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The Urban Pedagogue to Principal Pipeline: Elementary School Teacher Leaders' Perceptions of Mentorship and Its Impact on Their School Leadership Preparation

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THE URBAN PEDAGOGUE TO PRINCIPAL PIPELINE: ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHER LEADERS' PERCEPTIONS OF MENTORSHIP AND ITS IMPACT ON THEIR SCHOOL LEADERSHIP PREPARATION

by

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EDUCATIONAL STUDIES IN DIVERSE POPULATIONS

ABSTRACT

Schools are complex and dynamic systems that require innovative leaders who are willing to invest in classroom teachers by giving them opportunities to lead beyond the four walls of the classroom. Because principals play an integral role in the academic achievement of students in their schools, it is incumbent upon principals to invest in teacher leaders to support students' unique and multifaceted needs. The knowledge teachers gain because of leadership experiences often strengthens their professional dispositions and expands their interest in other critical roles in the system such as becoming an instructional coach, interventionist, principal, or curriculum specialist. A systematic approach, using a tool such as the distributed leadership framework, supports autonomy, capacity, and accountability which are critical for innovation and growth.

The goal of this study was to identify the mentoring practices utilized by urban elementary school principals and compare their responses to what teacher leaders reported as effective strategies to support their growth and development. The following questions were explored:

1. What strategies do urban elementary school principals use to mentor their teacher leaders?
2. How do urban elementary school teacher leaders describe the mentorship they

receive from their principals?

3. What opportunities do teacher leaders desire for their principals to provide them in an effort to prepare the teacher leaders to become principals?

Data analysis revealed that principals employ numerous strategies, often individualized to meet the specific needs of the teacher leaders at their schools, while also using specific strategies such as communicating, assigning leadership responsibilities, and encouraging professional learning. Teacher leaders largely echoed these strategies as beneficial, but interviews also revealed the need for a more structured leadership framework. The results of this study will contribute to the body of knowledge surrounding leadership succession planning in urban elementary schools and provide recommendations for effective strategies that can be used to build leadership capacity within a school district.

Keywords: mentorship, teacher leader, urban elementary school, principal, pedagogue

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my Savior, Jesus Christ, for His guidance and never-ending love for me. God, I appreciate You for giving me the desire to start and complete this journey. Without You, I would not have made it this far. I love You, Lord!

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Schools are such complex and dynamic systems that it is critical for school leaders to listen to their teachers. Moreover, because school leadership plays such an integral role in the students' academic achievement, it is incumbent upon principals to invest in teacher leaders. By building capacity of the teacher leaders at a school, principals can better support the unique and multifaceted needs of their students.

The definition of teacher leadership varies among scholars (Leithwood & Duke, 1999; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Some scholars consider teacher leaders to be educators who take on leadership roles in addition to their classroom teaching responsibilities to accomplish the multi-tiered work of schools (Cosenza, 2015; Kenjarski, 2015). Nolan and Palazzolo (2011) do not confine teacher leaders as educators who lead from the classroom, but they characterize teacher leaders as "expert pedagogues with years of classroom experience who have demonstrated capacity to work collaboratively to effect change in their schools and larger learning communities" (p. 302).

The teacher leadership opportunities prior to becoming a principal may include serving as the grade level chair or the leader for a specific subject area team while remaining in the classroom (Ado, 2016; Sergiovanni & Starratt, 2007). Other teacher leaders may seek positions such as curriculum coach or content coordinator (Mangin, 2007). These out-of-classroom leadership positions, generally held at the school level,

serve the dual purpose of (a) increasing student academic achievement by supporting other teachers to improve their classroom instruction (Ado, 2016; Desravines & Fenton, 2015; Mangin, 2007; Smylie et al., 2002) and (b) reducing the load of the school's principal by taking on leadership responsibilities (Camburn et al., 2003; Mangin, 2007; Murphy, 2005). These varied experiences of pedagogues are integral to their growth as leaders in education and inform their continued career choices, including the decision of whether or not to become a school administrator.

A pedagogue is a classroom teacher who transitions to school principal. This path starts by first serving in the classroom for a non-specified period. While gaining experience as a teacher, the pedagogue concurrently assumes some leadership roles such as grade level leader. After that, the pedagogue chooses various leadership opportunities within education that can lead to a fulltime leadership position such as instructional coach, interventionist, principal, or curriculum specialist (Loder & Spillane, 2005).

Public school principals are widely held responsible for the successes and failures of their schools' academic programs while serving essential roles in their schools' performance and functioning (Desravines & Fenton, 2015; Hancock et al., 2012). Second only to classroom instruction, the leadership of school principals has an indirect, yet proven, impact on student learning (Brown, 2016; Cotton, 2003; Desravines & Fenton, 2015; Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Leithwood et al., 2004; Robinson et al., 2008; Wallace Foundation, 2017; Wenner & Campbell, 2017). Principals' leadership responsibilities include their ability to continuously perform multiple leadership tasks simultaneously throughout the school year. Principals are responsible for working with all stakeholders

in their schools' orbits by including students, classified staff, teachers, parents, central office administrators, school board members, community members, and local business owners in their decision-making processes (Mangin, 2007).

Little is known about the interactions between principals and their teacher leaders (Leithwood & Riehl, 2005; Loder & Spillane, 2005; Mangin, 2007). However, when principals collaborate with their teacher leaders and share their leadership load, "school improvement efforts become more manageable" (Ado, 2016, p. 3). School principals play crucial roles in fostering opportunities for teacher leaders to hone their leadership skills within the school context (Cassata & Allensworth, 2021). It is important for public school principals to better understand the plethora of challenges that they are experiencing. This way, they can better share their firsthand knowledge of what it takes to effectively lead a school with other educators such as the teacher leaders who are interested in becoming school principals. This will also allow principals to provide meaningful support to those teacher leaders who may not wish to secure school leadership roles.

The pedagogical skills and strengths that a teacher in any school possesses do not automatically translate into an innate ability to lead students to academic mastery. Within a teacher's classroom community, multiple factors influence the teacher's work to keep their classroom environment safe and conducive to deep learning. The skills needed to nurture a classroom culture of high academic performance and achievement can be challenging to acquire and hone. However, even when fully acquired, those skills are usually insufficient to prepare that teacher to become an effective teacher leader and, in turn, to become an accomplished school leader. A principal serving in a mentorship

capacity can help teacher leaders gain the necessary skills to become a master school leader by creating conditions that support the teacher leaders' work (Ado, 2016; Higgins & Bonne, 2011; Muijs & Harris, 2007; Silva et al., 2000). By embedding mentoring opportunities into the school day and continuously throughout the school year, principals can intentionally create authentic and meaningful leadership experiences for the teacher leaders in their schools.

Leading an urban elementary school requires particular preparation and awareness that must be intentionally presented to future school leaders. Elementary schools are early learning institutions that offer foundational learning experiences for young students. When in an urban setting, elementary schools also represent other unique descriptors. For example, urban schools are havens for students from a variety of cultural backgrounds, socioeconomic statuses, and academic levels. The layering of diversities in urban schools' student populations, combined with the diverse experiences of the schools' faculty and staff members, makes the job of urban school leaders extremely challenging. Despite the challenges, the difficulty experienced by new school leaders can be lessened with proper preparation prior to assuming leadership positions in such schools.

In this study, the researcher will examine how urban elementary school principals go about mentoring the teacher leaders in their schools with the hopes that their teacher leaders will become school principals in the future. Creating a pipeline for teacher leaders to become principals is important because studies have shown that "school leadership is second only to teaching among school-related influences on student learning" (Wallace Foundation, 2017, p. 7). According to Cotton (2003), knowledgeable and involved

principals who actively focus on their schools' instructional programs influence higher student achievement in comparison to their principal peers who are mostly focused on the managerial tasks of their schools. Because of the integral role that principals play in the success of their schools, principals must balance multiple tasks, one of which includes "preparing novices for the school leadership pipeline" (Peters-Hawkins et al., 2018, p. 29).

This research will delve into the mentoring strategies employed by the principals as well as discover the perceptions of teacher leaders regarding the mentoring strategies that they experience. Having a clear understanding of the mentoring strategies that principals use to prepare their teacher leaders for leadership positions will inform the body of work surrounding urban school leadership. Similarly, uncovering the perceptions that teacher leaders have as the recipients of their principals' mentoring strategies will serve to expand principals' knowledge of whether their strategies are effectively executed.

Statement of the Problem

The educational effects and implications that have resulted from the loss of instructional time due to the COVID-19 pandemic is becoming more and more apparent as time goes on. Such effects are impacting many schools across the nation but to an even greater degree in poverty-stricken and minority communities generally served by urban schools (Haderlein et al., 2021). The negative perceptions and realities that urban schools faced before COVID-19 have become more exacerbated from the closing of schools to protect families from exposure to the virus (Schwartz et al., 2021). Conversations have

continued and funding allocated to address learning loss that has inevitably widened the achievement gap between students in suburban, rural, and urban schools (Anderson & Summerfield, 2010; Schwartz et al., 2021). Leadership mentoring in urban school settings is also inconsistent and too often non-existent, which, in turn, can lead to poor planning for leadership succession (Peters-Hawkins et al., 2018).

Urban schools possess distinct characteristics, and the negative perceptions of these characteristics are often perpetuated through movies and the media (Bulman, 2002; Golub, 2009; Hayes & Kincheloe, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2009). These negative perceptions are shrouded in depictions of school violence, low academic achievement, dysfunctional families, gang violence, and drug activity (Reed & Swaminathan, 2016). Despite such perceptions, urban schools continue working to meet the needs of the students that they serve. Teachers of minority students must be adequately prepared to address the needs of urban students through research-based professional development and ongoing support from their peers and administrators (Schaffer et al., 2018). Understanding the implications of teaching in urban schools is important for the future of education in the United States (U.S.). In fact, such understanding is crucial because the U.S. Census Bureau predicts that, by 2060, schools will have a larger population of minority students than White students (Bryant et al., 2017; Colby & Ortman, 2015).

To fully comprehend the magnitude of teaching in urban schools and how the challenges of urban schools differ from those of suburban and rural schools (Knoblauch & Chase, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 2009), one must understand the overall characteristics of urban schools. Schaffer et al. (2018) acknowledge that a singular definition of urban

schools can limit one's ability to recognize the enormous issues facing urban schools. Scholars define urban schools using various demographics and characteristics of the communities and cities in which the schools are located (Whipp & Geronime, 2017). For example, urban schools usually have higher minority student populations, while suburban schools have higher White student populations (Reed & Swaminathan, 2016). Urban schools usually have many students from low-income homes and many who struggle academically. Urban schools also tend to experience perpetual difficulties with recruiting and retaining qualified teachers (Darling-Hammond et al., 2005; Martin et al., 2016).

In addition to the varying descriptions used to define urban schools, research shows that urban schools face more significant challenges than suburban and rural schools because of the lack of resources in the more densely populated urban districts (Crowson, 2011; Milner, 2012; Schaffer et al., 2018). When resources are distributed, such resources might not reach students who need additional support and services such as in special education and English for speakers of other languages. For example, although schools that serve low-income, high-minority populations will have special education teachers, these teachers might lack the content expertise needed to help high school students with their subject matter (Reed & Swaminathan, 2016).

The issues plaguing urban schools are numerous and have direct impacts on the students' achievement levels. School leaders play an integral role in students' academic achievement and their school's overall achievement levels (Brown, 2016; Cotton, 2003; Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Leithwood et al., 2004; Wallace Foundation, 2017; Wenner & Campbell, 2017). However, to ensure student achievement and to meet students' unique

and complex needs, principals should tap into the strengths of their teacher leaders. By doing so, principals can also effectively prepare these teacher leaders for becoming future school leaders.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study is to examine the mentoring strategies used by principals to prepare teacher leaders for school leadership positions at urban elementary schools in Central Alabama. In addition, this study seeks to understand how urban elementary school teacher leaders describe the mentorship strategies used by principals as well as discover how teacher leaders desire to be mentored. The goal is to gain more insight into the effective mentoring practices that urban elementary school principals should employ to encourage teacher leaders in their schools to seek school leadership positions in the future. The results of this study will contribute to the body of knowledge surrounding leadership succession planning in urban elementary schools and give necessary strategies that principals can use to successfully prepare teacher leaders to become principals. The narratives of these principals and teacher leaders at urban elementary schools in Central Alabama are essential for revealing the experiences that shaped their school leadership journeys despite the systemic barriers and challenges that perpetually affect urban school leadership.

Research Questions

This study addresses three research questions (RQs):

1. What strategies do urban elementary school principals use to mentor their

teacher leaders?

2. How do teacher leaders describe the mentorship strategies used by their principals?
3. What opportunities do teacher leaders desire for their principals to provide them in an effort to prepare the teacher leaders to become principals?

Significance of Research Study

This study uncovers the process that school leaders use to create, institute, and perpetuate the changes that are needed for student success in urban elementary schools. The current research is significant because it reveals differences in how leaders at varying urban elementary schools exercise their leadership influence on the teacher leaders in their buildings. Other research studies were conducted mainly by using "historical analysis to examine an urban, northern, de facto segregated school and elucidated factors associated with educational effectiveness or goodness" (Randolph, 2004, p. 598). However, this study has been conducted specifically in Alabama urban schools to examine how elementary school principals are mentoring and supporting their teacher leaders. The results of this study have the potential to develop the pedagogue to principal pipeline by building capacity within urban elementary schools and addressing the need for an effective succession framework.

Definitions of Important Terminology

The important terms used in this study are defined as follows:

Andragogy: the method of innate discovery and self-directed learning for adults

(Knowles, 1980)

Mentorship: the process of transferring knowledge in a particular area of focus from one person to another using strategic learning methods (Martin et al., 2016)

Pedagogue: a teacher or instructor of children (Merriam-Webster, n.d.)

Phenomenology: the study of lived experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2018)

Principal: the leader, manager, and change agent for a school (Mangin, 2007)

Teacher leaders: expert educators who take on leadership roles in addition to their classroom teaching responsibilities to accomplish the multi-tiered work of schools by working collaboratively with other educators (Cosenza, 2015; Kenjarski, 2015; Nolan & Palazzolo, 2011)

Urban school: a school located in a large city that has a predominantly minority student population (Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006; Haberman, 2003; Milner, 2012; Orfield, 2001) and that has the effects of student poverty (Jensen, 2009) and low academic achievement (Rothstein, 2017)

Limitations

This study has two limitations affecting its generalizability. The primary limitation was a relatively small sample size, that of 26 urban elementary school participants (12 principals and 14 teacher leaders). The second limitation was having just one setting, that of a single urban school district in Central Alabama. Findings may or may not be generalizable or replicated outside of the setting used in this study. However, to increase the potential of generalizability, these two limitations can be addressed in future studies.

Organization of the Study

The researcher organized this study into chapters, each with its own headings and subheadings. In Chapter I, the researcher overviews the study topic and shares the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, the research questions, the benefits of the study, the definitions of important terminology, the limitations of the study, and the organization of the study. In Chapter II, the researcher introduces the review of the literature, outlines the theoretical frameworks, and discusses pertinent literature to the topic of study. In Chapter III, the researcher introduces the plan of inquiry, shares the research design, gives the context, identifies the participants, states the research questions, describes the data collection tools and methodology, explains the data analysis process, discloses any ethical considerations, and divulges the researcher's role in the study. In Chapter IV, the researcher introduces the results of the conducted research and outlines the findings of the study. In Chapter V, the researcher summarizes the findings, gives conclusions, and shares suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Prior to the Civil War, education in the United States (U.S.) was provided mainly in rural settings where traveling teachers taught children in their homes (Sharp & Walter, 2012). Following the Civil War, schools became urbanized. As communities began to grow, so did the need for the construction of small community schools, although the managerial needs of the schools remained relatively low (Anderson & Summerfield, 2010). After 1880, urban institutions of education began to replace the American education system as it was known at that time. Teaching and school administration were not considered to be separate roles until around 1918 with the emergence of "larger, complex bureaucratic school structures modeled after cost-efficient businesses" (Loder & Spillane, 2005, p. 264). Although schools continue to be run in a business-like fashion until the present day, they have changed tremendously since the early 20th century. From the rural settings upon which education in America was built, schools have evolved with the creation and growth of urban and suburban school populations. For this study, the researcher will focus on current school leadership in urban elementary school settings.

Understanding the implications of teaching and leading in urban elementary schools is important for the future of education because the 2015 U.S. Census Bureau predicted that, by 2060, schools will have a larger student population of minorities than Whites (Bryant et al., 2017; Colby & Ortman, 2015). Americans of various ethnicities,

races, and backgrounds have adopted their own perceptions based on how urban schools are presented in the media (Bulman, 2002; Golub, 2009; Hayes & Kincheloe, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2009). However, despite these perceptions, urban schools must work to meet the needs of the students that they serve. Pedagogues and principals of minority students in urban school settings must be adequately prepared to address the needs of students through research-based professional development and ongoing, collaborative support (Schaffer et al., 2018).

Theoretical Frameworks

This study examined how urban elementary school teacher leaders perceive the mentoring strategies utilized by their principals. These perceptions were gathered through interviews with principals and teacher leaders. The study was guided by the social constructivist theory (SCT), the distributed leadership framework (DLF), and the teacher leadership skills framework (TLSF). Mentoring is a constructivist process intended to inform the learning and preparation of mentees for potential work tasks and responsibilities (Martin et al., 2016). In this study, principals are the mentors, and teacher leaders are their mentees. Mentoring allows urban elementary school principals and their teacher leaders to learn together with the goal of improving themselves professionally. To reach this goal, they construct knowledge through collaboration and experience, which, in turn, allows them to impact the learning of others in their schools.

Social Constructivist Theory

Learners in schools are not confined to young students; learning also occurs for the educators of those students. SCT posits that learners must be conscious in their thinking in order to derive meaning from listening to or observing their instructors (Alanazi, 2016). Vygotsky described such learning as the creation of knowledge through experience in the world and the reflection on such experiences (Kociuruba, 2017). Like Vygotsky, Piaget believed that the interactive and social process of learning proves that new knowledge is actively constructed, not simply acquired, as learners make meaning of their experiences (Alanazi, 2016; Drago-Severson, 2009). Because the personal and professional experiences among learners varies, the construction of new knowledge and the rate at which knowledge is constructed will also differ.

Distributed Leadership Framework

Incorporated within the DLF, distributed leadership illuminates the role that principals play as the owners of power, experience, and knowledge such as when sharing leadership knowledge and responsibilities with their teacher leaders through a democratic process (Desravines & Fenton, 2015; McKenzie & Locke, 2014; Spillane, 2005; Spillane et al., 2001). Distributed leadership also focuses on the dissemination of supervisory and management functions in schools (Gibb, 1954, as cited in Edwards, 2011) while highlighting the importance of creating a collaborative environment (McKenzie & Locke, 2014; Spillane, 2005). According to Glickman et al. (2014), distributed leadership involves principals including the entire school community in the process of decision-making while promoting teacher leadership, giving direct support, and coordinating

collaboration among internal and external colleagues. These researchers purport that the levels of support vary as do the needs within the schools (Glickman et al., 2014). According to Klein et al. (2018), "leadership is not an individual action; rather, it requires a relationship among the teacher leaders themselves and with members of their schools to influence curricular and pedagogical change" (p. 93). Similarly, Spillane (2005) explains that a distributed perspective of leadership practice highlights a system of specific interactions between people and their placement within an organization rather than simply focusing on a solitary action. Building systems for distributed leadership is an important component of school improvement (McKenzie & Locke, 2014) which can be materialized by principals allowing members of their instructional leadership teams to manage specific initiatives or lead grade-level teams (Desravines & Fenton, 2015).

Teacher Leadership Skills Framework

The TLSF focuses on the roles and responsibilities of teacher leaders as recipients of shared power with their principals and as producers who exert influence, not solely on their own learning, but also on the knowledge gained by other teachers and students around them (CSTP, 2018). The TLSF is centered around three components: (a) knowledge and skills, (b) dispositions, and (c) roles and opportunities. According to the CSTP, teacher leaders must possess strengths in pedagogy, andragogy, communication, collaboration, and decision-making. These competencies serve to improve teacher leaders' aptitude in formally and informally impacting student learning.

Theoretical Framework Usage in Study

The SCT, DLF, and TLSF were all used in this study to guide the development of pertinent interview questions. The researcher generated questions to elicit ideas from the principals regarding the mentoring strategies they employed to prepare their teacher leaders for leadership roles. In response to these questions, the principals described their mentoring strategies. Their responses led to determining the level of support provided by principals to their teacher leaders. Utilizing the SCT, DLF, and TLSF, the researcher also constructed similar interview questions to elicit ideas from the teacher leaders. Imperative to this study was generating questions to reach an understanding, from the teacher leaders' perspective, of the mentoring strategies utilized by their principals. Aligning interview questions for the principals with those for the teacher leaders was an intentional approach that allowed the researcher to compare the responses from the principal group to those from the teacher leader group. By comparing the responses from one group to the other group, the researcher was able to deduce which mentoring strategies described by principals were most effective at translating to the perceptions by teacher leaders regarding the mentorship they received and its impact on their school leadership preparation.

The researcher utilized the SCT, DLF, and TLSF as lenses through which to view the practices employed by principals when mentoring teacher leaders as well as to understand the descriptions of roles that they gave to teacher leaders. This allowed the researcher to analyze the responses from both participant groups (principals and teacher leaders) and to identify the subsequent themes. The DLF characterizes how principals

assign and share leadership roles with their teacher leaders while the TLSF defines the abilities of a teacher leader (CSTP, 2018). By combining DLF and TLSF with the SCT, the researcher discovered how urban elementary school principals distribute leadership opportunities to teacher leaders, how the teacher leaders construct knowledge from such mentoring, and how the new knowledge and skills acquired are described by scholars. By collecting and analyzing the perspectives of principals and teacher leaders, the researcher was able to reach a better understanding of how the teacher leaders perceive the mentorship that they have received.

Review of Literature

Teaching in Urban Schools

To fully understand the magnitude of teaching in urban schools and how the challenges of urban schools differ from those of suburban and rural schools (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Knoblauch & Chase, 2015), one must understand the overall characteristics of urban schools. Schaffer et al. (2018) acknowledge that a singular definition of urban schools restricts one's ability to classify the enormous issues faced by urban schools. Scholars define urban schools by using various demographics and characteristics of the communities and cities in which the schools are located. However, because it is difficult to arrive at a singular definition, Milner (2012) classifies urban education within three categories, each with varied levels of resources available to the schools in that category:

1. *Urban intensive* schools are located in large metropolitan cities with populations of one million people or more.

2. *Urban emergent* schools are located in large cities but not quite as large as metropolis cities.
3. *Urban characteristic* schools may be located in suburban or rural cities and may have a growing immigrant population.

Urban schools are often described as being deficient and as having problems that do not exist in suburban and rural settings (Steinberg, 2010). The negative connotation associated with urban schools perpetuates stereotypes that are not easily erased. Because modern urban schools face a plethora of challenges such as lower academic achievement and issues with classroom management (Siegel-Hawley, 2016), the recruitment and retention of effective pedagogues and principals can be very difficult (Darling-Hammond et al., 2005; Ingersoll et al., 2019; Martin et al., 2016).

Schaffer et al. (2018) highlight the controversy of defining urban schools solely based on the census data of the cities in which the schools are located. To explain their argument, the authors reiterate Milner's (2012) assertions that urban school districts should be classified based not only on their cities, but also on the academic, economic, and social implications of the communities that surround their schools (Schaffer et al., 2018). Educators and school leaders in urban settings face many challenges such as many students being from low-income homes and, also, struggling academically because of numerous factors (Darling-Hammond & Podolsky, 2019; Ingersoll et al., 2019; Siegel-Hawley, 2016). Many urban schools also experience perpetual difficulty with recruiting and retaining qualified teachers (Darling-Hammond et al., 2005; Martin et al., 2016).

As previously stated, the socioeconomic status of an urban community's population is often used as a correlation to its realities and characteristics. Jensen (2009) identifies six types of poverty. One of these types is *urban poverty* that "occurs in metropolitan areas with populations of at least 50,000 people. The urban poor deal with a complex aggregate of chronic and acute stressors (including crowding, violence, and noise) and are dependent on often-inadequate large-city services" (p. 6). Jensen's description of urban cities' characteristics aligns well with the descriptions given by other researchers and scholars. Conducted in elementary schools serving students from a single urban city, the current study sought to provide additional insights by exploring the unique occurrences surrounding mentorship and school leadership preparation in such settings.

Urban school demographics. Most American urban schools have predominantly minority student populations (Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006; Haberman, 2003; Milner, 2012; Orfield, 2001; Reed & Swaminathan, 2016). In 2017, Bryant et al. wrote, "at present, approximately 75% of Black students attend predominantly non-White schools with some school populations in large metro districts comprised of over 90% minority [students]" (p. 265). However, the teaching population in urban schools is predominately comprised of White females from middle-class and monolingual backgrounds (Banks, 2016; Evans & Leonard, 2013; Irvine, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Patton & Jordan, 2017). In the 2017-2018 school year, the country's teaching profession was 79.3% White, 6.7% African American, and 9.3% Hispanic (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). The more recent National Teacher and Principal Survey reported by the Institute of Education Sciences (2022) revealed that, during the 2020-2021 school year, public

school teachers were 79.9% White, 6.1% Black, and 9.4% Hispanic. Across this time span, demographics remained consistent for teachers in public schools.

According to Martin et al. (2016), an "issue facing urban educational settings is the transformation of a predominately White teaching force into professionals who are culturally responsive and prepared to successfully educate students who are culturally and linguistically diverse" (p. 315). To overcome the discrepancy between the cultural backgrounds and ethnicities of urban schools' student populations and teacher populations, Banks (2016) suggests that teachers be trained utilizing *multicultural education*. The multicultural education model is a conceptual framework that equips teachers with pertinent skills and knowledge when teaching diverse students (Howard, 2010). Ladson-Billings (2009) is a proponent of *culturally relevant teaching*, a "pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (p. 20). Kafele (2021) describes a *culturally relevant practitioner* as being "a teacher who utilizes a variety of instructional strategies that enable the students to continually see themselves culturally in their learning and who utilizes relatable learning strategies that the students can identify with through a cultural lens" (p. 68). Ladson-Billings (2005) considers culturally relevant teaching to be integral to making multicultural education effective.

Even with the consideration of urban schools' high concentration of poverty, the challenges experienced by students and teachers in urban schools are greater to overcome in many ways when compared to their suburban and rural counterparts (Schaffer et al., 2018). Student populations in urban schools are also greater in enrollment numbers than

in other types of school settings. Thus, densely populated urban schools and districts may experience a lack of key educational resources because of the need to spread resources across a greater number of students (Crowson, 2011; Milner, 2012; Schaffer et al., 2018; Siegel-Hawley, 2016). Schaffer et al. (2018) explain that urban schools are in highly segregated neighborhoods and have trouble retaining quality teachers. Urban schools also serve students from challenging family backgrounds as well as students who are negatively influenced by youth subcultures.

Academic achievement. Numerous factors affect the academic achievement levels of students in urban schools. Minority students experience challenging family dynamics that are rooted in a history of discrimination and poverty (Rothstein, 2017). Because of marginalization and segregation, urban communities have experienced the irrefutable effects of redlining and White flight (Rothstein, 2017; Sulak, 2016). The education offered in urban schools is oftentimes looked upon as being inferior to the education offered in suburban schools or those in high-income settings (Anderson & Summerfield, 2010; Randolph, 2004; Schaffer et al., 2018). Not only do students' family backgrounds play a role in their educational attainment, but other factors also add to the narrative surrounding academic achievement. Such factors include the absence of urban school teachers' professional autonomy and the scarcity of academic resources needed to deliver effective instruction (Owens, 2018; Rothstein, 2017; Schaffer et al., 2018; Siegel-Hawley, 2016).

Rothstein (2017) explains that African American children from socially and economically disadvantaged homes endure more difficulty in attaining higher academic

achievement because of the barriers associated with their home lives. Likewise, Owens (2018) concludes that family income influences the academic achievement of students because it allows parents to provide food, clothing, and shelter for their children as well as provide access to childcare and health care. In addition to meeting basic needs, such economic advantages allow parents to afford educational resources such as books, technology, and tutoring, which, in turn, can promote their children's learning. Owens further explains that higher incomes might help with reducing parental stress and improving parental health and that these, in turn, could lead to positive parent role models.

The results of poverty are far-reaching in the lives of urban school students, and the intersectionality between poverty and race further compromise their access to educational attainment (Wisman, 2020). In her study of 1,202 children in 170 metropolitan statistical areas, Owens (2018) compares the math and reading scores of White and Black students by examining "the relationship between income segregation and the income achievement gap" (p. 7). Her findings suggest that family income is a comparable predictor of students' math achievement levels in highly segregated metropolitan statistical areas, while similar effects were not evidenced in integrated metropolitan statistical areas. The central role that socioeconomics plays in the overall academic achievement of all students is well documented (Wisman, 2020). Consequently, the socioeconomic statuses of families in low-income, marginalized communities can have lasting, multidimensional implications for their children as students in the urban schools of those communities.

Absences occur frequently and are due to “poor health, unreliable transportation, having to stay home to care for younger siblings, or family instability” (Rothstein, 2017, p. 197). Such absences hinder students’ ability to benefit from instruction. Jensen (2009) points out that low-income families also suffer from other factors such as drug addiction, depression, and intense work schedules. Such factors interfere with children’s abilities to establish positive relationships outside of the family. Such relatively low emotional and relational capacity decreases “children’s self-esteem, [their] sense of mastery of their environment, and optimistic attitudes” (Jensen, 2009, p. 9). Therefore, although a child’s home life has been proven to affect their academic success, it is not the sole indicator of the difficulties and barriers to their learning.

Teachers in low-income urban schools have less autonomy over their curriculum in comparison to teachers in low-income rural schools (Schaffer et al., 2018; Siegel-Hawley, 2016). Teachers in such schools need “to have increased authority to make decisions concerning matters of curriculum and instruction” (Cotton, 2003, p. 22). Based on an analysis of the Teacher Questionnaire and the Private School Teacher Questionnaire, with both questionnaires stemming from the 2011–2012 Schools and Staffing Survey, Li and Allen (2021) concluded that “two factors of teacher autonomy (teaching and assessment and curriculum development) are positively associated with teacher-perceived school support and collaboration” (p. 265). In order to increase teacher autonomy, these researchers suggested that the school leaders and policymakers should invest more money in education, create opportunities for teachers to actively participate

in school decision-making processes, and provide more leadership support as well as decrease evaluations, standardized testing, and "market-oriented practices" (p. 274).

When urban schools and districts have leaders who solely focus on their students faring well on standardized tests, urban educators lose their voice (Coyle, 2011). In such instances, teachers are "forced to accept 'controlled' curriculum and instruction strategies that utilize the traditional pedagogies that fail … students year after year" (Zamudio et al., 2011, p. 110). When a drill-and-kill approach to proficiency exams becomes the norm, the flexibility required for providing quality instruction is no longer valued:

> Students attending minority-segregated, high-poverty schools often experience watered-down and/or outdated curricula that feels disconnected from their lives. Evidence indicates that segregated schools more often rely upon older textbooks and instructional materials that do not contain information reflective of our rapidly evolving society. (Siegel-Hawley, 2016, p. 14)

Standardized test scores are low in many urban schools. According to some scholars, low test scores are due to the fear and trauma experienced by minority students (Goodman & West-Olatunji, 2010; Jones, 2018). Children who suffer from poor health, have little or no access to reliable transportation, come from families with low income, or live in unstable conditions are often absent from school and therefore do not benefit from consistent, quality instruction (Jensen, 2009; Rothstein, 2017). According to Darling-Hammond (2008), American students rank low on international assessments because well-qualified teachers are not in schools with low-income students and students of color.

Howard (2010) asserts that increased student retention rates correlate with the likelihood that students of color will drop out of school. He writes, "in schools where there is a high degree of underachievement, grade retention—the frequency of students

repeating grade levels—becomes a prevalent issue" (Howard, 2010, p. 20). Within this conversation is the acknowledgment of the high suspension and expulsion rates of minority students. These issues play a huge role in urban school students' academic performance (Howard, 2010).

Recruiting and retaining teachers. An ongoing issue experienced by urban school districts is the struggle to recruit and retain qualified teachers (Buddin & Zamarro, 2009; Fossey, 2003; Lareau, 2011; Reed & Swaminathan, 2016; Schaffer et. al., 2018; Teemant, 2014; Whipp & Geronime, 2017). The challenge of recruitment and retention in urban schools can result in the ineffectual education of these students (Peters-Hawkins et al., 2018). Reed and Swaminathan (2016) assert that new teachers placed in urban settings expressed a preference for suburban schools. Given the opportunity, many teachers leave urban schools for suburban or rural schools (Fossey, 2003). Whipp and Geronime (2017) explain that in multiple studies, although mixed in their results, teachers generally cite school leadership as a common reason for them deciding to leave a particular school. Other factors are teachers' relationships with their colleagues, the school culture, access to quality professional development, and mentoring. With constant changes in the teaching staff, "it is difficult for principals to cultivate school stability, plan for appropriate professional development, foster collaborative relationships, and implement long-term school improvement" (Reed & Swaminathan, 2016, p. 1098). Darling-Hammond et al. (2005) describe the teacher recruitment issue in the following way:

> Teacher demand has increased and funding inequities have grown over the past 15 years, many urban and poor rural districts have hired a growing number of

> individuals on emergency permits or waivers who lack formal preparation for teaching. These individuals typically teach low-income and minority students in the most disadvantaged schools. (p. 2)

Negative narratives of urban schools are perpetuated through local and national media, movies, and the communities served by those schools (Bulman, 2002; Golub, 2009; Hayes & Kincheloe, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2009). Peters-Hawkins et al. (2018) assert that it is often difficult to recruit and retain effective teachers and leaders because of how the media depicts the challenges faced by modern urban schools. Before entering the profession, preservice teachers' negative perceptions of urban schools result in their lack of "confidence in their ability to teach in urban schools, particularly to teach students from diverse backgrounds" (Schaffer et al., 2018, p. 511). The researchers arrive at this conclusion based on findings shared by Desimone et al. (2013) from a five-year longitudinal study of 66 middle school math teachers who were new to the profession. Increased school violence and safety concerns also exist among prospective teachers when considering where they will teach (Reed & Swaminathan, 2016; Siegel-Hawley, 2016).

Once recruited and hired, new teachers are often ill-equipped to address urban school students' educational and emotional needs (Reed & Swaminathan, 2016; Thompson & Smith, 2005). Ladson-Billings (2009) describes beginning teachers as being "unable to understand the students' home language, social interaction patterns, histories, and cultures" (p. 146). Because of these barriers, some urban school teachers struggle to provide quality instruction to minority students (Reed & Swaminathan, 2016). According to Banks (2016), there is a vast difference in the backgrounds and experiences of students

versus their teachers' backgrounds and experiences. This results in notable and cause-affecting gaps in race, cultural, and economics. Fossey (2003) criticizes the inefficient recruitment practices of urban school administrators as a frequent occurrence that leads to the hiring of incompetent and poorly trained teachers.

Layered upon the recruitment and retention challenges facing urban schools is the difficulty of many White teachers in connecting with students of color. Students in American public schools come from increasingly diverse ethnic, racial, language, and economic backgrounds (Banks, 2016; Martin et al., 2016). Urban schools educate a more concentrated number of students of color, while suburban schools have a greater concentration of White students (Reed & Swaminathan, 2016). Because of the academic challenges experienced by some urban schools, these teachers must use an even more diverse repertoire of strategies when teaching students (Brown, 2003; Darling-Hammond et al., 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2009). Although Howard (2010) intentionally refrains from comparing Black and White students' academic performances, he does acknowledge that "White students as a group in U.S. schools are performing at higher levels than many of their culturally diverse counterparts" (p. 6).

When the ethnicity, race, backgrounds, and experiences of teachers differ greatly from those of their students, these teachers are more likely to exhibit what Milligan and Howley (2015) identify as cultural capital. According to the cultural capital theory, misunderstandings and misinterpretations between White middle school educators and Black students happen more frequently than between White educators and White students. Because of this, White educators often make more discipline referrals for their

Black students than they do for their White students. This is not only the case with classroom teachers but also with White administrators and their Black students.

In their study of principals with White teachers, Milligan and Howley (2015) found that principals of different races and backgrounds approached the actions and behaviors of their White staff members in different ways. Depending on how their White staff members responded to African American students or African American parents, the responses of the principals varied. In instances where White staff members responded in an inappropriate or insensitive manner, some White principals chose to ignore the issue or chose not to address it, while other White principals addressed each situation. However, most of the African American principals interviewed in the study always directly addressed the issues with the White teachers involved.

The differences lie in the background experiences of the principals themselves (Milligan and Howley, 2015). The White principals who had personally attended K-12 schools with students from varying ethnicities, races, cultures, and socioeconomic statuses were more comfortable confronting or addressing the inappropriate and insensitive words or actions of their White teachers. On the other hand, the White principals who had not attended schools with people of different backgrounds than themselves were less likely to address their White teachers' negative responses to Black students and parents. Many teachers at urban schools leave the profession or request to transfer to different schools such as the high-performing, suburban schools (Buddin & Zamarro, 2009; Thompson & Smith, 2005).

Generally, urban schools or schools with predominantly minority student

populations are described as unsafe, low-achieving, and unsteady (Anderson & Summerfield, 2010; DeMatthews, 2016; Howard, 2010; Peters-Hawkins et al., 2018). When these endless challenges are stacked up, the plight of urban schools seems dismal. African American students in public schools are often perceived as "deprived, deficient, and deviant" (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 9). The behaviors observed among students educated in urban schools are explained by empirical data provided by scholars over several years. Research shows that American urban school students are often from low-income homes and are considered to be at risk because of their perceived low academic performance (Buddin & Zamarro, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 2009).

Professional Development and Growth

Upon graduation from teacher education and graduate schools, educators must continue their education and growth through job-embedded professional development and meaningful reflection. This form of ongoing professional growth may not result in a degree provided by a postsecondary institution. However, such professional development will serve to improve the educators' knowledge, develop their expertise as education practitioners, and grow their personal capacity (Drago-Severson, 2009).

Andragogy was originally defined by Knowles (1980) as "the art and science of helping adults learn." Later it expanded as a focus on the innate self-directed nature of adult learners and adults' ability to diagnose their need for learning (p. 43). The premise of andragogy is important because education practitioners must continuously participate in opportunities for professional growth and use the knowledge gained to effectively hone

their skills in the ever-changing climate of education in the U.S. (Holton et al., 2001). Effective adult professional learning opportunities incorporate presentation methods to engage adults' diverse learning styles and respond to their needs for various sorts of support and challenges for them to develop and improve themselves (Drago-Severson, 2009; Post, n.d.). Effective professional development also includes the use of collaborative, ongoing, and school-based approaches (Drago-Severson, 2009; Teemant, 2014). Aligning teacher leadership positions with instructional improvement goals is the result of research on effective professional learning opportunities (Mangin, 2007).

According to research, better teaching is attributed to professional learning opportunities focused on effective instructional practices, collaborative in nature, sustained over time, and context-specific (Mangin, 2007; Richardson & Placier, 2001). By allowing teacher leaders to facilitate ongoing, high-quality professional development through the creation of formal, school-based teacher leadership roles, schools may increase their capacity and, as a result, improve student achievement (Mangin, 2007; Smylie et al., 2002).

Teacher coaching. Increased standardized testing and research-based professional development have highlighted and supported the importance of professional coaching in schools (Mangin, 2007). Melvin and Vargas (2021) are national teacher coaches who suggest that all teachers, from novice teachers to the most experienced teachers, deserve coaches who directly support their professional growth and cultivate teacher efficacy. They recommend that coaches, after providing constructive feedback to teachers, apply practice as a way for teachers to redirect their behavior in the classroom and to prepare

for subsequent lessons. Post (n.d.) agrees that adults who practice what they learn can retain the information for a longer period of time than those who do not put this into practice. Melvin and Vargas (2021) contend that a nondirective approach to coaching is ineffective because "it values teachers taking a journey of self-discovery over their actual effectiveness in the classroom" (p. 49). Although this andragogical approach, based on constructivism, is intended to make teachers reflect and arrive at alternative teaching techniques, it does not always produce the intended outcome. Instead, they assert that effective coaching meetings include conversations focused on data collected from classroom observations and specific communication about how the teacher can apply the suggested improvements to future lessons.

Teemant's (2014) research reveals the effectiveness of urban educators utilizing a five-standard model in their daily class instruction. In her study, Teemant measured the effectiveness of instructional coaching provided by an external consultant to teachers for enforcing concepts that they were learning through professional development. By following this model, these teachers strategically integrated from three to five standards into each lesson when teaching small groups of diverse learners. Findings suggest that children from disadvantaged backgrounds whose teachers received consistent instructional coaching with the five-standard model improved significantly more than students whose teachers received no instructional coaching and, thus, did not utilize the five-standard model. The organized and strategic plans associated with the five-standard model could inform a model for coaching teacher leaders to become school leaders.

Aguilar (2017) purports that "districts and education organizations seeking to

improve principals' performance and reduce turnover—particularly those that want to hire and keep more leaders of color—could go a long way toward those goals by offering leadership coaching" (p. 33). Aguilar also claims that coaching is "more formal than mentorship" and that an effective coach is an expert at the facilitation of andragogy (p. 34). The act of coaching is an effective form of professional development given that the coach and the practitioners (i.e., coachees) participate together in continual in-depth learning (Teemant, 2014). In response to their coach's feedback, the practitioners are expected to improve their skills. According to Aguilar (2017), effective coaches do not need to have the same experience as the practitioners (or coachees). However, they do need to have strong leadership qualities, deep knowledge of best practices, vast repertoire of instructional strategies, efficient organizational skills, an ability to collaborate well with others, and emotional intelligence.

Teacher leader mentoring. The word *mentor* is a Greek term that originated centuries ago in Homer's *Odyssey*; it was a character's name that meant "enduring." Across many years, "the meaning of the terms *mentor* and *mentoring* have altered, especially since the relatively recent emergence of the field of personal and professional coaching" (Drago-Severson, 2009, p. 213). Some scholars make clear distinctions between mentoring and coaching, other scholars seem to use these terms interchangeably, and a few scholars purposefully avoid using these two terms.

Mentoring can be provided in a variety of ways such as by (a) partnering new teachers with more seasoned teachers, (b) partnering preservice teachers with experienced teachers, and (c) partnering teachers knowledgeable about a school's mission

with teachers from other schools (Drago-Severson, 2009). After teachers are partnered, such partnering can serve to facilitate group discussions. Whitaker (2003) suggests that principals create opportunities for new teachers to observe veteran teachers during their initial years of teaching. He purports that this strategy provides information, effective collegial interaction, and professional benefits not just to the novice teacher who is observing but also to the more experienced teacher who is being observed. Teachers need a practical approach to learning that provides them with immediate applicability to their professional goals (Post, n.d.).

Rideout and Windle (2010) summarize the results of a 2004 study that focused on teacher induction programs and included mentorships. Novice teachers received mentoring support from more experienced colleagues who taught similar subject areas. Over a specified period of time, these two teachers (novice and experienced) worked in collaboration with each other. By receiving such personalized support, these novice teachers were less likely to move to other schools or perhaps even leave the teaching profession early in their careers (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004, as cited in Rideout & Windle, 2010).

Although coaching and mentoring are paramount to the professional growth of educators, their specific parameters are not exhaustive in nature. For example, teachers can learn from one another by participating in grade-level and content area meetings as well as by doing walkthroughs and observations where they voluntarily observe their peers' instructional practices (Hattie, 2015). Spillane and Diamond (2007) explain that school leadership should focus on influencing others to achieve personal growth. Angelle

and DeHart (2011) support freeing teacher leaders from focusing on the management of a school and, instead, offering opportunities for them to focus specifically on teaching and learning. Educators can also seek resources and advice from other educators through online professional learning communities (PLCs) on social media platforms. Coaching and mentoring offer customized feedback and suggestions to educators despite their level of expertise, years of experience in the field, and individual learning styles (Post, n.d.).

According to Martin et al. (2016), mentoring requires the mentor to have experience in the area for which they will be providing mentorship:

> The mentor and mentee work together to reach specific goals and to provide each other with sufficient feedback to ensure that the goals are reached. A mentor facilitates *personal* and *professional* growth in an individual by sharing the knowledge and insights that have been learned through the years. Mentoring is a process by which a passageway to knowledge by sharing ideas and information is opened. The success of the mentoring relationship depends on how well the mentoring relationship is defined (p. 318).

Rideout and Windle (2010) agree that mentors provide guidance from the perspective of a more experienced teacher colleague. Daresh (2003) describes mentoring as an ongoing process in which people support and guide others with the goal of becoming more effective contributors to the organization in which they serve. Similarly, Billings-Harris (2012) defines mentoring as a relationship that is developmental in nature where the mentee's knowledge and skills are enhanced based on the time invested by the mentor. Shillingstad et al. (2015) assert that mentors effectively shape the skills, dispositions, and knowledge of their mentees and colleagues. Martin et al. (2016) describe mentors as individuals who are respected by their colleagues and community members. Mentors are also positive role models (Martin et al., 2016; Shillingstad et al., 2015). In mentoring, the

mentor and mentee engage in "collaborative coaching conversations" meant to promote professional "growth by inviting ongoing cycles of reflection and action … about how to effectively implement new practices in the classroom" (Teemant, 2014, p. 581). Overall, mentoring encourages adults to broaden their perspectives, challenge their assumptions, and share their expertise with others through a plethora of strategies (Drago-Severson, 2009; Shillingstad et al., 2015). Mentoring also allows teachers to move from only expressing their pedagogical skills to utilizing their andragogical skills (Weaver, 2009).

According to Martin et al. (2016), a need exists for "quality leadership preparation programs that provide comprehensive, practical, and relevant learning experiences to facilitate a deeper understanding of collaboration" (p. 316). Because such programs are scarce, an area of great concern is the preparation of urban special education leaders. Mangin (2007) acknowledges the effectiveness of teacher leaders in serving as conduits of "ongoing and context-specific instructional improvement" and highlights the importance of principals supporting their teacher leaders (p. 322). Like teachers, principals also need a practical approach to learning (Post, n.d.). Hale and Moorman (2003) share that "the lack of strong working relationships with school districts also makes it impossible to develop learning laboratories in which 'student-principals' can make protected or mentored mistakes from which they can learn and develop" (p. 6).

Leadership opportunities. Teacher leadership is a critical component to the establishment and perpetuation of successful school programs (Cheung et al., 2018). Because of this, teacher leaders are "typically characterized as expert pedagogues with years of classroom experience who have demonstrated capacity to work collaboratively

to effect change in their schools and larger learning communities" (Nolan & Palazzolo, 2011, p. 302). Whether voluntarily or upon selection, and whether formally or informally (Ado, 2016; CSTP, 2018; Klein et al., 2018; Shillingstad et al., 2015), teachers at various stages of their careers accept or ascend into positions of greater authority and consequential responsibility by becoming leaders in their schools, communities, and districts (Patterson & Patterson, 2004). This, however, leads to celebrated victories and inevitable oppositions. According to Cheung et al. (2018), “the more ambitious the conception of teacher leadership, the more likely it is to spark conflict” (p. 39). Some attempts to support teacher leadership have been met with opposition due to the interpretation of school administrators that the selected teacher leader is a threat to the administrator’s job (Cosenza, 2015).

According to Whitaker (2003), effective principals seek out teachers with strong pedagogical skills, but they also desire to have teachers with the ability to influence others for assisting with and providing support to the principal’s visions and goals for the school. School leaders in support of teacher leadership are instrumental in inviting and encouraging teachers to assume leadership roles in their schools by

- delivering presentations
- leading faculty meetings and/or professional development workshops
- sharing ideas, learning, and expertise in informal ways
- serving as principal for the day
- leading peer reviews by examining student work and teaching practices
- mentoring and modeling for student interns

- modeling new programs and learning for others
- researching, adapting, and implementing models
- serving as leaders in technology (Drago-Severson, 2009, pp. 128–132)

This extensive list highlights the vast array of opportunities for teacher leaders to showcase their expertise while gaining transferrable skills and relevant experiences in educational leadership (Drago-Severson, 2009).

Teacher leadership roles may be formal and informal in nature (Ado, 2016; Angelle & DeHart, 2011; CSTP, 2018; Klein et al., 2018; Shillingstad et al., 2015). Kenjarski (2015) underscores the role that teacher leaders play in the creation and execution of policies and initiatives, often originated by those outside of education (e.g., school board members, state legislators). According to Angelle and DeHart (2011), informal roles include planning for instruction, sharing curriculum goals, and managing activities. These researchers also explain that many teacher leaders consider their roles to be informal because they perceive positions of authority, such as principal and other supervisory roles, to be more formal in nature. In contrast, formal roles may involve specific titles such as grade level chair or may require the teacher leader to be removed from the classroom altogether. Danielson's (2006) position, however, is that teacher leadership is not focused on formal roles but on the growth that results informally from the execution of specific tasks. As teacher leaders innovate and create what they consider to be effective strategies that promote student learning, the importance of their roles is highlighted.

Shillingstad et al. (2015) purport that effective teacher leaders utilize their

knowledge of best practices, curriculum, and current research to collaborate with their colleagues and those they mentor. Angelle and DeHart (2011) stress the importance of teacher leaders possessing expertise in their areas of focus because such expertise serves to establish credibility with other teachers. To be clear, teacher leadership is not about power, but about the professional and personal growth of teachers and their colleagues as well as the academic growth of their students (Cosenza, 2015). Instead of power, teacher leadership is "a collective effort that empowers teachers to make positive contributions to the school community while establishing expectations for all teachers" (p. 80). With their many strengths and an unwavering focus on student learning, teacher leaders express the ability to multitask while still carrying out pedagogical responsibilities, collaborating with colleagues, and influencing decision-making in their schools and districts.

Student achievement is improved when school administrators include teachers in the decision-making process and when teachers work collaboratively with one another (Ado, 2016; Burgess & Bates, 2009). Teacher leader roles have been touted as helpful in increasing standardized test scores and providing embedded professional learning opportunities for other teachers (Ado, 2016; Cosenza, 2015; Mangin, 2007). In this era of standards-based school reforms, "growing numbers of teachers have taken on significant leadership roles related to curriculum implementation, professional development, and induction and mentoring" (Berry, 2019, p. 50). Angelle and DeHart (2011) mention teacher leaders' formal titles such as "department head, team leader, mentor, coach, staff developer, and master teacher" (p. 143). Regardless of whether teacher leaders have formal or informal roles, their impact on student achievement has been demonstrated

through research, and this impact cannot be overstated (Ado, 2016; Angelle & DeHart, 2011; CSTP, 2018; Drago-Severson, 2009; Klein et al., 2018; Shillingstad et al., 2015).

Teachers have long been encouraged to take a more prominent role in school reform with research having documented positive impacts from teacher leaders on school improvement (Angelle & DeHart, 2011). Cheung et al. (2018) explain that "instructional reforms, especially, depend on teacher leaders' capacity to implement any new approaches and help colleagues understand how it fits with their values, skills, and expertise" (p. 38). Ado (2016) describes teacher leaders' contributions as creating a "culture of continued growth and ongoing learning in schools … [that helps their] colleagues improve their teaching practice" (p. 3). She also explains that creating opportunities for teacher leaders allows teachers to presume more responsibility without leaving their classrooms. Angelle and DeHart (2011) summarize a study where 10 struggling schools created and sustained a culture of collaboration and shared decision-making with the principal. The result was schoolwide responsibility for reform where teachers participated in and were committed to carrying out the school's goals. When purposefully creating meaningful opportunities to participate in reforming schools, teachers experience less stagnation in their careers. This may lead to schools being able to retain more teachers.

Mangin (2007) purports that a secondary benefit of increasing the visibility and role of teacher leaders in schools is reducing the ever-increasing responsibilities of their principals. Because principals understand the daunting task of leading an effective school, they desire to share some of the complex leadership responsibilities with

accomplished and trustworthy teachers (Berry, 2019). This is done with the goal of growing their teachers rather than with the sole purpose of decreasing some of their load. A 2013 national survey showed that 75% of principals consider their jobs to be more complex than they desire while the same survey showed that 25% of teachers are quite interested in a hybrid model of teaching and leading within their schools (MetLife, 2013).

In some schools and districts, teacher leaders are asked to perform administrative or managerial tasks such as communicating messages from the school's administrators, convening meetings, and securing materials (Cheung, 2018). Some teacher leaders may also be required to "share lesson ideas and classroom activities" or be responsible for serving as substitute teachers (p. 39). Burgess and Bates (2009) define *shared leadership* as being characterized by "collaboration, collegiality, community, cooperation, and communication" (para. 2). Teacher interdependence surfaces from established and cultivated relationships inclusive of respect and trust. Of great importance is having teacher teams led by a teacher leader who guides the group to a common goal. It is imperative that all teachers within a learning institution support and embrace the school's vision for academic excellence. This notion shares many tenets of teacher collaboration given that shared leadership encourages collective responsibility among the educators at a school and, by doing so, strengthens their relationships with each other and improves academic achievement.

Empirical data support the importance and efficacy of a more inclusive leadership model in schools (Spillane & Diamond, 2007). It is important that teachers have collaborative opportunities for growth and development at their schools (Berry, 2019;

Cosenza, 2015). This has been described as the provision of "avenues for fostering both local leadership and instructional expertise, thus helping to enrich the human capital available for subsequent problem-solving opportunities" (Spillane & Diamond, 2007, p. 42).

Cosenza (2015) argues that teachers must experience opportunities for collaborating with other adults to build their own leadership capacity. Berry (2019) confirms that student learning is positively impacted by teacher collaboration. With mounting evidence supporting its positive effects, teacher leadership has been gaining recognition by local and state entities. By 2019, "17 states [had] adopted teacher leader standards, 22 states … [offered] a license or endorsement, and 24 [provided] formal supports and/or incentives for classroom practitioners who lead" (Berry, 2019, p. 51). These developments highlight the efficacy of teacher leadership in schools and districts. Nonetheless, teacher leaders must continue to seek their own opportunities to lead. Similarly, school leaders must encourage their teacher leaders to lead and for doing so on a regular basis.

In their study about how school leadership preparation influences the outcomes and experiences of teachers, Orphanos and Orr (2014) add to the limited research that exists on effective preparation programs for school leadership and the impact they have on schools' leadership practices. They explain that a correlation exists between effective transformational leadership practices and improved teacher engagement. Similarly, a given level of teacher engagement can result in a corresponding degree of improved student achievement. To that end, "quality leadership programs that provide

comprehensive, practical, and relevant learning experiences to facilitate a deeper understanding of collaboration are needed" (Martin et al., 2016, p. 316). In response to this call, the current study explores relevant learning experiences for teacher leaders provided by their principals through mentoring strategies. In this new study, the researcher provides insight to strategies used by principals when mentoring their teacher leaders, illuminates how teacher leaders describe the mentorship they receive, and uncovers the leadership preparation opportunities that teacher leaders desire before ascending into a school principal role.

Conclusion

Of great importance to school success, the school leaders should be focused on instruction and school management rather than on discipline and clerical-type roles. On a micro-level, teacher leadership has been shown to be an effective strategy by which schools can improve (Mangin, 2007). Teacher leaders' roles and responsibilities range from communicating and collaborating with colleagues to leaving the classroom and facilitating consistent professional development opportunities for other teachers. An individual principal cannot be the sole person creating and carrying out a school curriculum but rather must solicit the assistance of fellow faculty members in order to be a successful and effective leader (Drago-Severson, 2009; Mangin, 2007).

Despite inadequate resources, family barriers, and negative perceptions associated with urban schools, these educators must continuously strive to meet the needs of their students. By empowering and supporting teacher leaders to participate in the decision-making processes at their schools, principals can positively impact student learning and

achievement. The support and mentoring provided to novice, experienced, and veteran teachers can have a lasting influence on the success of urban schools. Thus, it would behoove urban elementary school principals to effectively mentor and support their teacher leaders. Through their mentoring actions, these principals can provide all involved with personal growth and professional learning opportunities.

CHAPTER III

PLAN OF INQUIRY

This exploration of urban teacher leaders' perceptions of their mentorship experiences stemmed from the need for principals in urban elementary schools to make concerted efforts in preparing their teacher leaders for future school leadership positions. This study sought to understand three main phenomena:

1. What strategies do urban elementary school principals use to mentor their teacher leaders?
2. How do teacher leaders describe the mentoring strategies used by their principals? and
3. What opportunities do teacher leaders desire for their principals to provide them in an effort to prepare the teacher leaders to become principals?

This chapter includes the rationale for using a qualitative, transcendental phenomenological approach to conduct this study. This chapter also includes the following: (a) research design, (b) context, (c) participants, (d) research questions, (e) data collection tools and methodology, (f) data analysis, (g) ethical considerations, and (h) role of the researcher.

Research Design

This research is a qualitative study employing the methods of transcendental

phenomenology. To better understand the perspectives of urban elementary school principals and teacher leaders, the researcher designed this study around *phenomenology*, the study of lived experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Farrell, 2020; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; van Manen, 2014). To capture these perspectives, this researcher used qualitative methodology that "emphasizes the individual's subjective experience" (Mertens, 2015, p. 247). Mertens explains that phenomenological research seeks to capture the perceptions of individual participants in a study and attempts to find the meaning of a phenomenon or experience. Phenomenological research also requires the researcher to "suspend theories, explanations, hypotheses, and conceptualizations to be able to understand the phenomenon" in its objective state before and aside from scientific intervention or expertise (Mertens, 2015, p. 247). Polkinghorne (1989) suggests that interviews conducted in phenomenological studies are of five to 25 individuals who have experienced the phenomenon in question. To fully meet this criterion, the researcher interviewed 26 participants (12 principals and 14 teacher leaders).

According to Farrell (2020), phenomenological approaches remain underutilized in educational research. Farrell contends that "one reason for its disfavor may be the oft-intimidating philosophy that underpins, and is critical to the application of, phenomenological approaches to research" (p. 1). Hermeneutic phenomenology (van Manen, 1990) and transcendental phenomenology (Husserl, 1970; Moustakas, 1994) are the philosophy and research methodology central to phenomenological studies (Aguas, 2022). Hermeneutic phenomenology is the research and interpretation of texts to determine people's lived experiences (Sloan & Bowe, 2014). Often seen as having two

parts, transcendental phenomenology is called descriptive phenomenology by Farrell (2020) and psychological phenomenology by Creswell and Poth (2018).

For the current study, the researcher did not select hermeneutical phenomenology because of its focus on interpreting text or pictures to understand and describe the experience being studied (Farrell, 2020; van Manen, 1990). Instead, the researcher selected transcendental phenomenology because its approach on collecting data from study participants and then, based on these data, identifying the experiences of these individuals (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Farrell, 2020; Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004; Moustakas, 1994). The goal of using transcendental phenomenology was to obtain a better understanding of the strategies that urban elementary school principals employ to mentor their teacher leaders. Another goal was to identify how the teacher leaders described the mentoring strategies used by their principals and, also, how they described the opportunities they felt were needed to prepare for leadership roles in urban elementary schools.

In transcendental phenomenology, *bracketing* or *epoche* is the process of the researcher setting aside their prior knowledge and views to perceive the phenomenon of study through an unbiased lens (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Farrell, 2020; Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004; Moustakas, 1994). By doing so, the researcher is more capable of discovering the purest meaning of the phenomena. After obtaining the data through interviews and as part of bracketing process, the researcher hand-coded the data and then analyzed the data—first on paper and then across a spreadsheet. The limitations to phenomenological studies include the fact that the study participants must have personal

experiences related to the phenomena being studied.

The participants in this study were school principals and teacher leaders in urban elementary schools in Central Alabama. The researcher was familiar with some of the participants as the researcher worked in the same school district and in similar positions as some of the participants. Because the researcher was acquainted with some of the research participants through personal and professional relationships, the researcher bracketed (or set aside) former experiences—as much as possible—to apply a fresh perspective to the data collected from the participant interviews (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The goal of the study was to uncover information to assist urban elementary school principals and urban school districts to provide effective mentoring opportunities for teacher leaders in urban elementary schools and to inform best practices in principal preparation programs.

Context

The participants in this study consisted of 12 elementary principals and 14 elementary teacher leaders in an urban school district in Central Alabama. For this study, schools serving any grades from pre-kindergarten through sixth grade were classified as elementary schools. Therefore, principals and teacher leaders serving students in the pre-kindergarten through sixth grade band were seen as elementary school educators. This determination is based on and supported by the Bachelor of Science in Education degree programs at colleges and universities in proximity to the school district under study. The pseudonym assigned to the school district is Temoni School District (TSD). Of the 12

principals interviewed, all were currently serving in leadership roles at 12 different schools at the time of the study (Table 1).

Table 1

Temoni School District Demographics

School's Pseudonym	Student Enrollment	Grade Levels Served	Number of Teachers on Faculty	State Report Card Score	Black or African American	Hispanic or Latino
Independence	751	PK-5	44	66	66.58%	29.43%
Marshall-Connor	461	PK-5	35	74	93.71%	3.47%
Waller	404	PK-5	25	65	87.87%	11.14%
Wonderson	251	PK-5	21	72	88.05%	12.35%
Nelson-Miller	566	PK-8	35	75	94.52%	5.12%
Whisper Eddison	700	PK-8	36	60	85.57%	12.71%
Blackjet	702	PK-8	43	62	90.6%	8.4%
Holly Valley	497	PK-8	35	70	56.74%	40.64%
Moony Park	734	PK-5	51	69	88.69%	9.54%
Spruce Grove	350	PK-5	28	63	90.57%	9.71%
Broadview	345	PK-5	32	57	93.33%	6.38%
Meadow Creek	646	PK-8	31	90	96.59%	2.32%

Note. The *Alabama State Department of Education Report Card: School year 2021-2022.*

As shown in Table 1, the grades served by principals and teacher leaders were pre-kindergarten to fifth grade (PK-5) or pre-kindergarten to eighth (PK-8). The number of faculty ranged from 21 to 51. The percentage of Black students ranged from 57% to 97%.

Participants

All principals held advanced degrees: six with an education specialist degree, five with a doctorate in education, and one with a doctorate in philosophy (Table 2).

Table 2

Temoni School District Principal Participants

Principal Pseudonym	Highest Degree	Years as Principal in Urban Elem. Schools	Years in Classroom	National Board Certified	School Pseudonym
1. Mrs. Maggie	Ed.S.	3	16	No	Independence
2. Dr. Michael	Ed.D.	8	7	No	Marshall-Connor
3. Ms. Samantha	Ed.S.	2	10	No	Waller
4. Dr. Allison	Ed.D.	6	6	No	Wonderson
5. Dr. Carla	Ed.D.	7	20	No	Nelson-Miller
6. Mr. Cameron	Ed.S.	1	10	No	Whisper Eddison
7. Mr. Bobby	Ed.S.	15	4	No	Blackjet
8. Dr. Gretchen	Ed.D.	6	10	Yes	Holly Valley
9. Dr. Johnny	Ph.D.	1	15	Yes	Moony Park
10. Mr. Roland	Ed.S.	7	4.5	No	Spruce Grove
11. Dr. Lena	Ed.D.	1	7	No	Broadview
12. Mr. Kenneth	Ed.S.	3	4	No	Meadow Creek

As shown in Table 2, the experience of the principals serving in urban elementary schools ranged from one to 15 years (Table 2).

In this study, the 14 teacher leader participants served at seven TSD elementary

schools (Table 3). It should be noted that these seven schools were among the 12 schools served by the principal participants.

Table 3

Temoni School District Teacher Leader Participants

Teacher Leader Pseudonym	Highest Degree	Years in Classroom	Aspirations to Become Principal	National Board Certified	School Pseudonym
1. Mrs. Sarah	Ed.S.	24	No	No	Waller
2. Mrs. Marlena	Ed.S.	12	Undecided	Yes	Marshall-Connor
3. Ms. Megan	M.S.Ed.	3.5	Yes	Yes	Independence
4. Ms. Brittany	Ed.S.	20	Undecided	No	Eagle-May
5. Ms. Natalia	M.S.Ed.	10	No	No	Nelson-Miller
6. Mrs. Aleah	M.S.Ed.	20	No	Yes	Waller
7. Mrs. Celeste	Ed.S.	22	Undecided	Yes	Broadview
8. Ms. Zoey	M.S.Ed.	19	Yes	No	Marshall-Connor
9. Mr. Waylan	M.S.Ed.	20	Yes	No	Blackjet
10. Dr. Wendy	Ed.D.	17	Undecided	No	Broadview
11. Mr. Quincy	M.S.Ed.	11	Yes	No	Meadow Creek
12. Dr. Ruby	Ed.D.	12	Undecided	No	Waller
13. Ms. Trudy	Ed.S.	17	Yes	No	Marshall-Connor
14. Ms. Rehema	Ed.S.	15	Yes	No	Marshall-Connor

As shown in Table 3, six of these teacher leaders held master's degrees, six held education specialist degrees, and two held doctorates in education. Six aspired to become principals, five were undecided, and four had no aspirations of becoming principals.

Research Questions (RQs)

This study addresses the following questions:

1. What strategies do urban elementary school principals use to mentor their teacher leaders?
2. How do teacher leaders describe the mentorship strategies used by their principals?
3. What opportunities do teacher leaders desire for their principals to provide them in an effort to prepare the teacher leaders to become principals?

Data Collection Tools and Methodology

This study employed pre-screener surveys for both participant groups (principals and teacher leaders), semi-structured interviews conducted via Zoom (online video conferencing platform), and Otter (online transcription program). The researcher conducted interviews of elementary school principals and teacher leaders in an urban school district in Central Alabama. The TSD was chosen because it serves a predominantly minority student population.

The purpose of the principal interviews was to determine the mentoring strategies that the principals utilize to mentor their teacher leaders in preparation for future school leadership positions. The purpose of the teacher leader interviews was to discover how teacher leaders describe the mentoring strategies that their principals use and to understand what opportunities teacher leaders would like for their principals to provide for preparing them to become urban school principals. A strength of employing this approach was the individualized experiences shared by each participant. A limitation was

the relatively small number of participants (principals and teacher leaders). This approach was appropriate because it provided the researcher with the specific information pertinent to the phenomenon that the researcher sought to understand.

By using an interview protocol, the researcher conducted interviews with the goal of eliciting insightful information regarding the specific needs of teacher leaders in urban elementary schools. To reach this goal, the researcher interviewed 26 educators in urban elementary schools (12 principals and 14 teacher leaders). Each principal interview lasted about 15 to 40 minutes, and each teacher leader interview lasted about 15 to 30 minutes. All 26 participants were interviewed via Zoom because of its recording capabilities.

The principal interview guide (Appendix A) was developed to ascertain the principals' experiences and the mentoring strategies that they utilize when mentoring their teacher leaders. After the principal interviews were completed and themes were identified from their interview data, the teacher leader interview guide was revised to reflect the responses given by the principals in an effort to facilitate discovering the teacher leaders' perceptions. The teacher leader interview guide (Appendix B) was developed to establish participants' descriptions of the mentoring strategies used by principals and to discover the leadership opportunities that teacher leaders desired from their principals.

Principal Pre-Screener Survey

The researcher collected data from a pre-screener survey before conducting the semi-structured interviews. The researcher initiated this first stage of data collection by emailing a recruitment letter to invite the principals to participate (Appendix C). Within

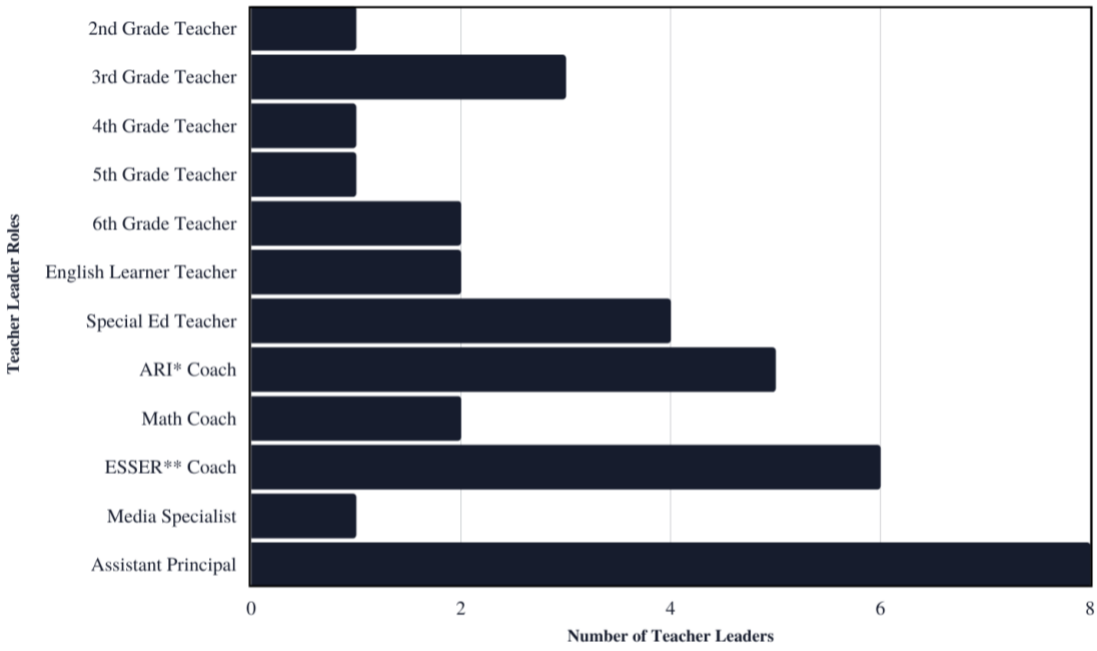
the recruitment email was the principal pre-screener survey (Appendix D). This survey consisted of three questions and was designed to discover the amount of time that potential participants had been serving as school principals. The principal pre-screener also endeavored to uncover whether potential participants were mentoring at least one teacher leader at their school when completing the pre-screener survey. Additionally, the principal pre-screener asked whether those who were mentoring teacher leaders would be willing to share the strategies and resources that they use to mentor the teacher leaders in their schools. The results of the principal pre-screener survey revealed that eight of the principals who participated in this study have been urban elementary school principals for at least three years while four of them had served for less than three years. Of the 13 responses collected, 12 principals were currently mentoring at least one teacher leader at their schools. Because of this, the one principal who responded, "No," was excluded from being interviewed for this study.

Principals Refer Teacher Leaders

During each interview, the principals were asked to share the names and roles of the teacher leaders in their schools. These 12 principals shared the names and roles of 36 teacher leaders. After all principal interviews were concluded, the researcher emailed a recruitment letter (Appendix E) inviting the 36 referred teacher leaders to participate in this study. This email contained the pre-screener survey. The referred teacher leaders included classroom teachers, grade-level team leaders, instructional coaches, and assistant principals. Figure 1 shows the roles (and corresponding frequencies) of the teacher leaders referred by the principals in this study.

Figure 1

Roles of Potential Teacher Leaders Referred by Principal Participants (n=36)



Note. *Alabama Reading Initiative. **Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief

As shown by the teacher leader roles listed in Figure 1, eight principals considered that their assistant principals were acting in the role of teacher leader. This suggests that urban elementary school principals view teacher leaders as serving in various roles, from classroom teachers up to and including assistant principals.

The proximity of principals to assistant principals may have played a role in several principals having identified assistant principals as being teacher leaders. Similarly, the proximity and roles of coaches in the Alabama Reading Initiative (ARI) and Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) probably led to these educators being identified as teacher leaders by their principals. Most principals also

identified teachers on their instructional leadership team (ILT) as being teacher leaders. Most ILTs consisted of assistant principals, ARI coaches, and ESSER coaches. Because of this, the principals considered educators in those positions to be teacher leaders who assisted them in making important decisions about the direction of their schools.

Teacher Leader Pre-Screener Survey

The teacher leader pre-screener survey (Appendix F) was designed to uncover whether the referred teacher leaders perceived themselves as being mentored by their principals and if they aspired to become school principals. Of the 23 teacher leaders who responded to the pre-screener survey, 22 denoted that they had been urban elementary school teachers for at least three years. When responding to whether they aspired to be a school principal, five said "Yes," eight said "No," and 10 said "Undecided." Finally, 20 of the 23 respondents denoted that they were currently being mentored by their principals. Of the 20 possibly interested in becoming principals, 15 were being mentored by their principals. The determination of selecting teacher leader respondents to participate was based on a minimum of three years teaching in an urban elementary school, currently being mentored by their principals, and agreeing to participate in the study. This resulted in the 14 teacher leader participants.

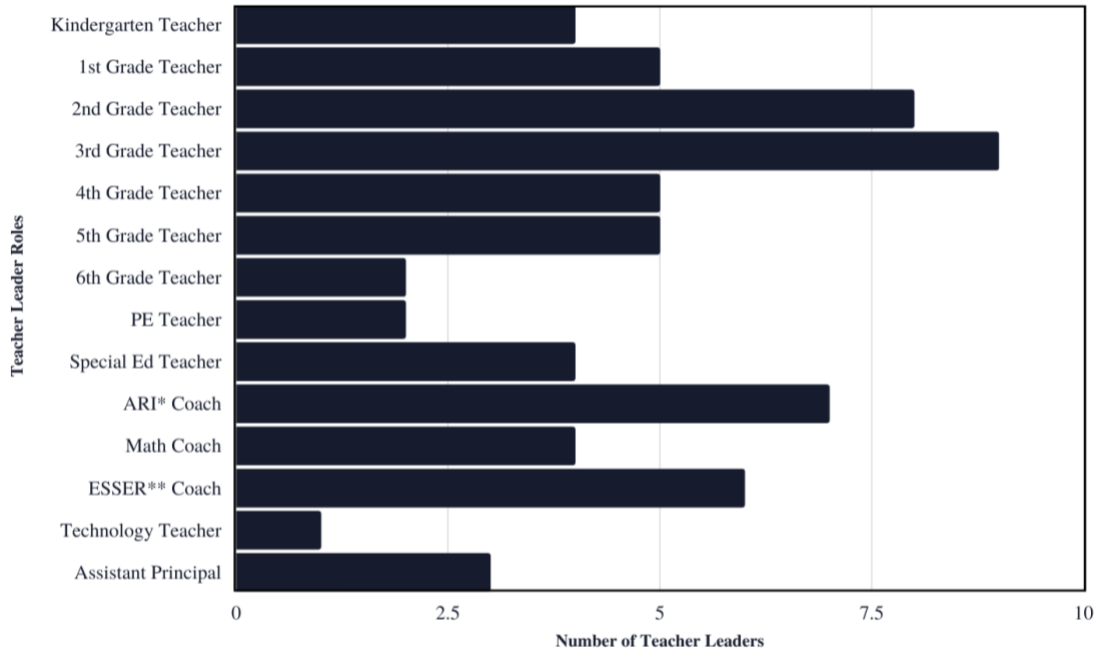
Teacher Leaders Refer Additional Teacher Leaders

During each interview, the researcher asked teacher leaders to share the names and roles of other teacher leaders in their schools to further validate the definition of teacher leader roles. After the interviews, the researcher emailed the 66 newly referred

teacher leaders. The email included a link to a pre-screener survey to determine their teacher leader roles. Figure 2 shows the roles of these 66 other teacher leaders.

Figure 2

Roles of Potential Teacher Leaders Referred by Teacher Leader Participants (n=66)



Note. *Alabama Reading Initiative. **Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief

As shown in Figure 2, the 66 newly referred teacher leaders occupied roles that were very similar to the roles of 14 teacher leaders that were interviewed and referred these names.

Data Analysis Process

The researcher chose the process of conducting interviews to discover the authentic experiences of urban elementary school principals and their teacher leaders. The interview questions for both groups (principals and teacher leaders) were informed by the literature surrounding teacher leadership and principal mentoring. The researcher

conducted all 12 principal interviews before conducting the 14 teacher leader interviews. Information gathered from the principal interviews was used to inform and generate questions for the teacher leader interviews. The process was cyclical and included the researcher's immersion in the data by relistening to and rereading transcripts as well as by embedding meaning-making throughout. This was intentionally done to inform the researcher of the additional types of questions to ask the teacher leaders for gathering their perceptions of the themes related to the strategies shared by the principals.

After conducting and recording each principal interview on Zoom, the researcher downloaded the audio recordings to the researcher's computer, uploaded the audio recording into Otter, and then labeled each recording with the corresponding pseudonyms for both the principal and school. The researcher listened to the recording while following along on the transcripts generated by Otter. The researcher did this to validate the transcriptions and revise grammatical errors or omissions. After the first three principal transcripts were confirmed by the researcher as accurately depicting each participant's interview responses, the researcher hand-coded the transcribed interviews (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) by winnowing the data, which means focusing on specific parts while disregarding others (Guest et al., 2012). By following the steps outlined by Rossman and Rallis (2017), the researcher plugged short phrases or codes under each interview question on a spreadsheet.

After the first three principal interviews were conducted and coded, the researcher began to see recurring statements and thoughts emerge from the interview data. These statements and thoughts were recorded by the researcher as potential themes. The

remaining nine principal interviews were transcribed and hand-coded immediately after each interview. These transcriptions either confirmed the initial potential themes or elucidated additional themes that had not yet emerged. After the 12 principal interviews were completed, the researcher began conducting the 14 teacher leader interviews.

Ethical Considerations

The researcher obtained full Institutional Review Board approval prior to conducting this research at the university site (Appendix G). Via email, the researcher provided each study participant with proper informed consent including a clear description of the study's purpose, procedures, methods, risks, benefits, participant confidentiality, voluntary participation, and withdrawal. To protect the confidentiality of each participant, all identifying names of participants and locations (e.g., schools and districts) were replaced by pseudonyms, kept separate from collected data (observation notes, interview data, focus group documents), and stored in a locked file cabinet. The researcher was the only person with direct access to all confidential information related to the participants.

Role of the Researcher

In qualitative research, the researcher serves as the primary instrument of data collection and must set aside personal moral principles, suppositions, and prejudices (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). However, the researcher's personal experiences with the setting can be helpful to this research because the researcher has served in multiple positions in the urban district being studied (Appendix H). The researcher's experience in

the TSD decreased the level of disruption in the field of study and helped the researcher establish and maintain positive rapport with the research participants (Mertens, 2015).

As a child and adolescent, the researcher matriculated through the TSD from second grade through 12th grade. Prior to beginning her doctoral studies, the researcher worked as a classroom teacher and assistant principal within the TSD. The researcher has also provided professional trainings as a consultant to some of the teachers, school administrators, and parents of the school district. The researcher is personally and professionally acquainted with some of the study participants. Because the researcher was a student, employee, and consultant for the TSD, the researcher acknowledges biases and previously held ideas about the school district in general.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

In Chapter IV, the results of this transcendental phenomenological study are reported. This qualitative study included 26 educators (14 principals and 12 teacher leaders) who currently work in the Temoni School District (TSD), an urban school district in Central Alabama. The researcher selected a transcendental phenomenological approach to explore the professional experiences and perspectives of each of the urban elementary school educators participating in this study (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Farrell, 2020; Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004; Moustakas, 1994). This study was developed as a response to the need for more research surrounding the actions taken in urban elementary schools that are focused on effective school leadership preparation. Literature reveals that opportunities exist to investigate how the complexities of teacher leadership are enacted in schools. Yet, there remains a need for understanding what experiences are needed to effectively support teacher leaders especially in they wish to become school leaders (Klein et al., 2018).

This study explored the following research questions (RQs):

1. What strategies do urban elementary school principals use to mentor their teacher leaders?
2. How do urban elementary school teacher leaders describe the mentorship they receive from their principals?

3. What opportunities do teacher leaders desire for their principals to provide them in an effort to prepare the teacher leaders to become principals?

These questions frame the reported results from individual interviews with each participant. The demographics of potential participants and actual participants were analyzed to report initial results. Specific quotes from 26 participant interviews have been included. The results and findings are discussed together and organized by each research question.

Teacher Leadership Defined

The definition of teacher leadership varies not only across the literature (Klein et al., 2018) but also among the participants in this study. Here, findings reveal discrepancies in how teacher leaders are described across a single school district. To ascertain how principals and teacher leaders describe effective teacher leaders, the researcher asked participants in each participant group, "What qualities and characteristics does an effective teacher leader embody?" The resulting descriptions—by participant group—are outlined later in this chapter.

According to the Teacher Leadership Skills Framework (TLSF), *teacher leadership* is defined as the "knowledge, skills and dispositions demonstrated by teachers who positively impact student learning by influencing adults, formally and informally, beyond individual classrooms" (CSTP, 2018). This study, based on the TLSF definition of teacher leadership, investigated how mentorship is formally and informally delivered by 12 urban elementary school principals in the TSD through the examination of the strategies used by those principals. In general, the interview responses shared by the 12

principal participants and 14 teacher leader participants mirrored components of each of the six skill sets outlined within the TLSF:

- working with adult learners
- communication
- collaboration
- knowledge of content and pedagogy
- systems thinking
- equity lens (CSTP, 2018)

Principal Descriptions

The principals who participated in this study described flexibility, responsible risk-taking, and initiative as key characteristics and qualities of effective teacher leaders. Dr. Lena shared that "an effective teacher leader has to be adaptable, adjustable, and flexible." Likewise, some principals discussed the imperative for teacher leaders to be willing to stretch themselves by stepping out of their comfort zones and taking on roles that other teachers may not be willing to do. This notion of teacher leaders agreeing or volunteering to add more responsibilities to their current job expectations is how some of the principals determines whether potential teacher leaders have strong leadership qualities. By showing initiative and a proven willingness to lead various committees or programs at their schools, the teachers carry out actions that indicate their level of leadership commitment. The principals of these teacher leaders take note of their actions.

Many of the principals described teacher leaders as educators who are interested in and willing to learn. When responding to the question about the qualities and

characteristics of effective teacher leaders, Spruce Grove's principal, Mr. Roland, shared, "They have to be knowledgeable." Other principals agreed that the teacher leaders must understand the content that they teach and be well-versed in the areas in which they serve. Expertise and ability were imperative components for effective teacher leaders to possess as the principals believed that their teacher leaders would need the knowledge to collaborate with other teachers and grow into strong school leaders.

When asked what they consider to be the qualities and characteristics of an effective teacher leader, numerous principals discussed the imperative for teacher leaders to be lifelong learners and continuously coachable. Some expounded that teacher leaders must possess the ability to grow by learning from others because doing so will, in turn, give teacher leaders the ability to lead and mentor others. Waller's principal, Ms. Samantha, mentioned that teacher leaders must be

> Willing to grow and tap into different professional learning. So just being a lifelong learner is one of those characteristics because if you're willing to learn, regardless of what area you're in, you're ready to hone in and master it. So, I think the willingness to learn is the key for leadership.

Dr. Lena elucidated by sharing an example of interviews that she and her leadership team had recently conducted. She described the conversation after interviewing multiple candidates:

> Well, candidate number three didn't know this. And they didn't know that. … But do you think they're coachable? You know, candidate number two may have known all of that. But do you think that person is coachable? Do you think they're teachable? You know, so we have hired teachers and teacher leaders who come from a different background. When we've interviewed teachers and teacher leaders who had the content knowledge and had the experience, we have turned around and hired a chosen candidate without the experience, without the background … They may have come from a different industry, but they were coachable. They were teachable and we got that from not only their presentations

but just listening to them speak.

Multiple principals mentioned teacher leaders in relation to their feelings about and willingness to serve students and families in their school communities. However, some principals believed that teacher leaders should be more focused on collegial collaboration because doing so directly impacts the academic growth of students. The principal at Moony Park, Dr. Johnny, explained that an

> effective teacher leader is someone who enables the person that they are leading. They don't hinder [them]. They understand the strengths and weaknesses of the person that they are leading. They accentuate the positive and they challenge those areas that need to be supported … An effective teacher leader is not one that criticizes with a heavy hand but someone that leads with gentle nudging … [They are] not necessarily this ogre trying to hit everyone over the head with a hammer, but [they are] someone that just knows how to guide and facilitate.

Teacher Leader Descriptions

As with the principal participants, the researcher asked each teacher leader participant the same question: "What qualities and characteristics does an effective teacher leader embody?" Like the principal participants, the teacher leaders provided varied descriptions of effective teacher leaders. Some of the teacher leaders focused their descriptions on the knowledge that teacher leaders possess while others focused on the importance of teacher leaders collaborating with their colleagues.

During the interviews, several teacher leaders discussed the importance for teacher leaders to possess a strong knowledge of their content area as well as school and district expectations. This was important to them because of the teacher leaders' need to share their expertise when mentoring or supporting other educators. Ms. Rehema described teacher leaders as experienced teachers who are knowledgeable of the

pedagogical skills necessary for their particular grade or subject area. She expounded by saying that teacher leaders "talk to novice teachers and provide support to them." In addition to being knowledgeable, multiple teacher leaders shared that teacher leaders are effective at their jobs and work to support other teachers around them. They discussed the importance of teacher leaders being relationship builders as they work with others. They also believed that teacher leaders are educators who possess a strong collaborative capacity.

When asked to share the qualities and characteristics of effective teacher leaders, some teacher leaders listed teacher leaders' ability to show compassion and care to others as necessary traits of an effective teacher leader. Mrs. Marlena described a teacher leader as one who "knows current educational trends so that they can be able to model strategies" for other teachers. She described this in the following way:

> Teacher leaders also should be seen as [if] they are growing as well. They are attending professional development. They are reading current books. They are being involved in different educational organizations in order to motivate the people who they lead to do the same.

A few teacher leaders explained the importance of teacher leaders sharing their principals' mindset and enthusiasm concerning the school's vision, while other principals described teacher leaders as being willing to lead and help other teachers. Ms. Natalia explained that teacher leaders "go above and beyond what's asked of them."

Themes Emerging from Data Analysis

The researcher invested time in disaggregating the data by listening to interview recordings and reading interview transcripts to code each participant's responses. When

separately coding the principal group's and teacher leader group's interview data, the researcher employed the process known as *horizontalization* (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam, 2002; Moustakas, 1994). The researcher spread the raw data out and treated all interview responses as having equal value (Merriam, 2002). By coding the principal and teacher leader participants responses separately, the researcher linked similar topics together to generate a full description of the phenomenon of study and subsequently was able to discover emerging themes (Moustakas, 1994). Utilizing horizontalization was important to this phenomenological study because it required the researcher to suspend any personal hypotheses, theories, or conceptualizations to discover the essence of the lived experiences of these principals and teacher leaders (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Mertens, 2015; Patton, 2002).

After utilizing horizontalization in separate processes for each of the two participant groups, the researcher constructed synthetical descriptions of the phenomena being studied and separated those descriptive themes for each participant group (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam, 2002). The validity strategies utilized in this research study included, but were not limited to, triangulation, rich descriptions, and the reporting of discrepant information (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Mertens, 2015). The researcher triangulated the data by collecting information from different sources such as the pre-screener surveys for both participant groups and comparing the information collected at this point to the information collected during the interview process. The researcher also triangulated the data by identifying consistent input from principal and teacher leader

interview responses and by preserving the voices of the outliers. As a result, three themes materialized from the principals' data, and three themes (some similar and some different) from the teacher leaders' data.

In this chapter, the researcher presents the themes that emerged from the interviews. These themes are organized by the questions that guided this study. This decision was made to maintain the coherency of each educator's responses and as a deterrent to overgeneralize the participants' experiences. These findings confirm that, although the experiences of urban educators might vary from each other, they are, nonetheless, connected. The themes and subthemes were derived from the viewpoints articulated by study participants. The narratives of each participant do not represent a complete professional experience of that specific participant (nor of other participants). However, the resulting themes and descriptive subthemes do provide a small window into the principals' and teacher leaders' experiences in their respective urban education settings. Following are the themes associated with each of the three RQs.

RQ1: Mentoring Strategies Employed by Principals

This first question explores the mentoring strategies employed by urban elementary school principals. To focus on this topic, RQ1 was stated as follows: "What strategies do urban elementary school principals use to mentor their teacher leaders?" With the goal of gathering data related to Q1, the researcher developed and asked the following interview questions:

1. How would you describe your leadership style?
2. What strategies do you use when mentoring teacher leaders to become future

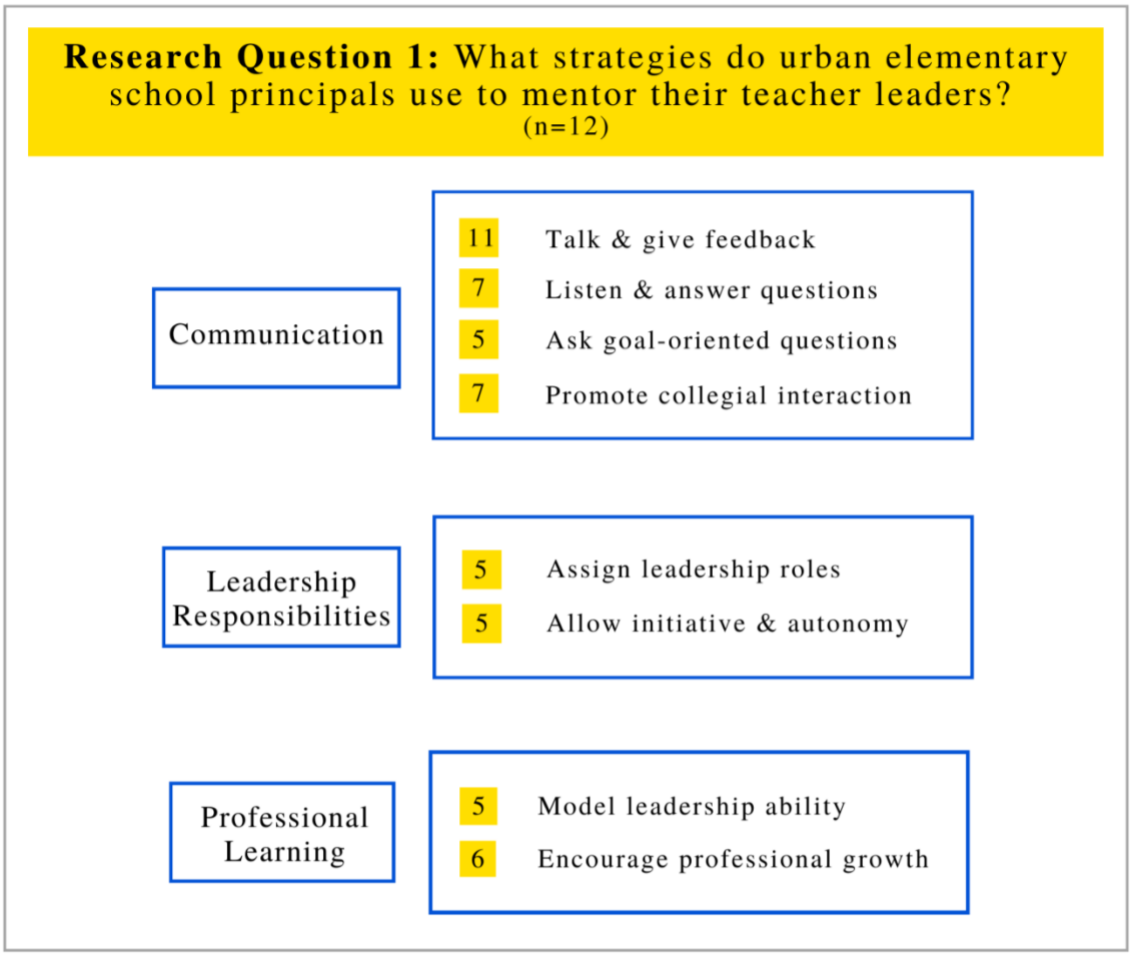
principals?

3. How do you determine the level of support given to teacher leaders in your school?

The researcher asked these questions of the principals during individual semi-structured interviews. By answering these questions, the principals revealed their general and specific thoughts regarding RQ1. Following the interview, the researcher coded and analyzed the interview data. From this analysis, three themes emerged that are associated with RQ1: communication, leadership responsibilities, and professional learning. These themes and their corresponding subthemes are illustrated in Figure 3 together with the number of principals who shared sentiments supporting each of the subthemes associated with RQ1.

Figure 3

Themes and Subthemes for RQ1



As shown in Figure 3, when describing the strategies they utilized during mentoring, these principals consistently shared that they focus on the needs, interests, and strengths of their teacher leaders. Through quotes extracted from the principal interviews, evidence is provided below for each of these themes associated with RQ1.

Theme: Communication

Of the 12 principals interviewed, 11 specified using the mentoring strategy of communication by talking and giving feedback to their teacher leaders. The principals seem to communicate regularly with their teacher leaders such as through weekly, biweekly, and monthly meetings as well as during periodic encounters. By providing teacher leaders with multiple communication touchpoints, principals tried to ensure that their teacher leaders have a firm grasp on what is expected of them.

Talk and give feedback. All principals who participated in the study recognized the importance of ongoing communication with their teacher leaders. However, the frequency and structure of leadership meetings varied by principal. Some administrators shared that they have a standing weekly meeting with their teacher leaders, while others shared that they schedule formal meetings with members of their leadership team as needed. Topics often discussed at formal teacher leader meetings include conflicts around the school as well as situations with specific teachers. They also discuss how to handle occurrences related to teacher performance, student data, and school events.

In addition to sharing and discussing important information at meetings, some principals mentioned using meetings as an opportunity to build relationships with teacher leaders in the school. Dr. Johnny discussed his belief in "doing a lot more observing and watching than talking" and then, afterwards, in offering insight and correction to his teacher leaders as he sees the need. Principals shared that informal meetings were often centered around topics such as providing constructive feedback on facilitating instructional meetings.

Concerning communication, Mr. Kenneth delineated between formal and informal strategies that he employs when mentoring his teacher leaders. On the one hand, he described the importance of meeting regularly with his teacher leaders when he is formally mentoring them. On the other hand, he mentioned that during informal mentoring, his meetings with his teacher leaders were not as consistently scheduled as when he was formally mentoring. Similar to Mr. Kenneth's informal mentoring approach, Dr. Allison discussed how she meets as needed with the teacher leaders being mentored to have candid conversations as well as discuss specific topics from which they will benefit. She shared that her conversations remain "on the curriculum side" of things instead of on "discipline or building management type situations."

Although Mrs. Maggie did not specify how often she meets with the teacher leaders at her school, she did share that when they meet, they discuss various issues and concerns surrounding how to handle conflicts that arise and how to inquire about the instructional practices utilized by teachers. The goal is to ensure that "everybody is on the same page and that all scholars have the same advantage." Other principals were nonspecific about how often they meet with their teacher leaders. However, all principals generally utilize the mentoring strategy of communication by meeting with, talking to, and building relationships with their teacher leaders.

While informing teacher leaders of the school vision is imperative to the principal's work, Dr. Michael discussed the importance of frequently communicating to reiterate the school vision. He said, "you have to remind individuals of that vision and where you want to go and how you're wanting to get there." Mr. Bobby discussed how he

has conversations with his teacher leaders to share the direction they are going. Ms. Samantha detailed how she starts with a small group of teacher leaders and uses a collegial approach to discuss TSD initiatives and the school's approach to implementing the Alabama Continuous Improvement Plan. As a result, they collaboratively create an action plan for which they later solicit feedback from other teachers. By promoting collegiality and collaboration, principals intend for teacher leaders to learn from one another and, in turn, appreciate the importance of collective teacher efficacy. Dr. Carla specified that in her communication with the teacher leaders that she mentors, she gives them specific tasks to do and is intentional with explicitly explaining her expectations of them. While the frequency, structure, and content of meetings varied, communication was a valued and regularly utilized tool for principals and teacher leaders.

Listen and answer questions. In addition to talking and giving feedback, eight principal participants discussed the importance of listening to and answering their teacher leaders' questions. Whether they are implementing a given task or executing an assignment given by their principals, teacher leaders must feel comfortable sharing their ideas with their principal mentors and inquiring about their topics of interest. Dr. Gretchen asserted, "You just have to let those you lead and collaborate with know that you're there to listen." Later in her interview, she reiterated the importance and gravity of listening to her teacher leaders. Principals offering a listening ear to their faculty and staff helps them feel heard and their ideas valued. Similarly, multiple principals shared that they solicit their teacher leaders' input on the direction of their schools. Ms. Samantha explained that this practice is part of the school's decision-making process to create "a

well-oiled plan." Principals understand that teacher leaders are important members of the school community and, as such, are integral to the execution of an effective school's plan and vision. Because of this, listening to teacher leaders is an effective strategy employed to mentor them and prepare them for school leadership positions.

Principal participants also highlighted their openness to answering their teacher leaders' questions. Multiple principals shared that they keep their office doors open so that teachers are not hesitant about constantly stopping by to ask questions. Dr. Carla suggested that principals should "have checkpoints to see if there are any questions or concerns" from their teacher leaders. Dr. Michael echoed other principals' sentiments about listening to their teacher leaders; however, he did not completely agree with their strategy. He shared, "I allow them to vent but they need to have a solution." In contrast to answering their teacher leaders' questions, multiple principals described the importance of encouraging their teacher leaders to discover the answers to their own questions. Mr. Kenneth shared that one of the most effective mentoring strategies that he utilizes is not providing his teacher leaders with answers. He went on to explain:

> What you're really trying to do is just kind of probe and let them discover their own understanding to gather their own answers through their own experiences … So, you're really helping to activate that background knowledge, maybe through questioning, not so much as giving the answers.

Mr. Bobby agreed with the strategy of not answering teacher leaders' questions. He believed that answering his teacher leaders' question would stifle their ingenuity and inspiration. He shared that if his teacher leaders request his help, he does not "want to give too much information because [he wants] them to have creativity as far as what they're [going to] bring to the table." He added, "there's no one way or right way to do

certain things." Mr. Bobby explained that he would only give recommendations to his teacher leaders if they told him "I just don't know what to do. I'm lost." Finally, some principals discussed how their teacher leaders would request help in different areas of their professional development. As knowledgeable leaders, principals share helpful conferences and workshops with their teacher leaders in an effort to set them on a course for success. Whether teacher leaders were asking for assistance with a task or inquiring about which professional learning opportunities to pursue, principals consider answering their teacher leaders' questions to be an effective strategy to support teacher leaders into becoming successful school leaders.

Ask goal-oriented questions. Principals mentor by listening to teacher leaders and answering their questions. However, they also find it helpful to ask probing questions of their teacher leaders. The questions posed by the principal participants range from being focused on their teacher leaders' professional goals to being focused on the teacher leaders' thoughts regarding the school goals. As a mentoring strategy, principals ask their teacher leaders what they see themselves doing in the future as well as if they have ever considered specific career options. Dr. Johnny, on the other hand, said that he learns whether his teachers are interested in school leadership by asking them the following questions:

1. What are your professional goals?
2. Where do you see yourself a year from now?
3. Where do you see yourself five years from now?
4. Do you see yourself long-term in the classroom?

5. Or do you see yourself moving into administration?

Unlike other principals, two principals shared that one of the first things they do when mentoring teacher leaders is to inquire, not about their professional goals, but about their vision and goals for the school. They shared how they talk about the school goals with their teacher leaders by consistently asking them how specific initiatives and programs relate back to these goals. Dr. Lena explained that asking goal-oriented questions gives her teacher leaders a "different perspective to see things through." One principal shared that, because her predecessor mentored her by asking questions, she utilizes the same strategy with the teacher leaders that she mentors. By encouraging teacher leaders to constantly refer to the school goals when considering whether to implement a particular program or initiative, principals intentionally situate all decisions within the vision of their school. By doing this, they can model this behavior for their teacher leaders to replicate later when they become school leaders.

Promote collegial interaction. The communication mentioned by four principals included dialogue between the principal and teacher leaders. Such communication also highlighted how these principals would promote opportunities for teacher leaders to interact and communicate with their colleagues regardless of whether they were serving in official leadership capacities. Dr. Gretchen discussed how she gives her teacher leaders opportunities to communicate with their colleagues and share their ideas at grade level and committee meetings as well as in professional learning communities (PLC). Mr. Cameron briefly mentioned the importance of teacher leaders being close to other teacher leaders so that they can glean pertinent knowledge from each other. Some of the

principals with open-door policies highlighted the importance of teacher leaders also having open doors and, thus, making other teachers feel comfortable coming to them. Dr. Johnny described intentionally creating opportunities for collaboration amongst his faculty members in the following way:

> When it comes to things that affect a certain grade level or affect a certain discipline, then of course, we will do the collegial thing and have everyone come to the conference room and bounce ideas off of each other and come to a conclusion. If we cannot make a conclusion, then of course, as principal, I have the responsibility of moving this organization forward. But [we] just respect everyone and the expertise they bring to the table.

Multiple principals mentioned the importance of collegiality specifically when making decisions for the school. They encourage their teacher leaders to brainstorm in teams or with the entire faculty. By approaching certain issues this way, principals hope to build the leadership capacity of their teacher leaders as well as give the entire faculty the ability to see how the teacher leaders are leading. Dr. Lena discussed how she thanks her teacher leaders for little things that they do, and she encourages them to turn around and thank the teachers with whom they collaborate. She highlighted the importance of her teacher leaders positively affirming their colleagues because "that makes them feel good and that motivates them." Dr. Lena considered this to be an effective mentoring strategy because she understands that people work best when they are motivated and feel appreciated.

Theme: Leadership Responsibilities

Nine of the 12 principal participants interviewed discussed assigning leadership roles and responsibilities to their teacher leaders as an effective mentorship strategy.

Principals expounded on why they intentionally exposed their teacher leaders to different aspects of the principal position by providing opportunities for their teacher leaders to complete leadership tasks and serve on or lead specific teams at the school and district levels. In addition to participating in committee meetings and carrying out leadership roles, principal participants also cited giving teacher leaders the autonomy to take initiative and make decisions concerning events and programs at their schools as a strategy to prepare their teacher leaders for becoming school leaders.

Assign leadership roles. Principals delegate specific leadership tasks to their teacher leaders as an approach to lighten their own load. They also do this to give their teacher leaders opportunities to experience the challenges and victories that come along with making decisions. Several principals explained the importance of teacher leaders accepting small responsibilities within their schools and on their grade level or subject-area teams. They reported that the teacher leaders can learn more by carrying out specific tasks that are related to their school plans to meet the Alabama Continuous Improvement Plan and, also, the district-wide goals. Some principals described placing their teacher leaders over the specific committees at the school such as the problem-solving team and the attendance team. Dr. Carla discussed the importance of teacher leaders serving on or chairing the school's leadership team. She said that allowing "them to chair certain programs and auxiliaries within the school is one of the main ways they acquire knowledge."

In addition to assigning leadership roles at the school level, one of the principals highlighted the importance of teacher leaders also being involved in leadership roles at

the school district level. Dr. Gretchen shared that she intentionally places her teacher leaders on "every committee in the district." She considered the opportunities provided by serving on district-level committees to be an effective way to prepare her teacher leaders to become principals. As a principal, she understands that this is an expectation of those in her role. By encouraging her teacher leaders to serve on district-level committees, she extended leadership opportunities to her teacher leaders, and, at the same time, she freed herself to accomplish other tasks.

Allow initiative and autonomy. Within and aside from committees and leadership teams, two principals cited the mentoring strategy of encouraging their teacher leaders to take the initiative to create a program or solve a problem in the school. Correspondingly, three principal participants discussed the importance of giving teacher leaders the autonomy to make decisions and complete assigned tasks. Some principals shared their appreciation for teacher leaders taking the initiative to complete certain tasks without their principals having to assign the tasks or give them prior approval. Dr. Allison shared, "I really like my folks to feel empowered enough to see that if [there is] a need that I don't mind them jumping in saying 'I saw this needs to be done. I just went ahead and did it'."

Other principals briefly mentioned autonomizing their teacher leaders by allowing those who lead certain departments or programs to run their programs as they see fit. Dr. Lena shared that she gives her teacher leaders the liberty to lead the activities for which she gives them responsibility. Her rationale, she explained, was due to the autonomy that her mentoring principal had given her when she was a teacher leader. Concerning her

prior experience as the mentee, she shared the following:

> If the principal that I had before did not give me that autonomy, I don't know what I would have been able to do. I would not know the capacity that I had. So, I do that with my teacher leaders as well.

One principal discussed the significance of explaining assigned tasks well enough so that teacher leaders have a clear understanding of what is expected of them. Principals should have established checkpoints to ensure that the teacher leaders' questions are answered about how to best execute the assigned tasks.

Four of the 12 principals did not reference any specific strategies related to providing leadership opportunities for the teacher leaders in their school. By involving teacher leaders in the decision-making processes of their schools, principals consider the strategy of giving leadership responsibilities to their teacher leaders to be an effective way of preparing their teacher leaders to become future school leaders. One principal participant, Ms. Samantha shared that she is "always trying to find opportunities to make individuals better and to help them seek out their growth."

Theme: Professional Learning

Ten of the 12 principal participants described the importance of encouraging or creating opportunities for their teacher leaders to participate in activities focused on professional growth inside and outside of their schools. From their personal experience, principals understand that their ability to become effective at their leadership positions came as a result of them seeking knowledge. Whether that knowledge was found within their schools by collaborating with their colleagues or whether the knowledge was

attained by attending workshops and conferences, these principals promote their teacher leaders with pursuing professional growth in an effort to become better leaders.

Model leadership abilities. When modeling various leadership practices, five principal participants characterized mentoring their teacher leaders by utilizing tangible and visible examples while also allowing teacher leaders to shadow them. When talking to her teacher leaders, Dr. Lena explained the importance of positively affirming other teachers. She then modeled that by consistently affirming and thanking the teacher leader consistently. Dr. Lena further explained that, after modeling the strategy of affirmation for her teacher leaders, she expects them to utilize this strategy when collaborating with other teachers. Ms. Samantha discussed how she modeled strategies and intentionally focused on relaying best practices to her teacher leaders. With a focus on modeling instructional practices, Dr. Allison indicated that her method of modeling for her teacher leaders involved teaching intervention lessons in classrooms and facilitating small group lessons with students similar to what she would ask of classroom teachers. By doing so, Dr. Allison helped her teacher leaders see that, as the principal, she remained a skilled and willing pedagogue who was interested in student learning. She referenced her reputation throughout the school as being a principal who models for her teachers what she expects of them.

One principal, Mr. Kenneth, shared the strategy of modeling vulnerability. He encouraged his teacher leaders to uncover the answers to questions by working alongside him. In this way, he modeled for his teacher leaders how a principal seeks answers to questions. He shared the importance of having teacher leaders put ““in a position where

people can feel comfortable, even vulnerable, for not having to know it all." He then added the following example:

> I think as a school leader, if you can model that, if you can exude that, if you can exhibit that, that helps to … bring your staff and the people that you supervise closer to you. I think it may allow them to be a lot more open [and] a lot more vulnerable themselves.

Linked to the mentoring strategy of modeling leadership behaviors and skills is the ability for teacher leaders to shadow their principals. Two principals briefly mentioned shadowing. However, neither expounded nor shared any meaningful explications of how principals should effectively facilitate having their teacher leaders shadow them. By modeling and allowing teacher leaders to shadow them, principals shared visible and replicable strategies and practices with their teacher leaders for them to utilize in school leadership roles, both for the present and future.

Encourage professional growth. These interviews revealed that suggesting or encouraging teacher leaders to seek out and attend professional learning opportunities was a mentoring strategy employed by at least six of the 12 principal participants. Dr. Johnny shared, "If you notice that there's something they lack as a teacher leader, then direct them to professional development. Direct them to workshops that can help support that." Nevertheless, he did not give specific examples of the types of professional development in which he encouraged his teacher leaders to participate.

Other principals referenced the necessity of teacher leaders remaining abreast of research surrounding school leadership, best practices, and curriculum implementation in preparation to become principals by seeking out and attending professional development. Dr. Allison excitedly shared the example of two of her teacher leaders were accepted into

a leadership program hosted by the Council for Leaders in Alabama Schools (CLAS). This was especially important for preparing her teacher leaders for future leadership positions. She explained the following:

> Both of them are in cohort number one and they are going to receive training through CLAS … they'll have this in their bag so when they go to apply for assistant principal [positions] or whatever, they will have the opportunity to say, "I've had these leadership trainings."

Similarly, some principals described how they support their teacher leaders' professional growth in the area of leadership by sending them to professional development at local, state, or national conferences.

A few principals described the importance of teacher leaders learning in areas beyond their current expertise in order to better prepare them to lead schools. This was imperative to principals because they believe that their own roles as principals have stretched them and required more of them than they were initially capable of doing while serving as classroom teachers. One principal suggested that teacher leaders seek mentorships within and outside of the school. However, they did not expound on how teacher leaders were to go about seeking or securing those mentorships. To meet the goal of becoming effective principals in urban elementary schools, these teacher leaders must continue growing professionally. They can do so by seeking opportunities for mentorship and by attending professional learning opportunities.

RQ2: Teacher Leaders' Perceptions of Mentorship

This second question explores the perceptions of teacher leaders regarding the mentoring that they have received from their urban elementary school principals. To

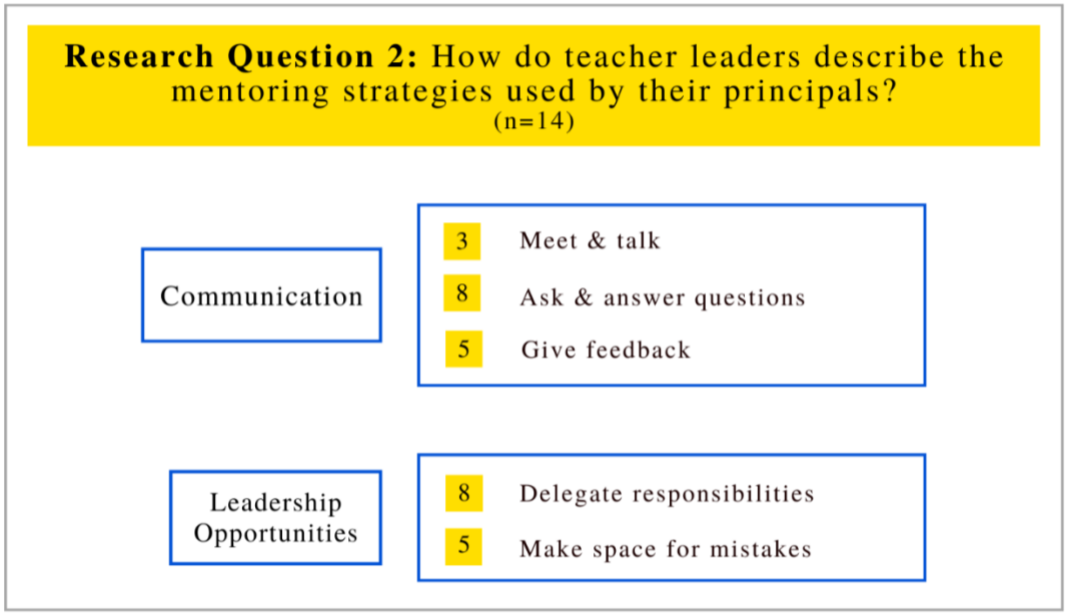
focus on this topic, RQ2 was stated as follows: “How do teacher leaders describe the mentoring strategies used by their principals?” With the goal of gathering data related to Q2, the researcher developed and asked the following interview questions:

1. How would you describe your principal’s leadership style?
2. What strategies does your principal use to mentor you as a potential future principal?

The researcher asked these questions of the teacher leaders during individual semi-structured interviews. These 14 teacher leaders worked at seven of the 12 schools led by the principals in this study. By answering these questions, teacher leaders revealed their general and specific thoughts regarding RQ2. After the interview, the researcher coded and analyzed the data. From this analysis, two themes emerged that are associated with RQ2: communication and leadership opportunities. These themes and their corresponding subthemes are illustrated in Figure 4 together with the number of teacher leaders who shared sentiments supporting each of the subthemes associated with RQ2.

Figure 4

Themes and Subthemes for RQ2



As shown in Figure 4, when describing the strategies used by their principals, these teacher leaders consistently focused on communication and leadership opportunities. Through quotes extracted from the interviews with these teacher leaders, evidence is provided below for each of these themes associated with RQ2.

Theme: Communication

Eleven of the teacher leaders cited their principals' use of communication as a strategy for mentoring them to become school leaders. Whether they were initiating the conversations or participating in dialogue with their principals or teams, most of the teacher leaders highlighted their verbal interactions.

Meet and talk. Of the 14 teacher leaders, three described meeting periodically or

regularly to talk with their principals (whether one-on-one or in group settings) as a strategy that their principals have used to mentor them. Dr. Ruby explained that she and her principal have check-ins each morning before the teachers and students arrive at school to discuss the things that are happening or need to happen at the school. Mrs. Marlena's principal encouraged her and others on her school's ILT to share how each of them, as leaders, contribute to the school. These conversations were meant to elicit deep thought and reflective dialogue amongst school leaders and, as a result, improve their output as leaders in the school. Mrs. Marlena also shared that her principal divulged more of his transparent thoughts in their weekly ILT meetings than he did with other staff members.

When characterizing the strategies used by the principal for mentoring her, Mrs. Celeste explained how their ILT meets often. In addition to their ILT meetings, Mrs. Celeste portrayed her weekly one-on-one discussions with her principal by saying, "We talk at least once a week about what's going on. I try to keep her abreast of what I've seen and what I see that's going on with the students." In addition to having formal team meetings, Ms. Trudy appreciated the ability to share frequent suggestions with her principal one-on-one because she believed that her perspective was highly esteemed by her principal. Teacher leaders value the opportunities for meeting and talking with their principals. Doing so allows teacher leaders to clearly ascertain what their principals expect of them as well as update their principals on what they have observed in the school that may be pertinent to effectively leading the school.

Ask and answer questions. Eight teacher leaders explained that their principals

mentored them by asking probing questions and by responding to the questions asked by teacher leaders. Multiple teacher leaders described how their principals solicited their feedback and ideas about specific topics. The teacher leaders explained that during informal conversations, their principals would ask questions about strategies and about the best decisions that could be made for the school. One teacher leader shared never being afraid to ask questions because their principal is always willing to provide answers. Correspondingly, Ms. Megan explained how her principal asked her questions while they worked together on the school budget. Ms. Megan shared the following:

> When it comes to making decisions, I was, at first, very indecisive, like, what should I do? But she would be like, "Well, what do you think?" So, she wouldn't be answering it for me, she would just be … getting me talking and then eventually I would kind of come to that conclusion.

Two principals asked questions about possible outcomes that could result from attempting certain approaches to gauge the teacher leaders' knowledge of the situation. They also wanted to challenge their teacher leaders to think critically.

Ms. Brittany explained that, after observing her teach a lesson, the principal would ask her one-on-one about the outcomes of this and other lessons that he had observed. Ms. Brittany reiterated her appreciation for her principal's approach of observing her teach, becoming involved in the lesson with her students, and subsequently asking her reflection questions about the effectiveness of these lessons. Mr. Waylan praised his principal for allowing him to ask questions concerning the tasks that his principal gives him to complete:

> [My principal] does a good job of communicating with me and making sure that I know the responsibilities that I'm assigned to and if I have any questions, I can always go to him and ask those things that may not be as clear.

The ability to ask questions makes teacher leaders comfortable with bringing their inquiries and ponderings to their principal. Additionally, principals asking their teacher leaders probing questions promotes reflection and growth on the part of teacher leaders. Thus, asking and answering teacher leaders' questions improves their professional leadership capacity and encourages them to replicate this modeling for others.

Give feedback. Five teacher leader participants categorized feedback they received from their principals as a strategy by which they were mentored. Some teacher leaders described how their principals were aware of their strengths and areas of need through conversations and observations. Their principals consistently suggested ways that they could improve. Dr. Ruby, on the other hand, shared that the daily feedback she received from her principal during their one-on-one meetings was important in helping her to prepare for the day ahead. She went on to explicate a specific instance where her principal instructed her to simulate facilitating a PLC meeting. After she had completed this simulation, Dr. Ruby's principal offered her valuable insights to make the meeting go smoothly. Similarly, another teacher leader briefly mentioned meeting with the principal one-on-one to receive feedback for improving a specific area of focus. However, this teacher leader did not identify any possible areas of focus.

Dr. Wendy shared an experience when both her principal and assistant principal were away from the building. As the leadership designee for the school, she was tasked with leading in their absence. Upon her principal's return, Dr. Wendy voluntarily updated her principal by summarizing the previous day's occurrences. She recounted that if her principal did not like a decision she had made, her principal would politely tell her to

change course or would reverse whatever decision she had implemented (but, of course, based on a strong rationale). Because of such experiences, she deduced that her principal trusted her to make decisions although she may have disagreed with some of the decisions that she has made. She later added the following:

> If I have a problem, I don't have a problem going to her and discussing it with her. I feel like she's gonna give me the best advice that she can. If she doesn't know, she can pick up that phone and she's gonna call somebody or she's gonna send an email. It's just trust and that might be the educational strategy.

Giving feedback to teacher leaders assists them in making future decisions based on data and best practices. When principals offer feedback, their teacher leaders learn more about their principals' visions for the school. With such insights, the teacher leaders are more inclined to make future decisions based on the feedback received from their principals.

Theme: Leadership Opportunities

At least 11 of the teacher leaders explained that their principals mentor them by providing them with leadership tasks and roles at the school level. Upon securing leadership roles, teacher leaders appreciate that their principals give them autonomy and allow them to make mistakes. When the principals delegate responsibilities to their teacher leaders, this gives opportunities to the teacher leaders for learning and growing so that they can become school leaders. As teacher leaders grapple with making decisions that affect a single classroom, grade level, or the entire school, they are faced with some of the daunting tasks regularly assigned to urban school principals.

Delegate responsibilities. Eight teacher leaders referenced the leadership responsibilities that their principals delegate to them. These responsibilities are intended

to generate onsite learning opportunities for teacher leaders. Multiple teacher leaders explained that their principals give them leadership roles with the goal of teaching them through real-life professional experiences. The teacher leaders commended their principals for doing great jobs at delegating responsibilities to the teachers and leaders in their schools. Dr. Ruby shared that her principal recognizes the strengths of those that she leads and, also, uses her knowledge of each of her teachers to delegate roles to them. Because of her own strengths, Dr. Ruby shared that her principal assigned her the role of leading a PLC.

Some teacher leaders discussed their principal's knowledge of their goals and shared that anytime opportunities come up that are in line with their goals, their principals call on them to implement the tasks so that their principals can push them further along toward reaching their leadership goals. Concerning her principal's leadership style, Mrs. Aleah expounded, "whoever [her principal] feels like is the strongest person to deal with whatever it is, [her principal will] turn to that person and get them to help make it come to fruition." One teacher leader said that the principal explains the tasks to be completed in an effort to combat this teacher leader's self-proclaimed shyness. By accepting and volunteering for leadership roles, teacher leaders participate in hands-on opportunities that are meant to prepare them for school leadership responsibilities. Principals delegate responsibilities based on their teacher leaders' goals and, also, as inspired by the strengths that each teacher leader possesses.

Make space for mistakes. Of the 14 teacher leaders, five described how their principals use the strategy of allowing them to explore leadership opportunities in which

they can make mistakes. Multiple teacher leaders explained that their principals do not always give directives but sometimes allowed them to make their own mistakes and learn from these mistakes. Principals frequently challenge teacher leaders to complete tasks without offering their assistance. The goal is to see if the teacher leader can accomplish the tasks without failure thereby avoiding teacher leader stagnation. Dr. Wendy explained how her principal gives the teacher leaders "the autonomy to do what they wanted to do while tweaking it at the same time." She later explained that her principal trusts the five teacher leaders at her school "to make the decision" without saying, "let me hold your hand" or "let me breathe down your neck."

Without divulging specific feedback received from the principal, one teacher leader said that if a task was not done properly or not completed in a timely manner, the principal allowed more time and space to get the task done. Later, however, the principal would talk about how the deadline had not been met and how to rectify this for future tasks. Mrs. Aleah explained that her principal mentored her by giving her tasks to complete that were out of her comfort zone. She expounded by describing her principal in the following manner:

> She feels like you will be a strong person to deal with whatever it is, and she'll give you what you need to do it. She'll kind of leave some of it up for you to discover on your own. Like, she'll give you the basics of what you need, but she's not going to go too far. She's going to make you figure it out. Then because of that, you end up being stronger in [that] particular area because you had to put in the work to do it.

Teacher leaders appreciate the autonomy given to them by their principals to discover new responsibilities and to make mistakes professionally. Their mistakes become learning experiences upon which they can build and grow their leadership capacity.

RQ3: Desired Mentoring Opportunities for Teacher Leaders

This third question explores the mentoring opportunities that teacher leaders would like to receive from their principals. To focus on this topic, RQ3 was stated as follows: "What opportunities do teacher leaders desire for their principals to provide them in an effort to prepare the teacher leaders to become principals?" With the goal of gathering data related to Q3, the researcher developed and asked the following interview question specifically for the nine teacher leaders who, on the pre-screener, had indicated an interest in becoming a principal:

- What opportunities would you like for your principal to give you to prepare you to become a principal?

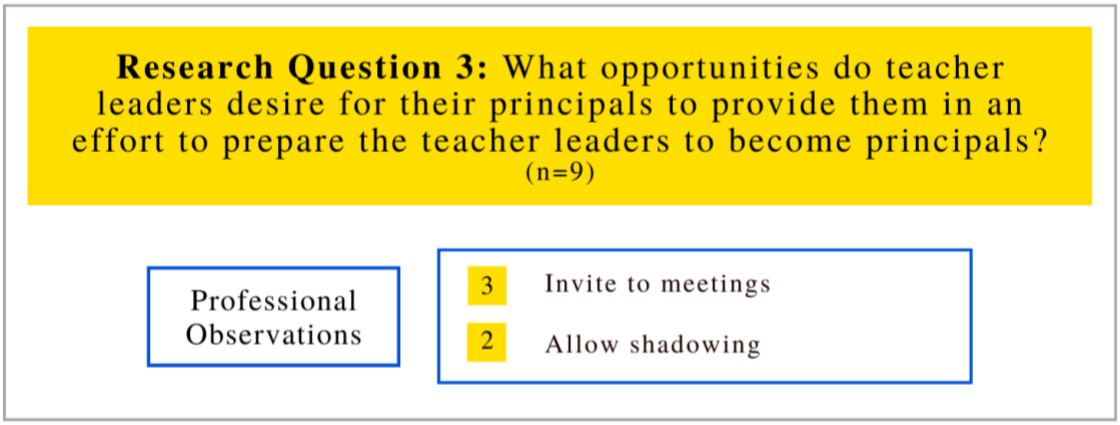
The researcher asked this question of these nine teacher leaders during the same semi-structured interviews used to elicit data regarding Q2. By answering this single interview question, these teacher leaders revealed their general and specific thoughts regarding RQ3. After the interview, the researcher coded and analyzed the data. From this analysis, one theme emerged that is associated with RQ3: professional observations. This theme and its corresponding subthemes are illustrated in Figure 5 together with the number of teacher leaders who shared sentiments supporting each of the subthemes associated with RQ3.

Seven of the nine teacher leaders articulated that their principals were already affording the opportunities necessary to prepare them for future school leadership roles. Participants applauded the opportunities that their principals were already providing them such as leading various initiatives or facilitating meetings at their schools. Nevertheless,

they continued by adding context to what they are receiving or by sharing areas in which they would like more experience. Concerning her principal, Ms. Rehema stated, “he’s developing me with different skills that will help maximize my leadership and he’s providing all the different tools that I can work with other teams.” Most of the teacher leaders who aspired to become principals (or perhaps were considering this) shared that their principals were already providing them with the opportunities they desire. Hence, only one theme was derived from the interview data regarding RQ3. This theme and the number of teacher leaders associated with each subtheme are provided in Figure 5.

Figure 5

Theme and Subthemes for RQ3



As shown in Figure 5, when describing the leadership opportunities that teacher leaders would like for their principals to provide, these teacher leaders focused on professional observations. Through quotes extracted from the interviews with these teacher leaders, evidence is provided below for the theme and subthemes associated with RQ3.

Theme: Professional Observations

Three teacher leaders verbalized a desire to attend leadership-level meetings or to lead teacher meetings. The types of meetings mentioned ranged from the school level to the district level. Two teacher leaders expressed interest in shadowing principals to learn more about daily occurrences in school leadership.

Invite to meetings. Of the nine teacher leaders who are or may become interested in school leadership, three mentioned their desire to participate in or observe the TSD principal meetings. The teacher leaders shared that they would like to be more in tune with principals' meetings to observe and see how things occur. They want to know how other principals collaborate and interact with one another as well as understand their superintendent's expectations. Mr. Waylan discussed his desire to participate in principals' meetings so that when he becomes a leader, he will understand the jargon. With respect to attending these principal meetings, he shared the following: "I'll know how to read the room. I'll know how to ask questions to the right people. I'll know who's in place to ask questions to."

Allow shadowing. Only two teacher leaders mentioned the strategy of shadowing as an avenue to learn what principals are required to do daily. Dr. Wendy shared that she would like to observe and experience an actual day in the life of a principal. She expounded by saying she would enjoy, "mock days where [she is] with the principal all day, following them [and] … shadowing them." Comparatively, Mr. Waylan suggested that having an opportunity to be mentored by another principal would be helpful in his future endeavors to become a principal:

> It will be awesome if my principal let another principal outside of this building be my mentor because there's always another perspective that's needed. I've been working with [my principal for] 12 years. I've only [gotten] that male perspective. But … it will help me to see it from a female's perspective, on how to have things in their building, or in another setting, or from her version of what leadership looks like. So, I would love for that to happen.

Shadowing principals, whether their own or a different principal, is a strategy of interest to some urban elementary school teacher leaders. By becoming entrenched in the daily tasks and professional lives of principals, teacher leaders believe that they will learn and grow into becoming effective school leaders.

Summary of Results

In this study, the urban elementary school principals and teacher leaders agreed and disagreed about the traits that define an effective teacher leader. The principals expounded on the specific strategies they use when mentoring their teacher leaders. The data from the 12 principal interviews reveals that urban elementary school principals employ numerous strategies, whether directly or indirectly and whether formally or informally. The described strategies are individualized to meet the specific needs of the teacher leaders in a principal's school while also utilizing specific strategies such as communicating, assigning leadership responsibilities, and encouraging professional learning.

The three themes describing the strategies utilized by principals as a means of mentoring their teacher leaders were identified by the researcher and are interconnected yet mentioned often enough to stand alone. For example, the principals' consistent communication with their teacher leaders was the vehicle used to encourage these teacher

leaders to accept or seek leadership responsibilities within and outside of the school. Likewise, these principals encouraged their teacher leaders to attend and facilitate professional learning trainings at the school, local, state, and national levels by communicating the related benefits with their teacher leaders. It can be deduced that the leadership responsibilities assumed by teacher leaders are intended to grow them professionally. By embedding opportunities for teacher leaders to assume teacher leadership positions, the principals seemingly expect teacher leaders to learn from their experiences through the assigned tasks and transfer that knowledge to their future school leadership positions. Although the themes discovered through this research are limited to a single urban school district and the descriptions shared are inexhaustive, they do provide insight into how principals mentor their teacher leaders to become future principals.

Teacher leaders acknowledge that their principals mentor them formally and informally by communicating frequently and by delegating leadership responsibilities. However, the data from the teacher leader interviews yielded different results than the data from the principal interviews. In this study, the teacher leaders did not report that their principals consistently or strongly utilized the mentoring strategy of modeling their leadership actions. Similarly, these teacher leaders did not report that their principals promoted their attendance or participation in professional development trainings. Despite the mentoring strategies identified by both the principals and the teacher leaders, the ability to observe certain job requirements exclusively for principals (e.g., attending district-level principal meetings) was a common desire among the teacher leaders.

This data analysis uncovers discrepancies between the mentoring strategies deployed by principals and those described by the teacher leaders. Such discrepancies illuminate a gap in the principals' mentorship as perceived by their teacher leaders.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

Chapter V provides an overview of the study, restates the research questions (RQ), summarizes findings from these three questions, and analyzes how these findings are situated within the study's theoretical framework. It also describes the significance of the study and offers possible implications for urban elementary school teacher leaders, principals, urban school districts, and school leadership preparation programs at institutions of higher education. This chapter ends with recommendations for improving this study and for conducting future research.

Overview of the Study

This qualitative study attempted to fill the gap of relatively little being known about the interactions between principals and their teacher leaders (Leithwood & Riehl, 2005; Loder & Spillane, 2005; Mangin, 2007). To that end, the researcher examined the mentoring strategies used by 12 urban elementary school principals in the Temoni School District (TSD) to prepare their teacher leaders for school leadership positions. The researcher also explored how 14 urban elementary school teacher leaders in the same district describe the mentorship strategies utilized by their principals and how they desire to be mentored. Data were collected via pre-screener surveys and semi-structured interviews. The researcher analyzed the responses from these 26 participants from the

perspective of three research questions. Interview responses from the principals revealed findings connected to RQ1. Interview responses from teacher leaders revealed findings connected to RQ2 and RQ3. These findings reflect similarities and differences between the themes derived from RQ1 and those from RQ2 and RQ3. Situated within the distributed leadership framework (DLF) and the teacher leadership skills framework (TLSF), the uncovered themes and subthemes offer insights to the implications of this study.

While the overlapping themes and subthemes confirm the mentoring methods used by principals, the discrepancy between responses from each of the participant groups (principals and teacher leaders) illuminates how 12 principals feel they deliver mentoring strategies versus how 14 teacher leaders feel they receive such strategies. A strength of this study was collecting descriptive, individualized experiences from each of these 26 participants. Limitations were a small sample size and a single study site.

The primary limitation of this study was a relatively small sample size (26 participants). These participants were 12 urban elementary school principals and 14 urban elementary school teacher leaders. Another limitation was how this study was conducted in a single urban school district in Central Alabama. Findings may or may not be generalizable or replicated outside of this study setting. Both limitations can be addressed in future studies and thus enhance the potential of generalizability.

Research Questions

This study provided responses to the following RQs:

1. What strategies do urban elementary school principals use to mentor their

teacher leaders?

2. How do teacher leaders describe the mentorship strategies used by their principals?
3. What opportunities do teacher leaders desire for their principals to provide them in an effort to prepare the teacher leaders to become principals?

Summary of Findings

In this section, the researcher summarizes the findings related to RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3. These findings are reported in an interwoven manner because of the interrelation of themes discovered when exploring these research questions. Findings related to RQ1 provide a baseline for the mentoring strategies that the urban elementary school principals intended to provide to their teacher leaders. Findings related to RQ2 provide insights from teacher leaders who, as a group, confirm or deny the strategies provided by the principals. Findings related to RQ3 provide additional information on how these teacher leaders desire to be mentored in preparation for becoming urban school principals. These findings illuminate how both participant groups (principals and teacher leaders) describe the mentoring strategies utilized in their schools and, also, shed light on the types of mentoring desired by teacher leaders. It should be noted that the mentoring strategies described by any given principal were not compared to the strategies mentioned by that principal's teacher leader(s) with the intention of possibly establishing consistency of perspectives within a given school. Rather, the strategies described by the participants in each specific group were analyzed holistically within that group.

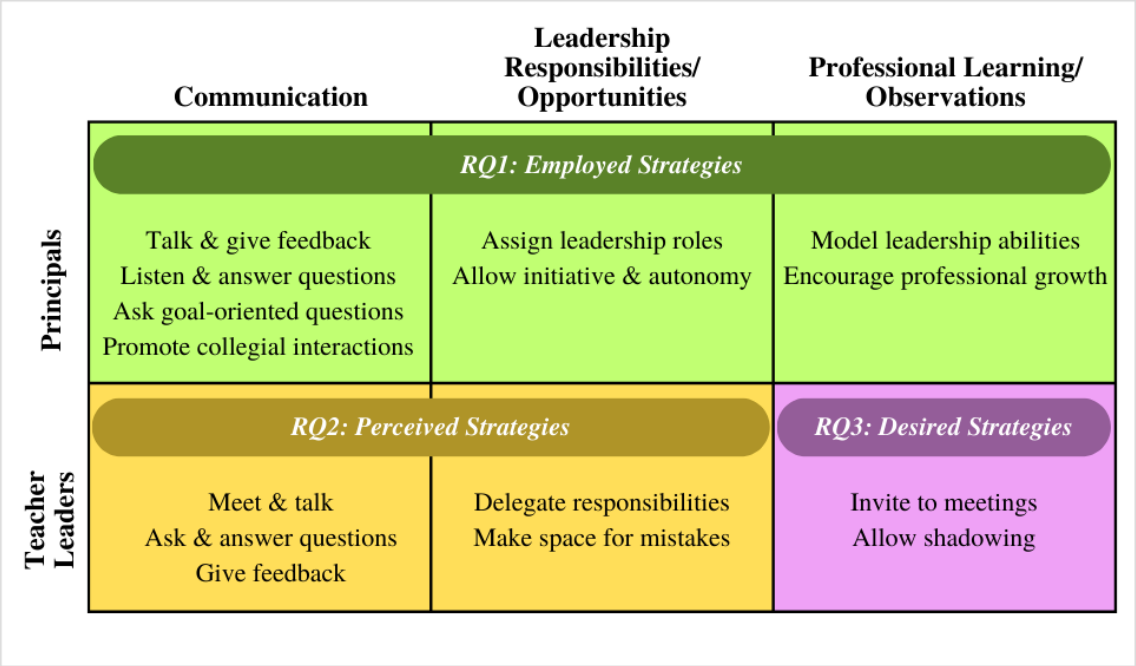
In this discussion of findings, the researcher starts by identifying the themes and aligning them with this study's conceptual framework. After that, the researcher synthesizes these themes to find overlaps between principal-related and teacher leader-related themes. This discussion ends by identifying the perceptions of teacher leaders regarding mentorship strategies provided by their principals.

The data analysis of responses corresponding to RQ1 resulted in the identification of three main themes: communication, leadership responsibilities, and professional learning. The data analysis of responses corresponding to RQ2 resulted in the identification of two main themes: communication and leadership opportunities. The data analysis of responses corresponding to RQ3 resulted in the identification of one main theme: professional observations. This produced a total of six themes—three related to principals (RQ1) and three related to teacher leaders (RQ2 and RQ3). Each of these themes has from two to five subthemes.

Based on similarities in themes between the principal group and the teacher leader group, the researcher collapsed these six specific themes into three generalized themes: (a) communication, (b) leadership responsibilities/opportunities, and (c) professional learning/observations. To better understand the interrelationship of themes and subthemes, the researcher aligned the three generalized themes with the RQs and with components from the study's conceptual framework, which come from the DLF, the TLSF, and the social constructivist theory (SCT). This synthesis of themes (and subthemes) is illustrated in Figure 6 where each column represents one of the three generalized themes.

Figure 6

Combined Themes and Subthemes for RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3



In Figure 6, the researcher illustrates the relationships between the themes generated by principals (first row of subthemes) and by the teacher leaders (second row of subthemes) and then shows where each theme fits within the overall findings.

The DLF provided a perspective through which to view the mentoring strategies utilized by urban elementary school principals while the TLSF highlighted the necessary proficiencies for teachers to become leaders (CSTP, 2018). The data from both groups (principals and teacher leaders) emphasize the use of mentoring strategies supported by the SCT. By layering components from the DLF and TLSF and then viewing these components from the lens of social constructivism, the researcher endeavored to ascertain

a deep understanding of how TSD principals and teacher leaders perceive and appreciate the school leadership mentoring strategies being employed. The findings from this study illuminate how both participant groups (principals and teacher leaders) describe the mentoring strategies utilized in their schools and, also, suggest ideas for effective mentoring strategies from the perspective of these teacher leaders.

The DLF includes roles and expectations of principals for imparting their leadership knowledge and expertise onto teacher leaders, disseminating supervisory and management functions, creating collaborative environments amongst those they lead, and including teacher leaders in decision-making processes (Desravines & Fenton, 2015; Gibb, 1954, as cited in Edwards, 2011; Glickman et al., 2014; Spillane, 2005; Spillane et al., 2001). The three themes and eight subthemes resulting from RQ1 converge with the DLF given how these principals shared at least two mentoring strategies addressing each of the four DLF components. However, a fundamental divergence exists in that not all TLSF competencies (CSTP, 2018) were addressed by the RQ2 themes and subthemes that emerged from the teacher leader data. The convergence and divergence of these themes are illustrated in Figure 7.

Figure 7

Combined Frameworks and Mentoring Strategies

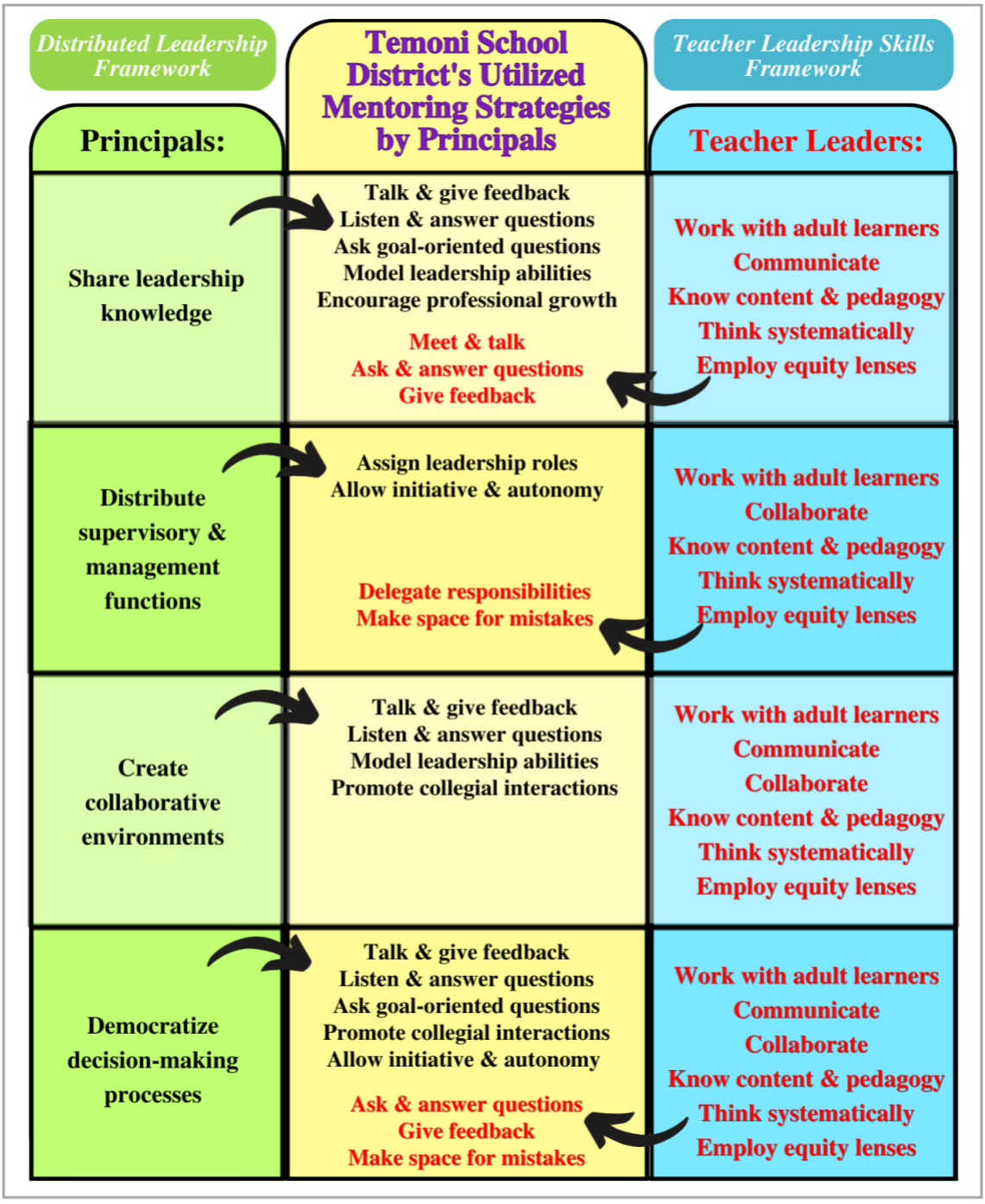


Figure 7 provides DLF components for principals in the left column and TLSF components for teacher leaders in the right column. The center column provides strategies used by TSD principals. Arrows show alignment between the framework components and the strategies used by the principals. Interactions corresponding to each of the four DLF components are described below.

Shared Leadership Knowledge

Martin et al. (2016) assert that a principal (as mentor) should facilitate the professional and personal growth of their teacher leaders by sharing the knowledge and insights they have learned over the years. The mentoring strategy of communication, referenced by 11 (92%) of the 12 principals, was overwhelmingly popular. The communication mentioned was described multidimensionally as it included principals, teacher leaders, and the teacher leaders' colleagues, who, in turn, were both initiators and recipients. The principals reported communicating with their teacher leaders as follows:

- talking and giving feedback
- listening and answering questions
- asking goal-oriented questions
- encouraging teacher leaders to interact collaboratively with their colleagues

When principals converse and share feedback with their teacher leaders, they listen to these teacher leaders, answer their questions, ask goal-oriented questions, model leadership abilities, and encourage their teacher leaders' professional growth. In addition, they are also sharing their leadership knowledge as supported by the DLF (Desravines & Fenton, 2015; Gibb, 1954, as cited in Edwards, 2011; Glickman et al., 2014; Spillane,

2005; Spillane et al., 2001). Of the 14 teacher leaders, three (21%) described having regular meetings with their principals to converse and share their suggestions or thoughts with their principals. Five (36%) of these teacher leaders mentioned their principals engaging with them during meetings, talking with them during other opportunities, asking and answering their questions, and giving them feedback. These subthemes supported four of the six skill sets outlined in the TLSF, with only collaboration and equity lens not having been mentioned (CSTP, 2018). However, yet inexplicit within the data from both groups (principals and teacher leaders) is the specific content of the leadership knowledge shared by principals with their teacher leaders. Both groups shared general notions of conversations surrounding the school vision, frequent and scheduled meetings, and the feedback that principals provide to teacher leaders. Nonetheless, it is unknown whether teacher leaders actually conceptualize the information shared with them and, as a result, are able to execute tasks as outlined in the TLSF (CSTP, 2018). Bradley (2015) purports that giving constructive feedback is imperative for everyone in the school community to learn and grow. This, in turn, suggests that supportive principals should initiate "time to meet [with], talk [to], and learn" from their teachers (p. 101).

When principals mentor their teachers in utilizing these strategies, teacher leaders are able to work with adult learners (i.e., their colleagues) by developing an understanding of teacher content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge. From this study, no specific evidence of this was mentioned, although teacher leaders shared that they lead meetings such as grade level, professional learning community (PLC), and instructional leadership team (ILT). These leadership roles require communication on the

part of the teacher leader. According to the TLSF, when learning to work with adult learners, teacher leaders must accept and act on the constructive feedback they receive (CSTP, 2018). This competency was mentioned by several teacher leaders based on their appreciation of the feedback they received from their principals. Similarly, teacher leaders must possess strong communication skills and be able to give feedback as well as listen deeply without judgment. All teachers, from novice to veteran, need mentors to provide them with constructive feedback. This, in turn, will lead to the practice of redirecting teacher behavior in the classroom and preparing for subsequent lessons (Melvin & Vargas, 2021). Upon properly implementing such practice, teacher leaders will receive constructive feedback. Then, in the future, they can offer constructive feedback to the teachers that they will one day be coaching. Interestingly enough, however, none of the study participants mentioned how teacher leaders would one day be giving feedback to others.

By being knowledgeable of their content and pedagogy, teacher leaders can identify and employ current, research-based best practices across context and content (CSTP, 2018). One teacher leader, who was a classroom teacher, shared a specific example in which the principal shared pedagogy-centered knowledge after a lesson observation. Principals may not feel the need to expound on content-specific information with teacher leaders who are working outside of the classroom given their focus mainly on the management side of school leadership. When mentoring teacher leaders, however, one principal mentioned intentionally focusing on school curriculum and goals.

Teacher leaders think systematically when they craft and deliver effective

messages. One teacher leader discussed how the principal had them simulate facilitating an upcoming PLC meeting. After the simulation, the feedback provided by the principal resulted in the teacher leader executing and facilitating an effective PLC meeting. Another teacher leader described observing the principal interacting with parents during the reinstatement of a student returning from a suspension. The teacher leader was then able to communicate effectively one-on-one with a different parent of a student being reinstated. By allowing teacher leaders to listen and observe, principals share their leadership expertise so that teacher leaders can glean how to best craft and deliver messages.

Created Collaborative Environments

Principals create collaborative school environments where communication frequently happens, modeling of leadership skills is provided, and positive collegial interactions are promoted. Seven (58%) of 12 principals mentioned collegial interaction as a mentoring strategy. The principals explained how they meet often with their teacher leaders to talk, give feedback, listen, and answer questions. The collaboration between principals and their teacher leaders results in how the principals model leadership abilities and, also, encourage teacher leaders to collaborate with their colleagues.

The responses from teacher leaders regarding feedback did not seem to create collaborative environments because the teacher leaders described their communication with the principals as only being between the two of them. The teacher leaders did not explicitly share instances of how their principals might have encouraged or required them to collaborate with other faculty members. Although both groups (principals and teacher

leaders) mentioned participating in or leading PLCs, the principals were more precise in describing the reasons (collegial inquiry and interaction) for encouraging teacher leaders to serve on PLCs. Teacher leaders, however, described their participation in PLCs as simply a task of delegated responsibility. According to Drago-Severson (2009), collegial relationships "can occur when teachers talk about practice, share craft knowledge, observe one another, and help one another" (p. 73). By encouraging teacher leaders to seek and foster collaborative connections with their colleagues, the principals can prepare them to become school leaders.

Distributed Supervisory and Management Functions

Principals distribute supervisory and management functions by assigning leadership roles to their teacher leaders and by allowing teacher leaders to take initiative and have autonomy when completing leadership tasks. Many principals explained how they encourage their teacher leaders to grow their leadership skills by leading various teams within and outside the school. Similarly, many teacher leaders referred to how their principals delegate leadership responsibilities to them. According to Glickman et al. (2014), "teachers or groups functioning at very high levels of adult development, expertise, and commitment are ready for the self-direction fostered by the nondirective supervisory approach. They are autonomous, explorative, and creative" (p. 152). Some principals shared that they encourage their teacher leaders to take initiative, and other principals specifically discussed giving autonomy to their teacher leaders. Many teacher leaders recognized that their principals would allow them to make mistakes in discovery experiences and, as a result, create new leadership knowledge. According to Bambrick-

Santoyo and Peiser (2012), giving teachers the freedom to solve problems creates opportunities for them to be "leaders in a small but meaningful way and prepare them to take on larger roles in the future" (p. 207).

Nine (75%) of the 12 principals referenced the leadership tasks that they entrusted to their teacher leaders. Comparably, 11 (79%) of the 14 teacher leaders described the leadership roles assigned to them by their principals. The teacher leaders seemed to appreciate the learning and experience provided through this strategy. The symbiotic descriptions of teacher leaders and principals about this topic should not be overlooked. From such data, it can be assumed that these principals distribute leadership as described by the DLF and supported by their teacher leaders. In return, the teacher leaders accept such leadership opportunities as a means of preparing them to become leaders in schools, whether they remain in teacher leadership positions or become school principals (Klein et al., 2018; Spillane, 2005; Spillane et al., 2001).

Most of the teacher leaders reported an appreciation for opportunities to explore by leading that were provided by their principals. In addition to encouraging teacher leaders to take on leadership responsibilities in the school, some principals expect their teacher leaders to initiate change and improvements at their schools. By giving teacher leaders the autonomy to lead programs and teams at the school level, principals are building their teacher leaders' professional leadership skills. Although less than half of the teacher leaders mentioned making mistakes, this strategy utilized by their principals seemed to be an effective way for the teacher leaders to grow. Interestingly, less than half of the principals reported either encouraging their teacher leaders to take initiative or

granting their teacher leaders the space to make mistakes. Despite the low percentage of teacher leaders mentioning this strategy, those who did reference autonomy and mistakes seemed to appreciate the freedom and safety provided by their principals if they made decisions that resulted in negative outcomes.

Democratized Decision-Making Processes

Principals democratize school-based decision-making processes by talking and giving feedback, listening to and answering questions, asking goal-oriented questions, promoting collaboration among their teachers, and allowing autonomous initiatives. Seven (58%) of 12 principals mentioned listening to and answering their teacher leaders' questions as a mentoring strategy while only five (42%) principals discussed asking goal-oriented questions of their teacher leaders. Democracy in schools is supported by teacher leadership (Hart, 1995 as cited in Glickman et al., 2014). Therefore, the democratic cultures created by school principals promote teachers participating in instructional leadership. In this study, principals and teacher leaders discussed how numerous teacher leaders are at the helm of grade level, PLC, and ILT meetings, thereby facilitating data-driven dialogue and moving groups to actionable outcomes in collaboration with their fellow teachers (CSTP, 2018).

Teacher leaders should also use student data to make equitable decisions about content and pedagogy. One principal discussed placing one of the teacher leaders over the school's problem-solving team and the other one over the attendance team. Another principal described how teachers meet in small groups and then bring their decisions to the larger faculty group for a vote. By employing such mentoring strategies, the

principals democratized the decision-making processes at their schools. Teacher leaders described their ability to ask and answer questions with their principals, give their principals feedback, and have space to make mistakes as strategies for participating in the democratic leadership culture at their schools.

Eight (57%) of the 14 teacher leaders described how their principals used questioning strategies to probe their thoughts on how to accomplish specific tasks and how to proceed on initiatives at their schools. They also mentioned how their principals responded to their questions. One teacher leader mentioned being the designee at the school when both the principal and assistant principal were absent. Upon returning, the principal supported the autonomous decisions made by this teacher leader or changed decisions based on sound rationale. Teacher leaders are aware of the established power structure and understand who has the power to make decisions (CSTP, 2018). One principal discussed allowing the ILT to meet and make decisions. However, when no decision can be made democratically by the ILT, the principal makes the ultimate decision.

Integrated Findings

Although not explicitly outlined in the DLF and just casually mentioned in the TLSF, the data suggest that the teacher leaders who participate in school-based or offsite professional development trainings are important to urban elementary school principals when mentoring their teacher leaders. Ten (83%) of the 12 principals referred to creating professional learning opportunities for their teacher leaders or sending them to professional development trainings.

Included within school-based professional learning is the strategy used by principals to model leadership at the school's highest level. Principals seemed to understand that, like their young students, teacher leaders also need lessons modeled for them. This modeling, according to some principals, was provided informally through their day-to-day interactions with teacher leaders and other faculty members as well as formally by working one-on-one with teacher leaders to collaboratively accomplish specific leadership tasks. Although some teacher leaders referenced shadowing or working closely with their principals, this strategy was not mentioned strongly enough to denote that the teacher leaders recognized that their principals were mentoring them in this way or that they were being allowed to shadow their principals. This begs to reason whether the proximity of principals to their teacher leaders serves as a barrier in their ability to consciously model leadership skills. For example, if a teacher leader is also a fourth-grade teacher, being confined to a classroom would prohibit that teacher leader from walking the halls of the school and interacting with teachers as a principal does on a regular basis.

More noteworthy is the desire for shadowing that is mentioned by two of the nine teacher leaders who are interested in or may be interested in becoming a school principal. By shadowing their principals, these teacher leaders would benefit from the shared leadership knowledge outlined in the DLF (CSTP, 2018). This is important because five (42%) of the 12 principals referenced using this strategy. If modeling leadership and allowing teacher leaders to shadow principals are seen as effective mentoring strategies by principals but not by teacher leaders, perhaps the teacher leaders are unaware of their

need for this mentoring strategy. Perhaps these principals consider this strategy to be necessary for mentoring because of their own experiences shadowing their predecessors.

Of the 12 principals, six (50%) considered the strategy of promoting their teacher leaders' attendance at external workshops and trainings to be an effective way to prepare their teacher leaders for school leadership positions. Few principals were explicit in their reasons for determining which types of professional development trainings were best for their teacher leaders. However, one principal proudly mentioned that two of the school's teacher leaders were accepted to a statewide leadership program. This principal explained wanting these teacher leaders to have this experience in case they apply for other leadership positions. In contrast, only one (7%) teacher leader discussed being sent by the principal to professional development trainings. Another teacher leader shared wanting the principal to continue supporting professional growth though without providing any details. Though supported by principals, this strategy is not being perceived as a mentoring strategy by the teacher leaders. The DLF and TLSF value teacher leaders facilitating professional learning for other teachers rather than just attending to obtain knowledge. Concerning this concept, the DLF and TLSF confirm the tenets of CST regarding how knowledge is constructed rather than gained (Alanazi, 2016).

Significance of the Study

Findings from this study are significant to factors that impact teacher leader selection decisions, teacher leadership mentoring practices, and school principal preparation in urban elementary schools. Currently, a limited number of studies exist on the topic of how urban elementary school principals choose and mentor the teacher

leaders in their buildings. Beyond the scope of elementary school principals mentoring their teacher leaders, limited research exists that focuses on effective school leadership preparation, its influences on student learning outcomes, the professional experience enhancements that it provides for teachers, and its impacts on the overall leadership practices at schools. Although modern public schools in America are run with a business-like mindset, the practices surrounding school leadership preparation in urban schools have not reached the level of systemization that provides a meaningful and sustainable return on their investments.

Teacher leaders and principals from the same school district held different perspectives regarding the characteristics and attributes of a teacher leader. While some principals tapped the teachers in whom they saw leadership potential to become their mentees, other principals considered it to be the teacher leaders' responsibility to approach their principals to request to be mentored. Additionally, some principals viewed teacher leaders as being more focused on learning about the managerial side of school administration while other principals focused on the principal's role as the school's chief curriculum officer. These extremes result in TSD principals providing varied and unsystematic levels of mentorship support to their teacher leaders.

Although many complexities surround the roles and expectations of educators at any level in public education, a common language and execution of leadership mentoring strategies would serve the TSD well by providing opportunities to grow teacher leaders across the entire school district and prepare them to lead in the school environment with which they are most acquainted. The outcomes of this study provide evidence that TSD

principals mentor their teacher leaders utilizing strategies that may or may not be recognized by their mentees. Evidence from this study also shows that the teacher leaders receiving mentorship support from their principals recognize some but not all of the mentoring strategies used by their principals. Evidence also suggests that the teacher leaders desire to be mentored in several ways already being used by their principals.

Implications of the Study

Implications for Urban Elementary School Teacher Leaders

It is imperative that teacher leaders who are interested in becoming school principals involve themselves in leadership opportunities at the school level when possible. By doing so, the teacher leaders can position themselves to be seen by their principals and to learn more about the important decision-making processes that school principals encounter daily. Teacher leaders who are tapped by their principals and those who are self-proclaimed leaders join the urban pedagogue to principal pipeline as soon as they transition themselves to consider becoming future school leaders. Although teacher leaders benefit from receiving mentorship support from their principals, they must also be willing to collaborate with and mentor other teachers. The opportunities for collegial collaboration are endless and include not only school-based collaboration but also district, state, national, and even global professional learning community opportunities.

Implications for Urban Elementary School Principals

As contributing members of the urban pedagogue to principal pipeline, urban elementary school principals should reflect on their own decisions and motives when

deciding which of their teachers to tap as teacher leaders. They must also determine why they choose to mentor certain teacher leaders rather than others. This process of reflection is important to principals as they endeavor not to exclude the teachers they lead and as they strive to advance the school's vision. Principals should challenge their teacher leaders to research and create their own mentorship plans. Such plans can include the following:

- the teacher leaders' definitions of a teacher leader
- whether the teacher leaders want to become school principals
- an explanation of the importance of principals
- how the teacher leaders desire to be mentored
- what the teacher leaders expect to learn from their mentorship process

For principals in smaller urban elementary schools with no assistant principal, less pressure is placed on a principal to model leadership abilities because of not having an assistant principal asking questions or interrogating the decision-making processes. Principals in these schools may depend heavily on their teachers to assist with leadership decisions and tasks, but the principals may not intentionally mentor classroom teachers because of their inability to leave the classroom.

Implications for Urban School Districts

One of the revelations resulting from this study was the fact that some principals are mentoring teacher leaders who do not explicitly have a desire to assume school leadership positions in the future. This could mean that the low principal retention rates experienced by urban schools such as in the TSD may prevent efficient principal

succession planning and subsequently affect teacher performance and student achievement in those schools. Some elementary school principals provide mentoring support to teacher leaders who have no interest in becoming principals. This implies that the decisions to mentor specific teachers in some schools are inconsistent with similar decisions of other elementary schools across the district. Acknowledging how teacher leaders were chosen by principals can inform the school district of gaps regarding who receives leadership mentoring and who does not. With this information, school districts can create and implement leadership mentoring protocols. By following these protocols, principals can become more effective at mentoring teacher leaders who are interested in assuming leadership roles that might include (or exclude) a principalship.

The school district must also consider possible discriminatory practices that may take place when principals select teachers to mentor. Although unknown by district level leadership, these practices may include:

- nepotistic-based decisions to mentor teachers who are related to the principal or to someone of prominence in the district;
- acceleration of the distribution of leadership opportunities to the principals' fellow fraternity or sorority members;
- preferential selection and tapping of males as teacher leaders over selecting female teachers to lead; or
- tacit selection criteria for mentoring based on teachers' gregarious personalities to the exclusion of those who are more mild-mannered.

To avoid possible discrimination, school districts should create teacher leadership

programs. Such programs should be focused not only on preparing teacher leaders to become principals but also on systematically training principals on how to identify teacher leaders in their schools and how to utilize the most effective mentoring strategies for teacher leaders at any competency level. Though for teacher leaders and principals, these programs can be similar to the five-standard model (Teemant, 2014). Based on how this five-standard model measured the level of efficacy in instruction coaching provided by an external consultant, school districts can create protocols that evaluate and measure the efficacy of their teacher leadership preparation programs. By creating rigorous standards and learning expectations for teacher leaders, urban school districts can prepare and develop the principals that their schools need and, as a result, build succession plans for their schools. Furthermore, as integral members of the urban pedagogue to principal pipeline, school districts should not work in isolation from their neighboring school districts.

Nearby school districts, especially in urban areas, can benefit greatly from a collective teacher leadership program of high efficacy where these districts can offer combined trainings and support for both teacher leader mentees and the principals mentoring these teacher leaders. Cross-district collaboration focused on school leadership preparation can benefit the urban districts involved because teacher leaders may seek school leadership positions in any of the surrounding school districts. This process should also encourage teacher leaders to visit and shadow principals outside of their schools and districts in order to give the teacher leaders access to and experience with the varying leadership styles and perspectives of urban elementary school principals.

Teacher leaders who are classroom teachers often have limited access to effective school leadership mentoring. Because of this, urban school districts should allocate funds for these teacher leaders to have substitute teachers on a periodic or consistent basis to free them for participating in shadowing opportunities with their principals. School districts should promote this opportunity by creating online substitute request forms and by assigning coordinators to oversee the frequency with which substitutes are utilized in each elementary school specifically for such opportunities. For continuity purposes and data collection, principals should encourage their teacher leaders to register for such opportunities. Afterwards, principals and their teacher leaders should submit written reflections to the school district denoting what activities occurred, what was discussed, and what knowledge was constructed.

Implications for Institutions of Higher Education and School Leadership Preparation

Because a need still exists in urban schools for the practical, comprehensive, and relevant learning experiences provided by quality leadership preparation programs, school leadership preparation programs should align their programs to meet the needs of urban school educators. This imperative should necessarily include colleges and universities. As direct contributors to the urban pedagogue to principal pipeline, these educator preparation institutions should provide multicultural education for leaders through a school leadership curriculum that includes culturally responsive andragogical practices.

Instructional leadership programs for advanced degrees should also include practicums in urban school settings that differ from the settings where these educators are

employed. For example, a fifth-grade teacher in a suburban school who has returned to college to attain a master's degree in school administration should be required to observe or shadow a principal in an urban school for an extended time period. By doing so, institutions of higher education may inadvertently encourage that fifth-grade teacher to seek teaching or school leadership positions in urban schools. Without the opportunity to experience urban schools in this way, this fifth-grade teacher may never really learn first-hand about urban school environments. Another positive outcome to this scenario may be that the fifth-grade teacher suggests effective strategies or programs for the urban school that the suburban school has already been using.

Recommendations to Improve Study

Based on the findings from this research, the following recommendations are made to improve this study. Such recommendations are focused on reaching a better understanding of elementary school teacher leaders' perceptions of the mentorship they receive and its impact on their school leadership preparation.

1. Increase the number of elementary school principals (and PK-8 principals) from 12 to 22 participants within a study similar to this one.
2. Administer a Likert scale to assess teacher leaders' views about their principals' effectiveness in providing mentorship.
3. Generate at least one interview question from each of the six skillsets outlined in the TLSF (CSTP, 2018) for both participant groups (principals and teacher leaders).

4. After the teacher leader interviews have been concluded, conduct follow-up interviews with the principals to capture their responses to what the teacher leaders had shared.
5. Conduct a longitudinal study to discover if teacher leaders, upon becoming principals, end up using the skills they learned from the mentoring strategies used by their mentors.

Recommendations for Future Research

Based on this study and its findings, the researcher recommends future research on teacher leadership mentoring and school leadership preparation to support effective leadership succession in urban elementary schools. The following recommendations are made to support this research.

1. Compare individual teacher leaders' interview responses with their principals' interview responses to identify possible correlations.
2. Observe teacher leader and principal interactions in school settings (e.g., one-on-one conversations, instructional leadership team meetings) to identify possible mentoring strategies.
3. Examine the decision-making processes used by principals to choose the teacher leaders they mentor.
4. Compare the mentoring strategies used by suburban and rural elementary school principals with the mentoring strategies used by urban elementary school principals.

Final Thoughts

The complexities existing in schools require innovation from school leaders and collaboration with teachers. By investing in their teacher leaders, urban elementary school principals can positively support student learning and achievement. The mentorship experiences provided to teacher leaders serve to expand their leadership capacity and strengthen their professional dispositions. As a result, teacher leaders will seek to become urban school principals and, by doing so, will be able to provide support to the next generation of teacher leaders.

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APPENDIX A

PRINCIPAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview Questions for Principals:
The Urban Pedagogue to Principal Pipeline: Elementary School Teacher Leaders' Perceptions of Mentorship and Its Impact on Their School Leadership Preparation.

Interviewer:
Thank you for taking the time to interview with me today. I greatly appreciate the responses that you have already provided for me through my initial questionnaire. Today, I am going to ask some additional questions to understand the strategies you use to mentor the teacher leaders in your school.

As I have noted earlier in the informed consent acknowledgment statement, participation in this research study is voluntary. At any point within the research process if you would like to discontinue participation, you are welcome to do so. There are no expected risks to this study.

In addition, I want to remind you that your participation in the research study will be confidential. In published reports, there will be no information included that will make it possible to identify you. Research records will be stored securely.

Do you have any questions, before we begin?

Research Question(s): What strategies do urban elementary school principals use to mentor their teacher leaders? How do teacher leaders describe the mentoring strategies used by their principals? What opportunities do teacher leaders desire for their principals to provide them in an effort to prepare the teacher leaders to become principals?

Interview Questions

1. What grades and subjects have you previously taught?
2. How long were you a classroom teacher?
3. How long have you been an urban elementary school principal? (Any other principalship experience outside of an elementary school setting?)
4. Are you a National Board Certified Teacher? If yes: In what certification area?
5. While a teacher, were you mentored to become a school leader? If so, what did your mentorship look like?
6. How would you describe your principal's leadership style? What attributes do school leaders have?
7. What qualities and characteristics does an effective teacher leader embody?
8. What are the names and roles of the teacher leaders you are currently mentoring?
9. What strategies do you use when mentoring teacher leaders to become future principals?

10. How do you determine the level of support given to teacher leaders in your school?
11. Can you share any additional information that may be pertinent to this study?

APPENDIX B

TEACHER LEADER INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview Questions for Teacher Leaders:
The Urban Pedagogue to Principal Pipeline: Elementary School Teacher Leaders' Perceptions of Mentorship and Its Impact on Their School Leadership Preparation.

Interviewer:
Thank you for taking the time to interview with me today. I greatly appreciate the responses that you have already provided for me through my initial questionnaire. Today, I am going to ask some additional questions to understand the strategies your principal uses to mentor the teacher leaders in your school.

As I have noted earlier in the informed consent acknowledgment statement, participation in this research study is voluntary. At any point within the research process if you would like to discontinue participation, you are welcome to do so. There are no expected risks to this study.

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Do you have any questions, before we begin?

Research Question(s): What strategies do urban elementary school principals use to mentor their teacher leaders? How do teacher leaders describe the mentoring strategies used by their principals? What opportunities do teacher leaders desire for their principals to provide them in an effort to prepare the teacher leaders to become principals?

Interview Questions

1. What grades and subjects have you previously taught?
2. How long have you been (or were you) a classroom teacher?
3. What is your highest degree?
4. What is your current role?
5. Are you a National Board Certified Teacher? If yes: In what certification area?
6. Do you have aspirations to become a school principal?
7. Why do (or why don't) you have aspirations to become a school principal?
8. If yes to Q5: Is your current principal aware of your desire to become a principal? Why or why not?
9. How would you describe your principal's leadership style?
10. What qualities and characteristics does an effective principal embody?
11. What strategies does your principal use to mentor?
12. How would you describe your leadership style?
13. If yes to Q5: What opportunities would you like for your principal to give you to prepare you to become a principal?

14. What qualities and characteristics does an effective teacher leader embody?
15. Based on the qualities and characteristics you shared, are there any other teacher leaders in your school? If so, what are their names and roles?
16. Can you share any additional information that may be pertinent to this study?

APPENDIX C

PRINCIPAL RECRUITMENT LETTER

Initial Email: Principal Participant Recruitment

To:

Subject Line: Seeking Participation for a Study – The Urban Pedagogue to Principal Pipeline: Elementary School Teacher Leaders' Perceptions of Mentorship and Its Impact on Their School Leadership Preparation

Content:

Hello _____,

I am conducting a research study to explore the perceptions of urban elementary school teacher leaders on the mentorship they receive from their principals.

Eligible participants must be:

- Urban elementary school principals
- Currently mentoring at least one teacher leader at their school
- Willing to share the strategies and resources that they use to mentor teacher leaders

The primary purpose of our study is to explore how teacher leaders perceive the mentorship and leadership support they receive from their principals. This study will also discover the strategies and goals that the teacher leaders' principals use when mentoring the teacher leaders.

Participants will be asked to:

1. Complete the initial questionnaire linked to this email communication in order for me to gain informed consent and to gather some general demographic and contact information. This initial questionnaire should take no more than 5 minutes to complete.
2. Complete a recorded Zoom interview. This may take 30-45 minutes to complete.

Those who elect to participate in the recorded Zoom interview will receive a $20.00 Walmart gift card following the interview session.

Participation in this research study is voluntary. Participants will be allowed to use a pseudonym on the audio-recordings. At any point within the research process if you would like to discontinue participation, you are welcome to do so. There are no expected risks to this study.

Your participation in the research study will be confidential. In published reports, there will be no information included that will make it possible to identify you. Research records will be stored securely, and only approved researchers will have access to the records.

If you have questions about the research study, the researcher conducting this study can be contacted by phone or at the following email address: Erica Jewel Littleton at (205) 643-8534 or ericaj14@uab.edu. Contact the researcher if you have questions.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please follow the link below to the informed consent page and a brief questionnaire. By completing the questionnaire, you are consenting to allow your responses to be used in this research.

https://uab.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_3Iqed4GxZDm6hfM

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, or concerns or complaints about the research, you may contact the UAB Office of the IRB (OIRB) at (205) 934-3789 or toll free at 1-855-860-3789. Regular hours for the OIRB are 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. CT, Monday through Friday.

Erica Jewel Littleton

APPENDIX D

PRINCIPAL PRE-SCREENER SURVEY

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA AT BIRMINGHAM

Have you been an urban elementary school principal for at least three years?

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

Are you currently mentoring at least one teacher leader in your school?

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

Are you willing to share the strategies and resources that you use to mentor teacher leaders in your school?

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

APPENDIX E

TEACHER LEADER RECRUITMENT LETTER

Initial Email: Teacher Leader Participant Recruitment

To:

Subject Line: Seeking Participation for a Study – The Urban Pedagogue to Principal Pipeline: Elementary School Teacher Leaders' Perceptions of Mentorship and Its Impact on Their School Leadership Preparation

Content:

Hello _____,

I am conducting a research study to explore the perceptions of urban elementary school teacher leaders on the mentorship they receive from their principals.

Eligible participants must:

- Be elementary school teachers
- Have at least 3 years of teaching experience
- Be currently receiving mentorship and support from their principals

The primary purpose of our study is to explore how teacher leaders perceive the mentorship and leadership support they receive from their principals. This study will also discover the strategies and goals that the teacher leaders' principals use when mentoring the teacher leaders.

Participants will be asked to:

1. Complete the initial questionnaire linked to this email communication in order for me to gain informed consent and to gather some general demographic and contact information. This initial questionnaire should take no more than 5 minutes to complete.
2. Complete a recorded Zoom interview. This may take 30 to 45 minutes to complete.

Those who elect to participate in the recorded Zoom interview will receive a $20.00 Walmart gift card following the interview session.

Participation in this research study is voluntary. Participants will be allowed to use a pseudonym on the audio-recordings. At any point within the research process if you would like to discontinue participation, you are welcome to do so. There are no expected risks to this study.

Your participation in the research study will be confidential. In published reports, there will be no information included that will make it possible to identify you. Research records will be stored securely, and only approved researchers will have access to the records.

If you have questions about the research study, the researcher conducting this study can be contacted by phone or at the following email address: Erica Jewel Littleton at (205) 643-8534 or ericaj14@uab.edu. Contact the researcher if you have questions.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please follow the link below to the informed consent page and a brief questionnaire. By completing the questionnaire, you are consenting to allow your responses to be used in this research.

https://uab.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_77Xwcx8XOZGwP5A

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, or concerns or complaints about the research, you may contact the UAB Office of the IRB (OIRB) at (205) 934-3789 or toll free at 1-855-860-3789. Regular hours for the OIRB are 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. CT, Monday through Friday.

Erica Jewel Littleton

APPENDIX F

TEACHER LEADER PRE-SCREENER SURVEY

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA AT BIRMINGHAM

Are you or have you ever been an elementary school teacher?

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

Have you been an urban elementary school teacher for at least three years?

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

Do you have aspirations to become a school principal?

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No
- ◯ Undecided

Are you currently being mentored and supported by your principal?

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

APPENDIX G

IRB APPROVAL FORM

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA AT BIRMINGHAM
Office of the Institutional Review Board for Human Use

470 Administration Building
701 20th Street South
Birmingham, AL 35294-0104
205.934.3789 | Fax 205.934.1301 |
irb@uab.edu

APPROVAL LETTER

TO: Williams, Erica J

FROM: University of Alabama at Birmingham Institutional Review Board
Federalwide Assurance # FWA00005960
IORG Registration # IRB00000196 (IRB 01)
IORG Registration # IRB00000726 (IRB 02)
IORG Registration # IRB00012550 (IRB 03)

DATE: 27-Oct-2022

RE: IRB-300008524
IRB-300008524-004
The Urban Pedagogue to Principal Pipeline: Elementary School Teacher Leaders' Perceptions of Mentorship and Its Impact on Their School Leadership Preparation

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The IRB reviewed and approved the Initial Application submitted on 24-Oct-2022 for the above referenced project. The review was conducted in accordance with UAB's Assurance of Compliance approved by the Department of Health and Human Services.

Type of Review:	Exempt
Exempt Categories:	1
Determination:	Exempt
Approval Date:	27-Oct-2022
Approval Period:	No Continuing Review

Please note:

- The information sheet for principals was updated to include all previously requested revisions. Please use the most recently updated copy of the information sheet stored in the ePortfolio when consenting participants.

Documents Included in Review:

- IRB EPORTFOLIO
- IRB PERSONNEL EFORM

To access stamped consent/assent forms (full and expedited protocols only) and/or other approved documents:
1. Open your protocol in IRAP.
2. On the Submissions page, open the submission corresponding to this approval letter. NOTE: The Determination for the submission will be "Approved."
3. In the list of documents, select and download the desired approved documents. The stamped consent/assent form(s) will be listed with a category of Consent/Assent Document (CF, AF, Info Sheet, Phone Script, etc.)

APPENDIX H

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Erica Jewel Littleton earned her bachelor’s degree in Early Childhood, Elementary, and Special Education from Samford University. In 2009, she became a National Board Certified Teacher as an Exceptional Needs Specialist and renewed her certification in 2019. In 2010, Erica Jewel returned to Samford and earned a master's degree in Educational Leadership.

Erica Jewel has served as a general education and special education teacher as well as an assistant principal and principal. In 2017, Erica became the Turnaround Specialist where she oversaw their $1.5 million school improvement grant.

Erica Jewel founded her company, Learning Little People, in April 2013. There she uses her expertise in professional learning to help Alabama's educators continue their learning in more meaningful and interesting ways. In addition to training educators and school leaders, Learning Little People provides trainings for parents and caregivers.

From 2019 to 2021, Erica Jewel served as the Director of Educational Advancement for the City of Birmingham in Mayor Randall Woodfin’s office.

Erica Jewel, a member of Faith Apostolic Church in Birmingham, AL, accepted the call into ministry in 2020 after serving as a Sunday School teacher and superintendent for years. She enjoys singing and teaching as she has a true passion for the Word of God.