. She was someone who I knew quite well and so I talked to her quite a bit about the pluses and minuses of it from taking on that role.

The Cherry School recognized that department chairs needed clarity and consistency among the departments about their roles as chairs. All department chairs participated in a re-write of the job description with the principal. Not only is this an example of distributed leadership, but it is an attempt on the principal's part to bring transparency and clear expectations to the job. When asked about department chair training, Respondent # 16 replied:

Informally, it is all of the other chairs who have been here role modeling what we do. We spent a lot of time as a group coming up with what is our job description as a department chair. Yes, there's the budget. Yes, there's the purchasing of materials and whatever that we need. But what do we want to be? Who do we want to be?

Collaboration

Along with mentorship, chairs are able to look to each other to create a learning community to and support system to facilitate their growth and capability as leaders. At the Apple school, department chairs were sent to a workshop to learn about leadership with chairs from across the country. When asked about this experience, Respondent #5 stated:

It was very useful. It was good. To be honest, when I saw the schedule of things, I thought it sounded terrible or it sounded boring. It sort of was like, "Ooh." To me, when they were talking about management strategies or something like that, it's not really something that gets me excited but it was really good. I really enjoyed it. You were with a bunch of other either incoming or within their first year or two of experiences being department chairs and stuff like that and just getting to share ideas and the shared struggle of what are some of the challenges you have had and everything like that.

Several respondents talked about department chairs getting together to support each other in their roles. Respondent #10 stated:

I think an obstacle has been having a system where the department chair really had no leadership skills ... I mean, no leadership experience. And then, when I came on board, many of the other department chairs started meeting regularly, and the school decided {that this was beneficial} and the department chairs be responsible for the individual growth of their faculty.

Summary of Research Question 3

The participants all help to lead the instructional program at their schools as the designated instructional leader, a responsibility that is encouraged and supported by their principals and other school leaders. The relationships that exist between the respondents and their principals underscore the characteristics of distributive leadership: they are a reciprocal exchange of ideas, they participate in a shared vision of the school, they are collaborative conversations and the principals serve as mentors to help problem solve, not

dictate solutions. The principal-department chair relationship is critical to enable the respondents to be successful instructional leaders.

The respondents are trusted and respected for their expertise in their disciplines. The lines of communication are open. The respondents are afforded the authority to make decisions, and their ideas are welcome. Allowing the department chairs to share in the management of the instructional program through shared decision-making fosters a culture of cooperative problem solving. This distributive culture of leadership nurtures the respondents as leaders and empowers them to use their expertise to improve the instructional program.

Mentorship was also a contributing factor in aiding the respondents to be successful instructional leaders. There is not much formal training to teach department chairs how lead departments. The respondents more or less learned “on the job.” To help combat this deficit, the department chairs learned to seek out mentorship from other school leaders and learned to collaborate and strategize with each other. Just as it benefits faculty to participate in collaborative learning communities, the same holds true for department chairs coming together to support one another.

Summary

This research study sought to explore the role of department chairs and their ability to share the management of the instructional program with their principals using a distributed leadership model. The study also sought to explore the perceptions and strategies of department chairs to promote quality instruction and professional growth among their department members.

Chapter 4 presented, in detail, the multiple dimensions of the sixteen department chairs' responses to 11 interview questions. The analysis of the department chair responses revealed 12 themes; the most significant are that department chairs have a thorough understanding of instructional leadership and view it as a main responsibility. They invest a significant amount of time and energy into nurturing the growth of their department members and they are able to do this successfully because of the support and trust of their principals.

Chapter 5 provides a summary of the findings in relation to the research questions and to previous research studies. The chapter ends with conclusions and implications for future research.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND SUMMARY

Introduction

This final chapter summarizes the findings of this study, relates the findings to the literature reviewed, and offers suggestions for practice, policy and future research. The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions and strategies of department chairs to promote professional growth and quality instruction among the faculty within schools that use a distributed leadership model, whereby department chairs and principals share the responsibility of managing the instructional program. This study addressed the following research questions:

1. How do department chairs in schools that incorporate distributed leadership describe the role of department chairs as instructional leaders?
2. In what ways, if any, do department chairs in schools that incorporate distributed leadership lead their departments in instructional practice?
3. How do department chairs who perform as instructional leaders explain the factors that allow them to lead in this way?

As indicated in the methodology chapter of this dissertation, a series of 16 interviews were conducted in three different schools, coded the Apple, Banana and Cherry Schools. All participants in the interviews were department chairs in secondary schools that practiced distributed leadership.

Discussion of Findings

The research within the past twenty years suggests that successfully managing a school's instructional program is key for student academic success (Blasé and Blase, 1999; Marks and Printy, 2003; Leithwood, et al., 2004, 2010; Hallinger, Lee & Walker, 2012). When teachers were interviewed for the 2010 Wallace Foundation research project, they identified the following practices of school administrators to be instructionally helpful: giving direct feedback about instruction; visiting classes regularly; sitting in on planning meetings; and providing professional development opportunities about instruction. The study also concluded that "Department heads should be regarded, institutionally, as a central resource for improving instruction in middle and high schools" (p. 92). The study confirmed the findings of the earlier study of Costanza, Tracy and Holmes (1987) that department chairs have the discipline-specific expertise enabling them to effectively assist in managing the instructional program.

However, additional studies reveal that department chairs can face difficulty in their quest to be effective instructional leaders. When there is a lack of clarity with regard to their job description, lack of authority, and too many administrative tasks, department chairs find it difficult to be successful instructional leaders (Weller, 2001; Mayers and Zapeda, 2002).

All of the department chairs interviewed for this study described their primary responsibility as instructional leadership. They spoke accurately and thoroughly about the varied aspects of instructional leadership. They were able to provide specific examples of how they lead, and they detailed the factors within their schools that support them in their

roles as instructional leaders. Additionally, in support of the existing research, the participants were candid about challenges they face.

Research Question 1 – Definition of Instructional Leadership

A review of the responses of the first research question indicates that the department chairs interviewed for this study collectively have a firm grasp on the definition of instructional leadership. Due to their proximity to the classroom and students, level of subject area expertise and positions of authority, they have a unique perspective and understanding of the components of instructional leadership. Their stories are in keeping with Costanza, Tracy and Holmes' work (1987), that department chairs can define curriculum and objectives, shape classroom culture and impact teaching styles. There were several patterns that emerged from the interviews. In their definition of instructional leadership chairs included the following key components: giving feedback to department members about instruction, observing classes, modeling good instructional practice, coaching teachers one-on-one and engaging faculty collaborative conversations about instruction.

An important aspect of the interview data to note is that all 16 participants in this study regard instructional leadership as a core responsibility of being a department chair. Leading the growth of their department members and ensuring that quality instruction is delivered is a constant pursuit. This sentiment supports the findings in Weller's 2001 study that 85% of department chairs felt that improving classroom instruction, developing curriculum, planning professional development and supervising faculty is what the role of department chair should be.

The interview data also showed that nurturing positive relationships among department members was a foundational strategy that the department chairs employed to assist them in their task to be instructional leaders. This strategy supports an important finding in the Blasé and Blasé study (1999), that effective instructional leadership included promoting professional growth through collegial collaboration about teaching and learning. Building positive relationships is also an aspect of transformational leadership which Fullan writes about in his book, Leading in a Culture of Change. Transformational leadership includes problem finding, problem solving and collaborations with stakeholders to promote organizational improvement (1991).

Research Question 2 – Instructional Leadership Practices

The second research question provided this study with numerous examples of how the participants engage in instructional leadership practice. Their ability to manage the instructional program is in accordance with the research that states department chairs are in the distinctive position of being the most influential people in secondary school due to their pedagogical and curricular expertise (Gold, 1998). A common practice by the participants was visiting classes and giving both formal and informal feedback on instruction. The Louis et. al. study (2010) identified classroom visits as a vital aspect of instructional leadership. It concluded that successful instructional leaders frequently observed classroom instruction for short periods of time followed up with direct and immediate feedback. The narratives for this study demonstrate that due to reduced teaching loads, department chairs have time for classroom visits. Moreover, they have the discipline-specific expertise to judge the quality of instruction. However, it must be noted

that the participants cited lack-of-time as a significant challenge to fulfilling their responsibilities, particularly in this area.

In their examples of instructional leadership, the participants offered examples of working with individual teachers to problem-solve a specific issue. This one-on-one support included: observations, talking through lesson plans, reviewing rubrics and improving parent communication.

Many of the respondents spoke about creating learning communities affording the opportunity to have on-going, collaborative conversations about teaching and learning with teachers. In Printy's study (2008), she concluded that departmental leadership is the most influential factor in promoting teachers' participation in successful learning communities. She found that teachers were more apt to adopt new teaching strategies when the strategies are introduced in a community where the teachers identify and the collegiality is strong. A regular practice among the participants was to carve out time during department meetings for inquiry and sharing of best practices to promote instructional growth. There was an emphasis on their teachers learning together and modeling for each other good instructional practice. The participants relied on this method rather than mandating change.

A theme that could not be overlooked when examining the interview data was the existence of challenges that the participants faced that prohibited them from fulfilling their department chair responsibilities to the best of their ability. There is ample research that illuminates the challenges that department chairs encounter in their positions. In the Weller (2001) and Mayers and Zepeda (2002) studies, they concluded that role ambiguity, lack of authority, under-preparation and too many clerical tasks all promote chairs'

underutilization as instructional leaders. However, for the participants interviewed in this study, the challenges were not as extensive as for those chairs in the Weller and Mayer and Zepeda studies because they operate in schools that practice a distributed leadership model. The participants in this study were helping to manage the instructional program with the authority and support of their principals. Their challenges mainly consisted of a shortage of time and feeling conflicted between leading their departments and meeting the needs of their students. Lack of training was also consistent among the respondents. Only chairs from one of the schools participated in any leadership training in the early stages of becoming a department chair.

Research Question 3 – What Factors Allow Department Chairs To Be Instructional Leaders?

The final research question sought to identify that factors that allow department chairs to be successful instructional leaders. Much of Research Question #3 is grounded in the theoretical framework for this study of distributed leadership. Spillane is one of the most well-known researchers on the topic of distributed leadership. According to Spillane, distributed leadership perspective recognizes that there are multiple leaders (Spillane et al., 2004) and that leadership activities are widely shared. A distributed model of leadership focuses upon the interactions, rather than the actions, of those in formal and informal leadership roles. It is primarily concerned with leadership practice and how leadership influences organizational and instructional improvement (Spillane & Camburn, 2006). A distributed leadership structure within a school is one where the department chairs share the leadership of the instructional program with the principal. In the

Leithwood (2008) study, higher-achieving schools followed a more distributed structure than lower-achieving schools. The interview data reveals that all 3 of the participants' schools practice distributed leadership.

Whitby (2014) wrote that distributed leadership requires trust, openness and support between all parties involved. A significant theme to surface in the participants' stories when questioned about the factors that allowed them to be instructional leaders, was a relationship with the principal that was respectful, empowering and transparent. The respondents described their working relationships with their principals as reciprocal and mutually respectful. The chairs felt as if they had unblocked access to meet with their principals. When they met to discuss departmental issues, they described feeling "heard." The narratives highlighted the mutual trust that existed between the participants and the principals.

In a distributed leadership school environment, the principal delegates instructional leadership to the department chairs. This practice was studied in the Wallace Foundation leadership study (2010) and concluded that collective leadership was found to have stronger influence on student achievement than individual leadership. The practice of delegating instructional leadership to department chairs was proven to be true in all 3 participating schools. The department chairs stated that they had the authority to make decisions and their professional expertise was valued. They described meetings with the principal as time for joint problem solving and strategizing about departmental concerns and goals.

Distributed leadership is greater than an organizational structure; it is a defining characteristic of school culture. When leadership is shared, there is evidence of teacher-

leaders, task distribution, collaborative leadership and distributed influence processes. It is a mindset that unites people around achieving a common goal (Robinson, 2008). In all 3 schools, the respondents spoke about a culture of leadership that was open and supportive. One respondent used the term “refreshing” and explained that all ideas are welcomed and supported. The chairs were invited to participate in the decision-making process.

In addition to a distributed leadership structure, the department chairs relied upon mentorship and collaboration with other chairs to support them in their leadership roles. The interview data show that there is little to no professional development within the 3 schools to train department chairs how to lead effectively. This is consistent with the research. When Mayers and Zepeda asked department chairs about job preparedness, more than 65% responded that they “learned on the job” (2002). To overcome lack of training and an official support system, all of the respondents sought out a mentor to help them fulfill their responsibilities, someone with the knowledge and experience to help guide them. In one of the schools, the department chairs began meeting regularly and the school recognized the benefit and formalized the group and meeting time.

Recommendations for Practice

This study sought to explore the perceptions and strategies of instructional leadership by department chairs and help identify the factors in place in their schools that allow them to be effective instructional leaders. As a result of this study, there are 3

recommendations for practice that educators and researchers should explore. The first is that school leaders should make every effort to give department chairs more time to accomplish the responsibilities of instructional leadership. There was not one respondent who did not mention lack of time as a challenge. All of the respondents were asked a “magic wand” question. Seven of the 16 respondents answered that question by stating they would wish for more time. First, school leaders must respect the time that decreased teaching loads affords. Even though chairs possess beneficial skill sets, they should not be asked to take on responsibilities outside the scope of leading their departments (i.e. participate on school-wide committees). Secondly, school leaders should also consider decreasing department-chair teaching loads further to 2 classes instead of 3. Of the 7 respondents who wished for more time, 4 specifically stated a further reduction in classes as a method to provide more time. Lastly, department meeting time should not be scheduled during lunch periods when department members need that time for a mental and physical recharge.

The second recommendation is that schools must provide professional development opportunities specifically designed for department chairs, whether it is sending chairs to an outside organization like Independent School Management or dedicating time during the normal school professional development days for department chairs to meet as a group to focus on department chair leadership. Just as teachers benefit from collaborative learning communities, department chairs would benefit as well. There are common challenges to leading a department, and chairs can use each other’s expertise and experiences.

The last recommendation for practice is for school administrators to create a formalized mentor program for department chairs. New chairs should be assigned a mentor who has substantial leadership experience. While the respondents described their principals as mentors, 7 respondents mentioned an additional person who served as a mentor, confidant, and sounding board upon whom they relied for guidance.

Recommendations for Policy

The policy recommendations for this study will bring more clarity to the department chair position, increase department chairs' buy-in and better allocate department chairs' time, allowing them to be more effective instructional leaders. The first recommendation is for school leaders (policy makers) to engage in a re-write (or a first write) of the department chair job description with the department chairs. A collaborative effort to write the job description will further support a distributive leadership structure and further empower chairs to be involved in the shaping of their roles. It will also spark collaborative conversation between chairs and school leaders, which may bring forth new ideas or ways of thought. The Cherry School has created a new job description for department chairs, and it had the best examples of distributed leadership in practice. The Banana School is in the early stages of transitioning to a more distributive model, and the respondents noted the most challenges to their leadership ability.

A second recommendation for policy is for school administrators to re-assign basic administrative tasks to office personnel (i.e. arranging for substitute teachers, budget reports, and textbook orders) in order to give the department chairs more time to

focus on instructional leadership. School administrators should capitalize on the strengths that department chairs bring to their positions: curricular and pedagogy expertise. Re-assigning basic administrative tasks may be an option for schools who face a fiscal challenge of a further class reduction for chairs.

Recommendations for Future Research

One implication for research based on this study should be an analysis of the principal's perspective on instructional leadership and a distributed leadership model. The researcher did have an opportunity to speak with one of the principals informally, and the principal stated that she could not run the school without the extraordinary work of her department chairs. Adding the principal's perspective would add another layer of clarity and understanding of how schools can successfully manage the instructional program, thereby improving student achievement. An informative study would be to interview department chairs and principals within the same schools.

Another implication for research would be to study the role relationship-building plays in schools. The researcher noted the significance that relationships between school personnel played in the ability for the department chairs to be successful and how much time was spent in cultivating and maintaining those relationships. Teaching is a personal profession, and it would be a worthwhile study to explore the influence of relationships between school leaders and teachers in a school setting.

The last implication for research would be to do a study that compares schools where instructional leadership is led by department chairs and schools where the management of the instructional program is still led by the principals to further study the

benefits and challenges of department chairs as instructional leaders. Perhaps a quantitative study could be included to study student achievement in both school settings to further explore the differences.

Summary

This study was designed to engage department chairs in conversation about instructional leadership in hopes to gain clarity about their understanding, practice and the factors within their schools that support them as instructional leaders. The analysis of the data supports existing research that department chairs are the best equipped to promote professional growth among their department members. The data analysis also illuminated that chairs were able to be effective instructional leaders when they had the support of their principals and were permitted to share in leading the academic vision of the school. Their discipline-specific expertise was valued and trusted, proving that management of a school's instructional program should not be a top-down endeavor or controlled by one person. As research suggests, a distributive approach creates a culture of respect, collaborative inquiry and problem-solving, where educators work together to improve teaching and learning.

The data does show that there are some challenges that chairs face as instructional leaders even in schools that support and delegate them to do so. Lack of time and too many clerical tasks remain problematic. There is an on-going internal conflict for department chairs choosing between their students' needs and their department members' needs. Department chairs live between two worlds: administrator and teacher. However,

this position is what makes them uniquely qualified to fulfill their obligations as instructional leaders. Schools must continue to question how can they position department chairs to be most effective.

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Appendix A

Preliminary Question- 1. How were you appointed to this position?

Research questions	Corresponding interview questions
1. How do school department chairs describe the role of department chairs as instructional leaders?	2. How would you describe your relationship between yourself and your department members? 3. What is your definition of an instructional leader?
2. In what ways, if any, do department chairs lead their departments in instructional practice?	4. What are your main responsibilities? 5. In what ways are you an instructional leader for your department? 6. How are you involved in professional development for teachers? 7. Are there obstacles to doing your job in the way you intend?
3. How do department chairs who perform as instructional leaders explain the factors that allow them to lead in this way?	8. How would you describe your relationship with the principal? 9. What professional development exists to support you as department chair? 10. How would you describe the culture of leadership at your school? 11. If you could wave a magic wand to make one change to your job, what would it be?



February 20, 2017

Carlaina Bell

89 Saddlefield Drive

Morris Plains, NJ 07950

Dear Ms. Bell,

The Seton Hall University Institutional Review Board has reviewed the information you have submitted addressing the concerns for your proposal entitled "The Role of Department Chairs as Instructional Leaders in New Jersey Secondary Schools that Practice Distributed Leadership". Your research protocol is hereby approved as revised through expedited review. The IRB reserves the right to recall the proposal at any time for full review.

Enclosed for your records are the signed Request for Approval form and the stamped original Consent Form. Make copies only of the stamped form.

The Institutional Review Board approval of your research is valid for a one-year period from the date of this letter. During this time, any changes to the research protocol must be reviewed and approved by the IRB prior to their implementation.

According to federal regulations, continuing review of already approved research is mandated to take place at least 12 months after this initial approval. You will receive communication from the IRB Office for this several months before the anniversary date of your initial approval.

Thank you for your cooperation.

In harmony with federal regulations, none of the investigators or research staff involved in the study took part in the final decision.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Mary F. Ruzicka, Ph.D.", is written over the typed name.

Mary F. Ruzicka, Ph.D.

Professor

Director, Institutional Review Board

cc: Dr. Barbara Strobert