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Transformational Leadership In The Special Education Classroom And Its Impact On Student Connectedness

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Transformational Leadership in the Special Education Classroom

and its Impact on Student Connectedness

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Educational Leadership

TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP IN THE SPECIAL EDUCATION CLASSROOM

AND ITS IMPACT ON STUDENT CONNECTEDNESS

ABSTRACT

The study of leadership is often relegated to the political or business world. As it pertains to the field of education, often it is thought of as something that happens outside the classroom walls. This study has broken that barrier by focusing on the classroom and the ways leadership skills manifest themselves in that environment. Transformational leadership as defined by Burns (1978) and Bass (1999) was chosen as the leadership style for this study because it is widely accepted in the literature as a leadership style which is adept at increasing connections between leaders and followers. Increasing levels of school connectedness for adolescents is critical because research included in the study strongly suggests that school connectedness is one of the strongest predictors of school violence, substance abuse, and adolescent depression rates. In an age where the nation is beset by unprecedented levels of school violence, an opioid crisis, and increased levels of adolescent mental health problems, school connectedness becomes immensely important for researchers to investigate.

This qualitative phenomenological study investigates the classroom leadership behaviors of three special education teachers at a special education collaborative in the state of Massachusetts. The purpose of this study was to identify leadership skills used by these teachers in the classroom and unveil their beliefs about those skills. The data for this study was obtained through classroom observations, 1:1 interviews, and a journal kept by the researcher. Through the process of coding the data themes emerged which were consistent with transformational

leadership theory. Importantly, it should be noted that the participants in the study did not identify themselves as leaders and often did not define their behaviors as leadership skills. They attributed the acquisition of these skills to three main sources: 1) trial and error, 2) informal mentors, and 3) innate ability. This study identifies the skills exhibited by these teachers, and explains how they relate to teaching and learning at the classroom level. These findings inform a classroom leadership model that can be adopted by formal teacher preparatory and professional development programs in order to increase the overall skill level of teachers.

University of New England

Doctor of Education
Educational Leadership

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

A great deal of research suggests that students perform better in the classroom when they feel connected to their school and teachers, and yet by high school as many as 40-60% of students report feeling detached from school (Klem & Connell, 2004, p. 262). The most effective teachers are somehow able to reach students that are at risk of becoming disengaged and make strong connections, inspiring them to remain connected to the learning process. These teachers demonstrate something more than traditional classroom management and curriculum skills; they demonstrate leadership skills.

High levels of school connectedness have been linked to a wide array of positive outcomes for students of all ages (King, Vidourek, Davis, & McClellan, 2002). These outcomes include increased academic achievement (Bond et al. 2007), decreased risk-taking behavior (Blum, 2005), and increased levels of self-esteem (Maddox & Prinz, 2003). While these benefits make school connectedness important at any age, the high risk-taking behaviors associated with the onset of adolescence make school connectedness especially important to prioritize at the secondary level. Adolescents take more risks than children and adults do, as evidenced by data on automobile crashes, binge drinking, contraceptive rates, and crime (Steinberg, 2007). Adolescents with high levels of school connectedness, however, demonstrate decreased risk-taking behaviors when compared to peers with low levels of school connectedness (Buckley, Sheehan, Shochet, & Romaniuk, 2011). Additionally, particularly vulnerable student populations, such as those diagnosed with social-emotional disabilities, also demonstrate decreased risk-taking behavior when they have high levels of school connectedness (Eisenberg, Neumark-Sztainer, & Perry, 2003).

This dynamic can be seen playing out in special education collaboratives across the state of Massachusetts. Take, for example, the case of one Massachusetts special education collaborative. This collaborative consists of 16 urban and suburban school districts serving the Greater Boston area and beyond. It is governed by a board of directors made up of superintendents and school committee members representative of each member district. The collaborative has a lengthy history, beginning in 1960s as a private consortium of public schools. Currently, the collaborative operates as a publicly funded entity which focuses on harnessing inter-district and inter-agency collaboration to meet the needs of underserved and at-risk students (Collaborative Handbook, 2017).

The collaborative has multiple schools which service a wide range of students. School A specializes in educating adolescents whose social-emotional needs have saddled their educational experiences with a long list of traumatic failures at school (School A Handbook, 2017). School B delivers a full academic program, along with counseling and associated support services, for students who have dropped out, are significantly at risk of dropping out, or are several years behind in earning a high school diploma in the Greater Boston area (School B Handbook, 2017). The Collaborative also operates a third site, School C, which provides rigorous academic instruction and social and life skills instruction to academically capable adolescents diagnosed with Autism (formerly considered Asperger's Syndrome or High Functioning Autism), Non-verbal Learning Disabilities, and/or similar challenges (School C Handbook, 2017).

One commonality between the student populations serviced by each school in the collaborative is that they report a high level of disconnection from school prior to their placement in one of the three schools described above (Collaborative Student Survey, 2017). This is important to note, as research suggests that high levels of school connectedness result in

positive, healthy behaviors. On the other hand, low levels of school connectedness result in negative, unhealthy behaviors. A diminished level of connectedness can place adolescents in danger of displaying risky behaviors at a time when developmentally they require the maximum amount of support (Chapman, Buckley, Sheehan, Schochet, & Romaniuk, 2011). Given that the fragile student population at the collaborative is prone to unhealthy choices and behaviors, the potential impact of cultivating high levels of student connectedness to school becomes readily apparent.

After arriving at the collaborative, students report feeling increased connections to their individual teachers and programs. Student feedback suggests that the faculty at the collaborative does an excellent job of forming relationships with the student body. A recent survey given to all students at the collaborative revealed that the majority of them feel as if there is at least one adult in their building that they can go to if they are experiencing a significant problem, and this is credited to the hard work of the faculty (Collaborative Student Survey, 2017).

Problem Statement

Current research shows that a teacher equipped with strong leadership skills can make a positive impact on student levels of connectedness and student learning outcomes. A study conducted by Pounder (2009), for example, concluded that a teacher with transformational leadership skills could "generate the extra study effort on the part of students that should be of direct educational value in terms of student achievement" (p. 322). Noland and Richards (2015) suggested that teachers who demonstrate skill in service leadership have a positive influence on levels of student engagement, school connectedness, and learning behaviors. Similarly, Cheng (1994) found that teacher leadership style was significantly linked with student outcomes and levels of student connectedness.

Despite the fact that teacher leadership would appear to be important for a school system to develop, teachers are rarely given formal opportunities to study leadership or practice leadership skills. As Treslan (2006) pointed out, "minimal attention is given to the significant leadership contribution of teachers fulfilling their professional responsibilities as administrators of the learning process, perhaps due in part to a lingering bureaucratic expectation or traditional belief that teacher leadership is at best peripheral to teaching effectiveness" (p. 58). A review of the program of studies for five major colleges in the state of Massachusetts that offer teacher preparation courses revealed that not one of them offered a course in leadership (Lesley University Program of Studies, 2015, UMASS Amherst Program of Studies, 2015, Boston College Program of Studies, 2015, Bridgewater State University Program of Studies, 2015, and Westfield State University Program of Studies, 2015). Each of these programs had courses in sheltered English immersion, curriculum design and assessment, adolescent development, multicultural studies, and content specific methods. Not a single one, however, offered prospective teachers a course designed to develop leadership skills.

While the research cited here indicates that teacher leadership in the classroom has a positive impact on levels of student connectedness, there is a lack of research on the identification what such leadership might look like in a secondary level special education classroom. There does exist a large amount of research, however, on leadership as it pertains to business manager efficacy. Therefore, to understand the relationship between teacher and student from a leadership perspective, it is helpful to envision the classroom through an organizational lens. A classroom, complete with students and teacher, does in fact run very much like a small organization with the teacher in the role of leader and students in the role of followers (Cheng, 1994; Harrison, 2011; Pounder, 2009; McGoran, 2005). In fact, Niculescu

(2015) described the "classroom as a micro-community which can provide an ideal context for leadership" (p. 887). It is essential for teaches to possess some leadership skills so they are able to inspire students to fully engage in the educational experience (Stein, 2010). Teachers must have vision, be capable of adapting to unforeseen intrusions, project honesty and trust, and create an environment where it is safe to take risks (Can, 2009). Stein (2010) pointed out that the majority of teachers receive training in classroom management, but not in classroom leadership. The effective teacher leader is able to positively impact a wide range of student outcomes (Bull, 2010; Can, 2009). There are few studies addressing this connection, and still fewer attempting to identify leadership skills that can be used by teachers in the classroom (Bolger, Caspi, & Roccas, 2013). This study seeks to document what leadership skills traditionally associated with business leaders are successfully employed by teachers to increase levels of adolescent connectedness to school.

Student connectedness to school is a key predictor of student achievement. Leadership theorists such as Burns (1978) and Fullan (2001) proposed that leaders play a key role in establishing strong connections between group members and their organizations. If the teacher is viewed as the leader and the classroom as the organization, then the teacher plays a pivotal role in whether or not students will be connected to the classroom and the school. Understanding what leadership techniques teachers can use to help foster a sense of student connectedness has serious implications for practice, as current research suggests that leadership skills can indeed be taught and once identified these skills can be included in teacher preparatory programs.

Purpose of the Study

This study aims to:

1. Identify what transformational leadership techniques traditionally associated with business leaders are used by classroom teachers at the collaborative to support high levels of student connectedness with vulnerable at-risk adolescent populations.

2. Understand what experiences and attitudes teachers at the collaborative have regarding leadership in the classroom and to learn what the source of these experiences and attitudes are.

This researcher documents what leadership skills customarily linked with business leaders are successfully used by teachers. Much of the existing research on leadership concerns the organizational and political realm, and not individual classrooms (Niculescu, 2015). The research conducted on classroom leadership mostly focuses on the university level or on how taking on leadership roles impact faculty members. There has not been much research focused on the secondary level, nor specifically on how teacher leadership in the classroom impacts the secondary level special education classroom. With a heavy focus on individual secondary level special education classrooms and teachers it is this research makes a significant contribution by addressing a glaring hole in the existing literature.

As discussed earlier, teacher leadership development is an overlooked part of teacher preparatory programs (Treslan, 2006; Stein, 2010; Burkett, 2011). It is hoped that by identifying specific leadership skills that are beneficial for teachers to use in the classroom that they can then be incorporated into teacher preparatory programs or professional development opportunities and taught to other teachers, thereby increasing the overall skill level of teachers.

Research Questions

The problem of practice suggests that despite the evidence indicating the importance of teacher leadership in the classroom and its apparent link to student behaviors and outcomes, it is an under researched aspect of teaching and learning, especially as related to at-risk student populations at the secondary level. This research answers the following questions:

1. What leadership techniques traditionally associated with business leaders are being used by classroom teachers at the collaborative to support high levels of student connectedness with vulnerable at-risk adolescent populations?

2. What experiences and attitudes do classroom teachers at the collaborative have regarding their own leadership and what is the source of those experiences and attitudes?

Conceptual Framework

The relevant literature suggests school connectedness is a reliable predictor of student achievement and behavior, and yet there exists little research which concretely investigates how teachers can increase student connectedness within the classroom itself. There is a large amount of research investigating employee connectedness to organizations which can be applied to classrooms if we view them through an organizational framework. This research often indicates that leadership is essential to employee connectedness within an organization. However, there is little research investigating the role of the classroom teacher as a leader. Most of the research about teacher leaders examines leadership outside of the classroom.

The first theory used in this research has to do with student connectedness to school and how it impacts achievement and behavior. According to Blum (2005), school connectedness is defined as, "an academic environment in which students believe that adults in the school care

about their learning and about them as individuals" (p. 16). McNeely and Falci (2004) identified three distinct components of school connectedness: Social support, belonging, and engagement. "The experience of social support generates a sense of belonging which, in turn, leads to increased engagement and academic motivation" (McNeely & Falci, 2004, p. 284).

The second theory used is organizational theory. While the implication for student connectedness is compelling, the literature about how student-teacher connections are forged is sparse. However, employers and business organizations have been studying how to increase employee connectedness for many years. It is a well-established fact that employers who want to get the most out of their employees should focus on increasing levels of employee connectedness and happiness with the organization (Williams, Kern, & Waters, 2016). Therefore, by viewing students as members of an organization, educators can better see and understand how the idea of student connectedness works.

One of the most highly studied influences on organizational connectedness is leadership. Therefore, if researchers look at the teacher as the organizational leader, they can identify what leadership skills successful teachers use in the classroom. While there are many leadership theories available, transformational leadership theory was chosen for this research because it has been so widely accepted and embraced within the education field. Through this lens, the framework of the study comes together, as the successful teacher is viewed as the transformational leader of an organization.

Limitations

Although the case for examining the impact of teacher levels of classroom leadership on student levels of school connectedness is strong, there are limitations and shortcomings to conducting the research at a special education collaborative. First, although the research was

conducted at multiple school sites, all students at those sites were receiving special education services. Future research at regular education sites is needed to confirm any findings and determine whether or not the results are skewed by the unique circumstances of the students in the study. Secondly, the population used in the study is small, only one teacher from each site, and might not be representative of the majority of the teachers at the state level. Finally, the relevant literature reveals that student connectedness to school if associated with many factors. It will be difficult to say with certainty that levels of teacher leadership are the sole factor.

Significance

There are a variety of ways in which studying classroom leadership is beneficial to understanding student connectedness. There is little doubt that the classroom acts as its own small social organization (Cheng, 1994). There is an abundance of research which outlines the ways leadership impacts an organization, but precious little of that research has been tied to classroom dynamics or student outcomes (Bolger, Caspi, & Roccas, 2013). While teacher leadership itself is widely studied, the concept is usually seen as an "outside the classroom" phenomena with teachers serving in administrative roles (Koh, 2008). This may stem from the fact that people who enter the education field do not typically perceive themselves as leaders (Bowman, 2004; Koh, 2008; Stein, 2010). This research addresses those misunderstandings in the current literature by broadening the traditional perspective of teacher leadership. While this research focuses on one special education collaborative, the implications reach far beyond that. The findings in this paper have the potential to impact the field of education on three broad fronts: Student behavior and outcomes, teacher morale and retention, and school leadership structures.

A considerable amount of research suggests that when adolescents feel connected to school they are far less likely to exhibit unhealthy behavior (Blum, 2005; Capern & Hammond, 2014; Monahan, Oesterle & Hawkins, 2010; Pounder, 2009; Roffey, 2012; Treslan, 2006). That fact alone should prompt educational researchers to explore every possible link to student connectedness. However, the benefits of student connectedness reach beyond students. With the demands placed on educators at an all-time high, there is a global shortage of qualified teachers (Siniscalco, 2002). Somewhat low salaries and a humble earning potential are believed to discourage many people from pursuing the profession (Frijters, Shields, & Price, 2004). Furthermore, a perceived decay in the prestige of the profession combined with increased government oversight appears to be prompting experienced teachers to pursue private sector jobs (Smithers and Robinson, 2003). Current research seems to indicate that having strong connections with students helps teachers maneuver beyond these pitfalls and increases the likelihood that they remain in the profession (Roffey, 2012).

As mentioned previously, there is a lack of focus on leadership development in teacher preparatory programs in the state of Massachusetts. At the same time, the need for teacher leadership is increasing. The demands of the educational field are extraordinarily high, and the pool of qualified candidates willing to step into educational leadership roles appears to be dwindling. As Malone and Caddell (2000) point out, "The demand for effective school principals is at an all-time high, the result of reform efforts, constant pubic criticism, and demographic realities. Half of America's public school teachers will leave the profession over the next decade, and the same pattern is likely to hold true for principals" (p. 162). With an apparent lack of qualified leaders in administrative positions, who is going to take the task of leading public schools? Identifying leadership skills that can be employed effectively by

teachers at the classroom level offers some hope for restructuring the traditional model of leadership at schools.

Definitions

Classroom leadership – Leadership skills demonstrated by a teacher without the formal title or role of leader, but instead through behaviors demonstrated with students in the classroom (Pounder, 2009, p. 537).

Organizations – A collection of individuals which interact as a workgroup, share and accept norms and beliefs, and reinforce these beliefs so that they become an institutionalized mind-set (Marion & Gonzales, 2014, p.2).

Transformational leadership – A leadership style in which the leader can inspire a group of people and can actually change people from the inside out – make them want to be better, more moral, and more committed human beings (Marion & Gonzales, 2014, p. 178).

Student connectedness – The degree of which students feel a sense of belonging to a school community, teacher, or classroom (Jimerson, Campos, & Greif, 2003).

Conclusion

Classroom leadership is an essential area of study. While leadership theory is well-researched, few studies apply organizational leadership skills to the context of the classroom. Classroom leadership should be as emphasized as organizational leadership, as research demonstrates that teachers with strong leadership skills have a positive impact on student achievement and outcomes, and levels of perceived connectedness. This study will identify classroom leadership techniques that should be incorporated into teacher training programs in order to positively impact student outcomes.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The research concerning teacher leadership is rich. However, much of it deals with teacher leadership at the building or district level, and very little of the research is focused on how teacher leadership is enacted within the actual classroom (Bolger, Caspi, & Roccas, 2013). Nevertheless, it is possible to investigate the potential impact of leadership at the classroom level by using organizational leadership theory as a framework. In many respects the classroom operates as its own small social organization (Cheng, 1994), and there is an abundance of research which outlines the ways leaders influence followers. By viewing students as "followers" and teachers as "leaders" we can better identify the leadership skills used by classroom teachers that have an impact on student levels of connectedness to school (Stein, 2010). Employers and business organizations have a long history of studying how to increase employee connectedness. Organizational leaders routinely strive to increase employee connectedness in an attempt to improve productivity (Williams, Kern, & Waters, 2016). In order to identify how student connectedness works at the classroom level, therefore, it is helpful to envision the classroom as a small business organization.

Leadership is one of the most highly studied means of increasing levels of employee connectedness. By viewing the teacher as the leader of a small organization, researchers are able to identify leadership skills that can be used in a classroom setting. Transformational leadership is one of the most widely accepted forms of leadership found in the literature, and as such will serve as the leadership model for this study. Following this model, the teacher is the transformational leader of a small organization, supporting high levels of student connectedness

with skills that have previously taken a backseat to classroom management and pedagogy in traditional teacher preparation programs.

Student Connectedness and Schooling

Students are more likely to demonstrate high levels of academic achievement when they feel highly connected to their school or teacher (Blum, 2005). By high school, however, as many as 40-60% of students report feeling detached from school (Klem & Connell, 2004, p. 262). Leadership theorists such as Burns (1978) and Fullan (2007) have suggested leadership is an important indicator of strong connections between group members and organizations. Therefore, as the leader of the classroom, the teacher is a critical factor in whether or not students will have strong connections to the classroom and the school.

Despite this, studies of teacher leadership behaviors in the classroom are scant in the literature (Crowther et al., 2002; Katyal & Evers, 2004; Strong-Rhoads, 2011; Treslan, 2006). As Treslan (2006) pointed out, "minimal attention is given to the significant leadership contribution of teachers fulfilling their professional responsibilities as administrators of the learning process, perhaps due in part to a lingering bureaucratic expectation or traditional belief that teacher leadership is at best peripheral to teaching effectiveness" (p. 58). Studies previously conducted on teacher leadership in the classroom, such as by Pounder (2009), suggested that teacher leadership skills do have a positive impact on student achievement. However, many of these studies focus on the university level. There is a glaring lack of literature which pertains to teacher leadership behaviors and its impact on levels of school connectedness for high school age adolescents, and especially adolescents that are diagnosed with learning or social-emotional disabilities. An in-depth study of how teacher leadership skills impact secondary level special education students in the classroom is needed to fill in these missing piece from the literature.

Understanding what leadership techniques teachers in secondary level classrooms can use to help foster a sense of adolescent connectedness has serious implications for practice, as if the techniques prove teachable then they can be incorporated into teacher preparatory programs and professional development classes.

Defining School Connectedness

School connectedness is a concept which goes by many different names in the literature. School attachment, school bonding, school commitment, school motivation, and school engagement are all phrases which are used to describe the idea of school connectedness (Jimerson, Campos, & Greif, 2003). Central to school connectedness is the perception by students that they are cared for by the adults in the building (Blum, 2005). McNeely and Falci (2004) emphasized that school connectedness is related to a strong feeling of belonging. Jimerson, Campos, and Greif (2003) noted that student connectedness is most often measured in the literature by studying rates of student academic achievement and participation in school related activities (p. 8). Some researchers have also used low rates of student disciplinary infractions as an indicator of student connectedness (Bullis & Yovanoff, 2002).

Several patterns emerge from the literature which help to frame a definition of school connectedness. The most prevalent theme in the literature regarding student connectedness is how strongly a student feels attached to a school. There are many studies which measure level of student attachment by assessing the student's feelings about their school, teachers, or classroom. These studies often survey students to determine how much they like or trust their teachers, or how much they look forward to going to school (Battin-Pearson et al., 2000; Chung et al., 2002; Jimerson, Campos, & Greif, 2003; Murray & Greenberg, 2001). The fact that student feelings

are so often an element of studies related to school connectedness indicates that emotions play a pivotal role in identifying it (Jimerson, Campos, & Greif, 2003).

Much like the variety of definitions found for school connectedness, the literature also provides a multitude of different ways to measure it. Jimerson, Campos, and Greif (2003) identified five commonly used traits used to measure high levels of student connectedness:

1. High academic achievement

2. Classroom behaviors that meet teacher/school expectations

3. Extracurricular involvement

4. Positive interpersonal relationships

5. Feeling a part of the school community

Jimerson, Campos, and Greif (2003) further noted that some of these indicators can be measured through direct observation, such as classroom behaviors, while others, such as feeling a part of the school community, must be measured by survey.

Student connectedness is a multidimensional concept which is highly related to emotions. Several traits of the strongly connected student, such as high levels of academic achievement or low levels of disciplinary infractions, are identifiable through observation. However, equally important are feelings and emotions which cannot be observed, as for some student populations indicators such as academic achievement or positive behavior may not be fully in their control. It is conceivable that students demonstrating low levels of academic achievement or high levels of disciplinary infractions could still be highly connected to their school because these behaviors are outside of their control due to disabilities or gaps in skill development.

The Benefits of Connectedness for Adolescent Students

Adolescents spend more hours at school than in any other place (Monahan, Oesterle, & Hawkins, 2010, p. 3). A substantial amount of research suggests that when adolescents feel connected to school they are far less likely to engage in risky and unhealthy behavior (Blum, 2005; Capern & Hammond, 2014; Oesterle & Hawkins, 2010; Pounder, 2009; Roffey, 2012; Treslan, 2006). However, by the time they reach high school, a large number of adolescents report being disconnected from school (Blum, 2005; Klem & Connell, 2004). This decreased level of connectedness can place adolescents in jeopardy of succumbing to maladaptive behaviors at a time when developmentally they need the most support (Chapman, Buckley, Sheehan, Schochet, & Romaniuk, 2011).

It is well documented that risk-taking behavior increases during adolescence. "The temporal gap between puberty, which impels adolescents toward thrill seeking, and the slow maturation of the cognitive-control system, which regulates these impulses, makes adolescence a time of heightened vulnerability for risky behavior" (Steinberg, 2007, p. 55). Because adolescent risk-taking behavior is strongly linked to brain development, traditional methods of addressing it, such as increasing knowledge levels, have largely been unsuccessful (Steinberg, 2004). "Efforts to provide adolescents with information about the risks of substance use, reckless driving, and unprotected sex typically result in improvements in young people's thinking about these phenomena but seldom change their actual behavior" (Steinberg, 2007, p. 55). Risk-taking behavior appears to be even more pronounced amongst adolescents diagnosed with learning or social-emotional disabilities. Research conducted by McNamara and Willoughby (2010), for example, indicated that adolescents with learning disabilities engaged

more often in risk-taking behaviors such as tobacco use, marijuana use, acts of delinquency, acts of violence, and gambling.

Research suggests that high levels of school connectedness are aligned with an array of adolescent behavior. Osterman's (2000) study of connectedness in schools discovered links between student levels of connectedness to school and self-esteem, self-regulation, attitudes toward education, levels of motivation, and rates of achievement. Furlong et al. (2003) and Maddox and Prinz (2003) also linked school connectedness with self-esteem and self-efficacy, as well as with academic outcomes achievement. Data collected by Bond et al. (2007) indicated that there is a direct relationship between levels of school connectedness and academic success. School connectedness has also been found to be linked to variables that are related with adolescent emotional well-being (Eisenberg, Neumark-Sztainer, & Perry, 2003).   Furlong et al. (2003) and Maddox and Prinz (2003) also connected school bonding with self-esteem and self-efficacy, as well as with academic outcomes.

The link to school connectedness reaches far beyond academic outcomes. Research conducted by Chapman, Buckley, Sheehan, Shochet, and Romaniuk (2011), for example, revealed that adolescents with a high level of school connectedness demonstrate substantially safer behaviors than their less connected peers, and are less likely to suffer injuries from risk-taking behaviors. In one study (Catalano, Haggerty, Oesterle, Fleming, & Hawkins, 2004), school connectedness was found to be related to delayed experimentation with drugs and alcohol. In fact, Eisenberg, Neumark-Sztainer, and Perry (2003) reported that school connectedness during adolescence is related to lower levels of criminal behavior, a lower chance of gang affiliation, and reduced rates of promiscuity. Reinke and Herman (2002) asserted that a lack of school connectedness was one of most accurate predictors of school violence. In addition,

Wilson (2004) found that a lack of school connectedness was a more accurate predictor of

violent behavior than other variables such as school size, ethnic makeup, and academic

performance. Blum (2005) noted that it appears the relationship between school connectedness

and adolescent risk-taking behavior remains constant across gender, ethnicity, cultural and

socioeconomic differences. This fact makes school connectedness one of the single most reliable

predictors of adolescent behavior found in the literature today, and fostering high levels of

connectedness between adolescent and their school communities needs to be an explicit goal for

the educators who work with them. Importantly, the positive influence a high level of school

connectedness has on adolescent behavior seems to last far beyond the teenage years, cementing

healthier behaviors throughout young adulthood (Monahan, Oesterle, & Hawkins, 2010).

It can be difficult to discern which comes first regarding school connectedness and

academic success. It is reasonable to assume that perhaps successful students naturally feel more

connected to school, and therefore data connecting the two is flawed. There is a growing amount

of evidence, however, that suggests the assumption that they are correlated is not accurate.

Capern and Hammond (2014) identified teacher behaviors which created high levels of student

connectedness for both successful and unsuccessful students, illustrating that students at all

levels of academic success benefit from increased levels of connectedness with their schools.

"Gifted students put a greater emphasis on behaviors that would help them achieve academically,

whereas students with emotional based difficulty emphasized the importance of teacher

behaviors that showed caring and understanding, and demonstrated patience and support for their

learning" (Capern & Hammond, 2014, p. 59). Additionally, research conducted by Prince and

Hadwin (2013) suggested that school connectedness is equally important to students with

learning disabilities, and Eisenberg, Neumark-Sztainer, and Perry (2003) reported that school

connectedness has a major impact on students suffering from mental health issues. Therefore, while academic achievement is tied to high levels of school connectedness, it is important to note that students who are incapable of fully accessing traditional forms of interventions and education due to learning or social-emotional disabilities may be even more in need of efforts to connect them with school to help mitigate potentially risky behavior.

The Benefits of Connectedness for Teachers

As strong as the case is for increasing levels of school connectedness amongst students, high levels of connectedness also have a positive impact on educators, and therefore connectedness has the potential impact of increasing their effectiveness. Educators must recognize and respond to a continuing pattern where the high rate of teacher demand is matched by a high rate of teacher attrition. The demand for teachers increased dramatically at the end of the Great Recession, reaching 260,000 teacher hires annually by the year 2014. By the year 2018, it is estimated that the number will reach 300,000 teacher hires per year. Factor in a roughly 8% rate of attrition to the total teacher workforce per year, and the reality of a teacher shortage becomes increasingly clear (Sutcher, Darling-Hammond, & Carver-Thomas, 2016). "The teaching workforce continues to be a leaky bucket, losing hundreds of thousands of teachers each year—the majority of them before retirement age" (Sutcher, Darling-Hammond, & Carver-Thomas, p. 2, 2016).

There have been many studies on why teachers leave the profession. The most often cited reasons are low pay, lack of administrative support, and overall burnout (Riggs, 2013). Struyven and Vanthournout (2014), in their study of teachers who rapidly quit the field, identified five reasons for teacher attrition:

1. Low job satisfaction

2. Disagreement with school policies

3. Heavy workloads

4. Unhappiness with future prospects for career growth

5. Poor relationships with parents

Another reason many teachers leave the profession is a lack of autonomy. Gone are the days when a teacher had the freedom to independently experiment with curriculum. In fact, Palmer (2007) reported that 64% of teachers who left the field to pursue other careers claim to have greater amounts of autonomy in their new careers. Bhattacharyya, Junot, and Clark (2013) noted that many teachers leave the profession because they feel it has shifted to rely too heavily on high stakes tests to measure teacher performance and forces them prepare students for standardized assessments at the cost of more meaningful lessons.

Of course, teacher attrition is a double edged sword, for despite a high number of teachers choosing to leave the field, there are also those who choose to stay despite the adversity. One might draw the conclusion that teachers who choose to stay in the profession do so because they don't have similar experiences in their schools as faced by their peers who choose to leave. This, however, does not seem to be the case. Mertler (2016), for example, found that rates of teacher compensation in Arizona was not a reason why teachers made the decision to stay. Teachers who stayed in the profession did so despite agreeing with their peers who chose to leave that their pay rates were too low.

One reason why certain teachers remain in the field is that they have successfully developed high levels of connectedness with their students. Teachers experience approximately 1000 interpersonal exchanges per day (Holmes, 2005). Considering the sheer volume of exchanges this adds up to over the course of a school year, the quality of these exchanges is

important. Roffey (2012) found that teachers with strong connections to their students were better able to deal with stressful situations and reported a higher level of job satisfaction. In a separate study, Cranton (2006) noted that the most talked about subject by the college professors he surveyed was the quality of relationships they had with their students. Marzano (2003) reported that teachers who fostered strong connections with students had significantly fewer classroom discipline issues than their peers. Student connectedness does more than make a difference on the lives of students, it makes a huge difference on the lives of those who work with them as well.

Using an Organizational Lens to Examine Student Connectedness

While the implications for student connectedness is compelling for both teacher retention and student behavior, the literature about how student-teacher connections are forged is sparse. However, the research on how to increase employee connectedness to an organization is deep indeed (Williams, Kern, & Waters, 2016). Unlike students, who often have very little choice of what teacher they have or school they attend, talented employees living in today's ultra-competitive global economy have many job opportunities to choose from. Successful business organizations, therefore, spend substantial amounts of energy and resources on keeping employees connected. The loss of talented employees brings with it a loss of knowledge and production, as well as the cost of training and recruiting a replacement (Suganya & Kanchana, 2016).

Organizations obtain several advantages when they effectively promote employee connectedness. According to Alshammari (2015), a highly connected employee will "consistently contribute beyond expectations to the respective organization" (p. 157). Specifically, Alshammari (2015) found that high levels of employee connectedness resulted in:

- Lower turnover

- High levels of employee buy-in to organizational goals

- Increased levels of job performance

- A linkage between employee actions and organizational needs

- Increased levels of motivation

What's more, research on employee connectedness suggests that it may very well be more important than pay or traditional forms of motivation. Research conducted by Lewig, Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Dollard, and Metzer (2007) on Australian volunteers, for example, revealed that even when employees receive no monetary compensation whatsoever, they can remain motivated when they are highly connected to their organization.

While there are many factors which impact levels of employee connectedness, one of the most widely researched variables is leadership. A vast amount of literature exists on the impact of leadership on organizational performance and employee levels of motivation and loyalty. The current research indicates that leadership has a direct impact on levels of employee motivation and organizational connectedness, and that this relationship exists across a large array of organizational types. Research conducted by Trihastuti, Nursalam, and Qur'aniati (2016) revealed that leadership has a greater impact on the motivation level of nurses than monetary compensation, while research conducted by Blase and Blase (2000) found similar results with teachers and principals. Ellemers, Gilder, and Haslam (2004) noted:

An important defining characteristic of contemporary work situations is that they often require individuals to align—at least to some extent—with a collective, such as their work team or the organization as a whole. As a result, workers are expected to adopt converging goals and to sacrifice (short-term) individual interests (e.g., by working

overtime) in order to achieve (more long-term) collective outcomes (e.g., attracting new business) (p. 460).

While the literature discussed here is decidedly focused on the employee and organization connectedness, many of the concepts are easily transferable to students and school connectedness. Looking at the words of Ellemers, Gilder, and Haslam (2004) above, one can quite readily see how schools ask students to embrace values and goals in a similar manner to the way organizations ask this of workers. The success of business organizations and schools ultimately rests on their ability to do this effectively.

An organization is comprised by a series of social structures in which individuals construct common goals and work together to achieve them (Scott, 2003). Each individual in the organization has a role and set of responsibilities. There are behavioral norms that influence individual actions and expectations. The individuals work together within the confines of these norms toward the agreed upon common goals (Scott, 2003). A classroom has similarities to an organization as described by Scott (2003). Most classrooms have a social structure and students are asked by the teacher to work toward common goals. While the students may not share the goals of the teacher, the teacher must play the role of the organizational leader and attempt to increase the level of connection between students and the classroom, thus increasing their level of motivation to work toward established classroom goals. The teacher, as the leader, helps establish classroom norms and is responsible for motivating students to abide by them. With these similarities so apparent, and the case for student connectedness so clear, it is important to look toward the literature on effective forms of leadership to see what theories can apply to the classroom.

Transformational Leadership Theory

Transformational leadership theory is widely researched as it applies to organization and group behaviors. In fact, one researcher called transformational leadership "the single most studied and debated idea within the field of leadership studies" (Diaz-Saenz, 2011, p. 299). A 2017 search of Google Scholar using the phrase "transformational leadership" filtered to start at 2012 resulted in 28,000 hits. First described by Burns (1978), transformational leadership happens when the leader and follower inspire within each other an increased level of motivation and performance (p. 20). Transformational leaders have been described in the literature as personable, inspirational, passionate, visionary, and motivational (Harrison, 2011, p. 92). Bass (1999) furthered Burns' (1978) definition of transformational leadership by breaking it down into four concrete behaviors:

Idealized influence

Often referred to as charisma, Bass (1999) described idealized influence as the leader's ability to verbalize a vision and successfully get followers to engage in the vision. Consequently, followers display high levels of enthusiasm for the vision and loyalty to the leader.

Intellectual stimulation

The leader provides followers with stimulating and meaningful tasks, and is able to inspire followers to reexamine preexisting ideas and modes of operation. Followers are encouraged to use innovative methods to solve problems, and the leader is able to instill a sense of pride within followers as they grow and push themselves.

Individualized consideration

The leader develops strong personal connections to followers, learns and understands their individual needs and motivations, and is able to use this knowledge to form a strong link between the needs of the followers to the goals of the organization. The followers heavily invest in the leader due to the interpersonal relationship they have formed.

Inspirational motivation

The leader is able to inspire confidence in the organizational mission, and also acts as a role model for followers. The leader is adept at communicating the mission through symbols and other methods that create a high level of follower buy-in.

There is a vast amount of evidence which supports transformational leadership as a highly effective way for an organization to increase employee connectedness. "When considered within the context of engagement, it is clear that transformational leadership can provide some of the conditions required for employees to engage" (Soane, 2013, p. 153). García-Morales, Jiménez-Barrionuevo, and Gutiérrez-Gutiérrez (2012) determined transformational leaders increase organizational performance by forming relationships which foster organizational-wide learning. Marion and Gonzales further this point when they tell us that transformational leaders are "….the salespersons, the preachers, the motivational speakers, the organizational cheerleaders, or the individuals who get others excited, committed, and motivated" (p. 169). Research conducted by Tims, Bakker, and Xanthopoulou (2011) established that transformational leadership presented employees the chance to develop mastery, and that this created high levels of connectedness.

Marion and Gonzales (2014) suggested that transformational leaders seek to motivate others to work toward deep change within themselves and inspire this response through the use

of techniques beyond the classic incentives offered by a traditional reward system. As teachers are often limited in the types of rewards they can offer students, transformational leadership studies hold potentially valuable techniques to implement in the classroom. Shields (2011) stated that transformational leadership is "leadership grounded in an activist agenda, one that combines a rights based theory that every individual is entitled to be treated with dignity, respect, and absolute regard with a social justice theory of ethics that takes these rights to a societal level" (p. 571). Marion and Gonzales (2014) claimed that because transformational leaders "believe people want to feel confident, empowered and capable…." they can "…. leverage esteem and self-actualization needs to involve people in the change process" (p. 170). This description of transformational leadership certainly sounds like the description of a powerful teacher!

While the literature clearly suggests that transformational leadership is an effective way to build employee loyalty, satisfaction, and connectedness, it is not always clear if this leadership style is directly related to employee performance. Dwyer, Bono, Snyder, Nov, and Berson (2013), for example, found that while transformational leadership had a positive influence on the satisfaction level of volunteers, it did not increase the levels of their contributions. Van Knippenberg, and Sitkin (2013) asserted that the traditional tools used to measure transformational leadership effectiveness are invalid because they fail to make a clear distinction between transformational leadership and other forms of leadership. Burton and Peachey (2014) reported that organizational culture partially mediates the impact of transformational leadership with their study on college athletic departments. Tourish (2013) went so far as to suggest that transformational leadership might be dangerous, as it could result in blind loyalty on the part of

employees and overconfidence on the part of the leader, thus seriously compromising the leader's judgement.

Despite some of the literature which suggests transformational leadership is limited in its ability to directly impact employee behaviors, it remains one of the most heavily studied forms of leadership in the past 15 years. The literature clearly indicates that transformational leadership has a positive impact on employee connectedness and engagement. Given the similarities between classrooms and small business organizations, there is the distinct possibility that a teacher using transformational leadership techniques can increase levels of connectedness with his or her students.

Transformational Leadership and the Nonprofit Organization

As making a profit is not the goal of public education, nonprofit organizations may be the most direct comparison for exploring schools and classrooms through an organizational framework. To this end, Riggio, Bass, and Orr (2004) noted that leading a nonprofit organization is quite different than leading a traditional private sector business. Some of the fundamental differences are the nonprofit's "focus on a cause as opposed to profits, its reliance on a volunteer workforce…. its less attractive compensation packages for management and staff, and the requirements of external agents, such as government entities, for ongoing performance assessment" (p. 49). It is easy to see the commonalities between leading a school and a nonprofit as described by Riggio, Bass, and Orr (2004). Schools, like nonprofits, do not emphasize making money. Students, like the volunteer workforce of a nonprofit, do not make wages. Teachers, like nonprofit managers, do not make exceedingly high wages. Schools, like nonprofit organizations, face government scrutiny and assessment.

The existing literature indicates that transformational leadership is an effective method for promoting strong connections within nonprofit organizations. Lutz, Smith, and Da Silva, (2013), for example, found that transformational leaders have a direct positive relationship with the psychological climate of nonprofit organizations, while laissez-faire leaders have a negative relationship. Rowold and Rohmann (2009) noted positive emotions are more closely associated with transformational leadership than with transactional leadership in nonprofit organizations. A study conducted by Geer, Maher, and Cole (2008) indicated that transformational leadership was critical in creating an atmosphere of accountability within nonprofit organizations. Similarly, research by McMurray, Pirola-Merlo, Sarros, and Islam (2010) suggested that there was a strong link to the commitment levels and satisfaction levels of nonprofit organizations and transformational leadership. With the comparison between public schools and nonprofit organizations so clear, and the link between transformational leadership and positive outcomes within nonprofit organizations well supported in the literature, it becomes an easy step to view the teacher as the transformational leader of a nonprofit organization.

The Teacher as Transformational Leader

"Transformational leadership and teacher leadership are not new in our literature, however transformational leadership is rare and transformational leadership by teachers is almost unknown" (Anderson, 2008, p. 8). The majority of studies on teacher leadership focus on traditional leadership roles outside of the classroom walls. Those studies, however, do point to the fact that teachers can learn and use transformational leadership skills effectively. The research by Anderson (2008) on teachers in rural elementary schools, for example, illustrated that teachers placed in leadership positions who use transformational leadership techniques have a positive impact on their colleagues and overall school climate. Another study conducted by

Beauchamp, Barling, and Morton (2011) found that students with transformative teachers reported significantly higher levels of self-determined motivation and self-efficacy.

The literature that does exist about teachers using transformational leadership in the classroom is primarily focused on the university level. Bradley, Kirby, and Madriaga (2015), for example, surveyed 35,000 UK students from a single university in order to develop an award for professors who were seen as inspirational. Most of the previous literature on teaching awards indicated that many awards were won through portfolios or a self-nomination process. The award studied here, however, was student generated and therefore the subsequent survey given to students gleaned excellent information into what behaviors students view as inspirational and transformational. "It is evident from the analysis of student comments that students want to be taught by staff who are enthusiastic about their subject, empathetic and hold a desire for students to develop their full potential" (Bradley, Kirby, & Madriga, 2015, p. 239). In other words, the students surveyed were looking to form a connection with their professors.

Bolkan and Goodboy (2009), authors of several studies about college student engagement, also contributed to the understanding of teachers using transformational leadership at the university level. Their 2009 study surveyed 165 college students to examine the relationship between transformational leadership in the college level classroom and results such as student participation levels, student learning outcomes, and instructor credibility with students. Their results suggested that there is a strong link between college professor transformational leader behaviors in the classroom and the student outcomes measured. In a similar study by Noland and Richards (2014) 273 college students were surveyed using the Multi-factor Leadership Questionnaire developed by Bass and Avolio (1997) to measure student perception and establish a link between student levels of motivation and teacher transformational

leadership behaviors. Like Bolkan and Goodboy (2009) before them, Noland and Richards (2014) also found a positive link between teacher transformational behaviors and the student outcomes they were studying. The Multi-factor Leadership Questionnaire is used quite often in the literature as a vehicle to measure student perceptions of teacher leadership skills. Harrison (2011), for example, also used the MLQ to assess university level student perceptions of teacher transformational and transactional leadership behavior and the subsequent student perception of teacher credibility, communication satisfaction, and learning outcomes. The final analysis of the surveys suggested that teacher transformational leadership behaviors are positively linked to student perceptions of teacher credibility, communication satisfaction, and learning outcomes.

In yet another study on college students, Bolkan, Goodboy, and Griffin (2011) developed a 10-item scale to measure telltale behavioral indicators of intellectual stimulation, such as encouraging independent thought. "Considering that transformational leadership has been defined as the ability for a person to align the interests of the individual with the interests of the organization, it may be the case that transformational leadership in general has the ability to foster intrinsic motivation in the classroom by creating an environment that naturally engages student interests and psychological needs" (Bolkan, Goodboy, & Griffin, 2011, p. 343). The resulting data suggested that teachers who demonstrate the behavioral indicators of intellectual stimulation do indeed have the ability to have a positive impact on student learning outcomes, thus connecting transformational leadership behaviors to effective classroom teaching.

Cranton (2006), while still focused on the university level, studied the perceptions of professors themselves. Twenty-two faculty members of a university were followed and regularly interviewed for a period of three years. The most often talked about subject brought up by the participants was their relationship with their students. Cranton (2006) stated, "Fostering

transformative learning in the classroom depends on a large extent on establishing meaningful, genuine relationships with students" (p. 5). It would appear that the desire for connections is as much a part of what it means to be a student, as it is a part of what it means to be a teacher.

The bulk of the literature, as previously stated, is focused at the university level and consists primarily of surveys. At least one researcher, however, is quick to point out a flaw in studies which use surveys to measure transformational leadership. Krishnan (2010) attacked the notion that traditional student surveys are effective tools for measuring or promoting transformational leadership behaviors. He stated,

> When we wish to evaluate the effectiveness of the course of treatment given by a physician, we seek to know whether the intended goal of treatment has been achieved. We do not rest satisfied with asking the patient about the process of treatment. However, when it comes to teaching a course, we seem to be satisfied with asking the students about the process of teaching. Student assessment of teaching may be useful input for teachers to modify their teaching style, but it cannot be taken as a measure of teaching effectiveness. (p. 1).

Krishnan (2010) concluded that teachers should focus more on giving students what they need rather than just meeting their perceived wants (p. 10). This is a straight-forward link to theories of transformational leadership which suggest that effective leaders often predict what followers need before followers are themselves conscious of it. Krishnan (2010) therefore determined that traditional classroom surveys may promote transactional leadership, and that truly transformational leadership skills are not easily recognized by students.

There are a handful of studies which examine experience of high school, middle school, or elementary school students and teachers. Boyd (2009), for example, strayed from the survey

model to create a case study which examined the classroom teaching style of Erin Gruwell, a high school English teacher and subject of the 2006 movie *The Freedom Writers*. Boyd (2009) asserted that by identifying the components of transformational leadership used by Gruwell in her classroom, other teachers may in fact be able to duplicate her outcomes. Boyd (2009) identified four transformational leadership behaviors used by Gruwell: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Boyd (2009) made the case that teacher transformational leadership behaviors may indeed be teachable, and therefore these behaviors can be taught to prospective educators in teacher preparatory programs or professional development offerings. Boyd (2009) also noted that Gruwell's experience not only transformed her students, but also transformed her. This is a strong link to both leadership and change theory. Donnell (2007) also looked at high school teachers in a study of new urban educators. The study focused on beginning teachers in an urban high school environment and traces their growth and development. Sixteen beginning teachers were interviewed and the information extracted for the study. Donnell (2007) found that beginning teachers who rated their first year as successful often cited the fact that they learned from their students as well and that they reported they were able to greatly enlist students in their efforts to teach class. This is a clue that the more effective teachers may in fact be demonstrating transformational leadership behaviors.

Strong-Rhoads (2011), meanwhile, focused on six teachers at various elementary and middle schools in a suburban California school district. The goal of the study was to analyze the perceptions of the participants about classroom leadership. Strong-Rhoads stated, "These transformational classroom leaders are reflective, collaborative and flexible lifelong learners. Important to note is that this study suggests these characteristics could be taught and learned by

all teachers at any school site" (p. 1). If transformative leadership skills are indeed teachable, then perhaps they can be incorporated into teacher preparatory programs and professional development opportunities.

Transformational Teaching

The combination of teaching with transformational leadership is often described as transformational teaching in the literature. As "teacher leaders may not be consciously aware of their transformational qualities" (Pounder, 2009, p. 537), the importance of identifying exactly what these skills are becomes increasingly important. Slavich and Zimbardo (2012) identified six key components of transformational teaching: 1) establishing a shared vision for a course, 2) providing modeling and mastery experiences, 3) intellectually challenging and encouraging students, 4) personalizing attention and feedback, 5) creating experiential lessons, 6) promoting pre-flection and reflection. It is easy to see the similarities to the major components of transformational leadership (idealized influence, intellectual stimulation, individual consideration, and inspirational motivation) as outlined by Bass (1999).

Conclusion

Factors outside of their control, such as brain development, leave adolescents more likely to engage in risk-taking behavior than children and adults (Steinberg, 2007). This risk-taking behavior is even more pronounced within vulnerable student populations such as those diagnosed with learning or social-emotional disabilities (McNamara & Willoughby, 2010). A great deal of research suggests risk-taking behavior is decreased, and achievement increased, when adolescents feel connected to their school and teachers (Blum, 2005). Juxtaposed with this fact is the research which reveals that, by high school, the majority of adolescents are experiencing a decreased level of school connectedness when compared to their elementary years (Klem &

Connell, 2004, p. 262), and it becomes apparent that teachers of adolescents need to focus their energies on reversing this trend.

Transformational leadership is an effective way of increasing a person's level of connectedness with an organization (Burns, 1978; Bass, 1999; Fullan, 2001). Despite a significant amount of data on leadership and its impact on business organizations and politics, there are large gaps in the research connecting teacher efficacy to leadership skills. Leadership theory, organizational theory, and teaching theory must be combined in order to fully understand the concept of classroom leadership. A classroom, complete with students and teacher, does behave like a small business organization or nonprofit, with the teacher in the role of leader and students in the role of followers. If the teacher is viewed as the leader and the classroom as the organization, then levels of student connectedness rest squarely in the hands of the teacher. Understanding what leadership techniques teachers can use to help foster a sense of student connectedness has serious implications for practice, as if the techniques prove teachable then they can be incorporated into teacher preparatory programs and professional development classes. "Teacher leadership is a sleeping giant in many schools, efforts should be undertaken to assist teachers in the attainment of effective teaching practice as a vehicle for providing benefits associated with transformational leadership" (Treslan, 2006, p. 62). There have been few studies addressing this connection, and still fewer attempting to study it within the confines of a secondary level special education classroom. This study will achieve just that, while identifying exactly what leadership skills can be effectively employed to increase the level of connections amongst our most vulnerable student populations.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

The relevant literature reveals that there is an abundance of data which suggests teacher leadership in the classroom is strongly linked to student behaviors and outcomes, and yet it remains an overlooked facet of teaching and learning, especially within secondary level special education student populations. The aim of this research, therefore, is to add detail to the incomplete picture currently painted by the literature and establish a clear understanding of the role of the teacher as the classroom leader and how that influences student connectedness in the secondary level special education classroom. Leadership studies tend to focus on politics or business, not on classrooms. Most research on school leadership focuses primarily on administrative leadership or teacher leadership at the building level, and does not investigate teacher leadership within the classroom itself. The research which does focus on classrooms is largely relegated to the university level. There has not been much research dedicated to the secondary level classroom, nor specifically on the secondary level special education classroom. With a heavy focus on individual secondary level special education classrooms and teachers it is hoped that this research will make a noteworthy impact on our understanding of leadership and how it impacts teaching and learning.

Special education collaboratives in Massachusetts offer a unique opportunity to conduct research on this topic. As stated in previous chapters, many students at the collaborative used in this research report a much higher of level of connectedness once placed at the collaborative than they reported feeling about their previous school placements (Collaborative Student Survey, 2017). This research addressed the following questions:

1. What leadership techniques traditionally associated with business leaders are being used by teachers at the collaborative in the classroom to support high levels of student connectedness with a vulnerable at-risk adolescent populations?

2. What experiences and attitudes do teachers at the collaborative have regarding leadership in the classroom and what is the source of those experiences and attitudes?

In order to answer these questions, a qualitative phenomenological research design was employed. A phenomenological approach was chosen because the researcher sought to understand, analyze, and describe the phenomenon of teacher leadership within the structure of a special education classroom at the secondary level. Groenewald (2004) noted that phenomenological research is an excellent choice when a study is attempting to understand the insights of several individuals experiencing the same phenomenon. As Lester (1999) stated, "Phenomenological methods are particularly effective at bringing to the fore the experiences and perceptions of individuals from their own perspectives, and therefore at challenging structural or normative assumptions. Adding an interpretive dimension to phenomenological research, enabling it to be used as the basis for practical theory, allows it to inform, support or challenge policy and action" (p. 1). This research design provided the researcher with the opportunity to delve deeply into the manner in which teacher leadership is manifesting itself within the classrooms at the collaborative. Additionally, the small sample size of participants lends itself to a qualitative design. This chapter presents the methodology, participants, setting, data collection procedure, analysis procedure, and potential limitations of the study.

Setting

This research was conducted at a Massachusetts based special education collaborative comprised of 16 urban and suburban school districts serving the Greater Boston area and beyond.

Two distinct school sites within the collaborative were used in this research. These schools were chosen because they specialize in working with students diagnosed with learning or social emotional disabilities. Data about each site was compiled from the program descriptions contained in the handbooks of each site, as well as from the student information management system currently used by the collaborative, SchoolBrains, and data collected from the Massachusetts Department of Education's database.

School A is a therapeutic day school which services students with social-emotional needs (School A Handbook, 2017). It currently has twenty high school students and five middle school students, with a teaching staff of six teachers (SchoolBrains, 2017). All students at School A are diagnosed with social emotional learning disabilities and have active individualized educational plans (Massachusetts Department of Education, 2016). School B services students diagnosed with Autism (formerly considered Asperger's Syndrome or High Functioning Autism), Non-verbal Learning Disabilities, and/or similar challenges (School B Handbook, 2017). School B currently has fifteen students and a teaching staff of four teachers (SchoolBrains, 2017). Like School A, all students at School B have active individualized education plans (Massachusetts Department of Education, 2016).

The researcher is an administrator at the collaborative. Involvement in this research was voluntary, and each participant signed written consent form prior to any contribution to the study. None of the participants had the researcher assigned as their evaluator for the time in which the research was conducted. The researcher emailed the participants with a request to participate in the study. All participants confirmed interest in participation to the researcher by sending their written consent. The researcher then arranged interviews and observations with the participants. Prior to the interviews and observations, the researcher reviewed the consent forms

to ensure that participants were abundantly aware of their involvement in the study and how the data collection, analysis, and storage would be pursued.

Participants

The participants in this study were teachers identified by the administrative leadership of each school as having exceptionally strong connections with students. Three teachers were identified. Strong-Rhoads (2011) pointed out that it is vital for the participants in a qualitative phenomenological study to have experienced the same phenomenon, and all teachers in the study were working at one of the sites where students reported high levels of school connectedness and were identified by administrative leaders as being central to this phenomenon. Additionally, all teachers involved in the study had similar credentials, having been certified by the state of Massachusetts in both special education and as content specialists, and working primarily with students diagnosed with learning or social-emotional disabilities at the secondary level. All participants were teaching in secondary level classrooms where the student population is predominantly comprised of special education students. Observations were limited to teacher behavior only, and no student information was recorded. As these student populations are exceptionally vulnerable, no mention of student names or identifying aspects were recorded in any way.

Data Collection

Specific procedures consistent with Groenewald (2004), Strong-Rhoads (2011) and Moustakas' (1994) description of qualitative phenomenological research was employed in this study. The major characteristics of this type of research outlined by Groenwald (2004), Strong-Rhoads (2011) and Moustakas (1994) used in this study were:

1. The phenomenon, in this case teacher leadership in the classroom, is clearly identified.

2. Data was collected from participants who experienced the phenomenon and worked at sites where students reported increased levels of connectedness to school.

3. Interviews and observations were used because they are the most commonly chosen means of data collection for qualitative phenomenological research.

4. The researcher developed a way to account for his own biases so as to limit their influence on the subjectivity of this research. This was accomplished to some degree through the use of a reflective journal.

5. Participants were asked broad questions so as not to lead them in any way.

The data was collected for this research through interviews, observations, and the researcher's reflective journal. Prior to conducting the study, the researcher obtained permission from the individual school sites as well as from EDCO Collaborative to collect the data. After the individual school sites and the collaborative granted permission, the researcher sent out an email to the teachers identified by the administrative leadership. After the proposed participants signed consent forms, the researcher established times for interviews and observations.

The researcher conducted the interviews with teachers at their individual school sites. The interviews ranged from thirty minutes to an hour. The questions for the interviews are included as an appendix at the end of this research. All interviews were audio recorded and then transcribed for data analysis. After the interviews, the researcher and participants scheduled classroom observations. Participants chose what class the researcher would observe. All participants in the study were observed once. The observations ranged from thirty minutes to

one hour, depending on the length of the class. No identifying records of any kind were kept of students. The research focused solely on teacher behaviors and interviews.

In order to account for personal biases, the researcher kept a reflective journal as suggested by Strong-Rhoads (2011). The researcher made journal entries before, during, and after interviews and observations. This process contributed to the findings section of this study as the researcher was able to supplement data collected from the participants with data collected from the reflective journal to develop an in depth understanding of teacher leadership in the classroom. By documenting personal thoughts, the researcher was able to identify personal biases while at the same time keep the thoughts of the participants and researcher separate.

Analysis

Data analysis procedures for this study were consistent with suggestions made by Groenewald, (2004), Moustakas (1994), and Strong-Rhoads (2011) for qualitative phenomenological research design. Grounded theory was applied to the transcripts, observation notes, and reflective journal. These data sources were manually coded in a manner traditionally associated with qualitative phenomenological research design. Codes were clustered into thematic categories. Observation data was coded and clustered into observable transformational leadership skills as defined by Burns (1978) and Bass (1999). These included idealized influence, intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, and inspirational motivation. These categories allowed the researcher to explicitly identify what transformational leadership skills traditionally associated with organizational theory are effective as classroom techniques for adolescents diagnosed with learning or social-emotional disabilities. These themes were also used to code interview data. Interview data was also be clustered into further themes aimed at uncovering teacher attitude toward and knowledge of these skills to more broadly understand

leadership at the classroom level. Copies of the coded transcript, observation notes, and reflective journal are included as supplemental materials in the submission of this study.

<div align="center">**Participant Rights**</div>

The participants were assigned a letter code to ensure their privacy. School sites were not identified in any way during observation or interview records. The audio files were destroyed after they were transcribed, and the transcripts were kept in a locked cabinet until the study was complete. Additionally, classroom observations conducted for this research were not formal evaluations and had no connection to the Massachusetts Educator Evaluation System as outlined by the Massachusetts Department of Education. Student behaviors were not identified in the observation notes.

<div align="center">**Limitations**</div>

There are certainly limitations presented by conducting this research at a special education collaborative. While there were multiple schools involved in the study, they were all a part of the same collaborative and all classrooms were predominately populated with special education students. This makes it difficult to know if the results can be generalized to other populations. It is recommended that future researchers conduct their research at secondary level sites with students not receiving special education services to see if the findings are similar. Additionally, the relatively small scale of the study makes it difficult to know if the results are indicative of a larger pattern. Lastly, current research suggests student connectedness is a multifaceted phenomenon.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

This study was structured using a phenomenological qualitative approach. This method was selected to glean deep knowledge from teachers on how they developed their classroom leadership skills. The purpose of this study was twofold: to identify what transformational leadership techniques traditionally associated with business leaders are used by classroom teachers at the collaborative to support high levels of student connectedness with vulnerable at-risk adolescent populations; and to understand what experiences and attitudes teachers at the collaborative have regarding leadership in the classroom and to learn about the sources of these experiences and attitudes.

The data for this chapter was collected through classroom observations and 1:1 interviews with three participants. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed upon completion. Throughout the interview descriptions in this chapter the letter "R" represents the researcher and the letter "P" represents the participant. Along with the classroom observations and interviews, the researcher also kept a personal journal to record thoughts and identify themes throughout the study. This journal was kept in a notebook.

Participants were interviewed one by one beginning with the first person observed and concluding with the last person observed. As the researcher analyzed the data, themes emerged that were consistent with transformational leadership theory, as well as themes which were related solely to teacher beliefs and attitudes. As the data analysis continued, it became apparent that while there were some consistent themes emerging between all participants, each participant also displayed unique beliefs and classroom leadership skills. The data was then categorized and

organized by two main themes. The two main themes are: 1) Leadership in the classroom, and 2) Teacher beliefs regarding the source of their leadership skills.

After analyzing the data the researcher discovered that the participants all displayed elements of transformational leadership in their classrooms, however they did not all exhibit the same exact traits. Additionally, while they all stated that they did not learn these skills from traditional teacher prepatary programs, they had differing beliefs about how they acquired the skills.

Transformational Leadership in the Classroom

Teacher behaviors and actions were observed during classroom observations and these behaviors and actions were then categorized as themes connected to transformational leadership: inspirational motivation, idealized influence, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Follow up interviews were conducted and the data pulled from those interviews was organized by the same themes.

After completing the analysis of data collected from classroom observations and interviews, it became clear that each participant incorporated some aspects of transformational leadership, but they did not employ every aspect of transformational leadership nor did they all display the same elements of transformational leadership. Each participant demonstrated characteristics consistent with two aspects of transformational leadership, however no evidence of the trait inspirational motivation was identified during classroom observations. While there was not observable evidence of inspirational motivation in classroom observations, strong teacher beliefs that are consistent with the description of inspirational motivation as defined by Bass (1999) were identified during teacher interviews. Table 1 illustrates which traits associated

with transformational leadership theory were exhibited by each participant during classroom

observations.

Table 1

Classroom Observation Data

Participant	Idealized Influence	Individualized Consideration	Intellectual Stimulation	Inspirational Motivation
A	X	X		
B	X		X	
C		X	X	

Classroom Observation Data revealed that each participant demonstrated two elements

consistent with the description of transformational leadership as described by Bass (1999).

Participant A demonstrated elements of idealized influence and individualized consideration,

Participant B demonstrated elements of idealized influence and intellectual stimulation, and

Participant C demonstrated signs of individualized consideration and intellectual stimulation.

While there was no evidence of inspirational motivation as described by Bass (1999)

identified by the researcher during classroom observations, perhaps one interesting development

was that it is the only component that all participants showed signs of during the interview

process. This may be due to the fact that the groundwork for inspirational motivation was

prepared earlier in the school year before the classroom observations took place, or that it often

took place outside of formal lesson times which were not observed. Table 2 illustrates which

traits associated with transformational leadership theory were exhibited by each participant

during interviews with the researcher.

Table 2

Participant Interview Data

Participant	Idealized Influence	Individualized Consideration	Intellectual Stimulation	Inspirational Motivation
A	X	X		X
B	X		X	X
C		X	X	X

The remainder of this chapter is organized into the following sections: Data on idealized influence from observations and interviews, data on individualized consideration from observations and interviews, data on intellectual stimulation from observations and interviews, data on inspirational motivation from interviews, researcher thoughts from the reflective journal, and conclusion.

Idealized Influence

Participant A and B both displayed behaviors consistent with the idealized influence component of transformational leadership. Idealized influence, as described by Bass (1999), is the leader's ability to engage followers to value an overall vision. The major characteristics of transformational leadership include creating trust, veneration, allegiance, and respect amongst followers through the use of captivating vision and behavior. Transformational leaders endeavor to build such a state of idealized influence by:

- Expressing a vision and clarifying how to reach the vision in an engaging manner

- Leading by example

- Acting confidently and cheerfully

- Highlighting values and underpinning them with symbols

- Exhibiting a high level of principled and decent behavior

Transformational leaders who apply idealized influence with their followers increase the trust and confidence of the followers. The followers view the leader as a role model and trust the decisions made by him or her. The leader doesn't ask followers to do something that he or she wouldn't do, and demonstrates strong follow-through. On a practical level, in the classroom this means that the teacher must be seen as a role model by students who seek to emulate their behavior. Participant A and B displayed behaviors consistent with the idea of idealized influence as described by Bass (1999) during classroom observations, and also revealed an awareness of how important this can be in a classroom setting during their interviews.

Evidence of Idealized Influence Collected During Classroom Observations

Participant A spent a great deal of time role modeling polite respectful behaviors. In fact, data collected from one classroom revealed that Participant A used the phrases "please" or "thank you" thirty-seven times in a single forty-five minute class. This modeling was highly effective, for it set a positive tone and helped a student classroom which was comprised of a combination of students diagnosed with social-emotional learning disabilities and Autism Spectrum Disorder to maintain positive interactions throughout the entire lesson. Many of Participant A's interactions with students were designed to teach students social skills through leading by example. Some of the phrases recorded during classroom observations of Participant A are listed below:

- Alright cool, thank you.

- Johnny can you do me a favor and pick the book up off the floor?

- Wait, wait, let me listen to Bobby.

- Hahahaha that was funny.

- That is an excellent thought process!

- Well, thank you Samantha, let me hear what Phillip has to say.

- Can you take your seat please?

- Can you put the Gummy Bears away please?

- Well, Jimmy, I think that is how most people feel when they sweat.

A careful examination of these phrases reveals that Participant A was often role modeling how to approach nuanced social situations, ranging from how to appropriately deal with being interrupted, to how to deal with ill-timed jokes, and even how to normalize uncomfortable physical feelings such as sweating.

Participant B also displayed characteristics of idealized influence as described by Bass (1999) during classroom observations, although not in the same manner as Participant A. Rather than role modeling through the use of polite language, Participant B was able to create a similar effect by relying on symbolism and visuals. At the very front of the room Participant B had a picture of a boat with the phrase "One Boat, One Team." Data collected from classroom observations reveal that in a single forty-five minute lesson Participant B made reference to that symbol nine times. These references included overtly speaking with students about how much easier it was to row in the same direction, reminding students to respect the people in the boat with them, and asking students questions such as "We are all in one what?" This tactic seemed to work well for Participant B, as data collected from classroom observations indicate that every student in the class understood the meaning of the symbolism and responded in a positive manner to its use.

Evidence of Idealized Influence Collected During Participant Interviews

Data collected from interviews of Participant A and Participant B reveal that their use of idealized influence strategies is not accidental. They both indicated a deep belief that serving as a role model was an essential aspect of teaching.

Participant A offered some insight into this area during this exchange:

R: What particular strategies do you use to connect with hard to reach students?

Participant A: There are things I just did, that I have always done and I think they are helpful in developing connections. I am consistent. I am honest….as honest as I can be. Sometimes they ask things I can't tell them the truth about. I am kind. I take kids seriously. I don't take myself seriously. I am genuinely excited when they are successful. I want them to be successful and they know that. I behave the way I expect them to.

While there is plenty of information in Participant A's answer that are consistent with the concept of idealized influence, that last sentence is perhaps the most powerful. Participant A makes it a point to behave in the manner that students in the classroom are expected to behave. Whether it be by saying "please" and "thank you," role modeling how to take a joke, or empathizing with a student who is sweating, Participant A embraces this element of transformational leadership in an effort to connect with students.

Participant A offered more insight into how idealized influence plays a role in their classroom in this exchange:

R: How would you define teacher leadership that is classroom based?

Participant A: When I visualize teacher leadership it looks like students choosing to do what is expected. Creating a culture of responsibility, respect, and teamwork through

action. I had a principal who would pick up trash in the hallway because that is the right

way to behave. I don't know if any kids noticed, but I did. And then I picked up trash in

the hallway…..when it wasn't too gross! That is good leadership.

Here, Participant A describes a moment when a leader acted in manner consistent with

idealized influence and actually transformed them! As participant A describes their vision of

leadership in the classroom, it is clear that they don't believe that classroom culture is accidental.

In the view of Participant A, the teacher is essential in role modeling this culture. These

remarks, along with the data collected from classroom observations, demonstrate that Participant

A consciously uses strategies in the classroom that are consistent with the description of

idealized influence given by Bass (1999).

Participant B had this to say about leading by example in response to interview questions

by the researcher:

R: What particular strategies do you use to connect with hard to reach students?

Participant B: There is something to be said for leading by example, showing up every

day, teaching and working hard, demonstrating the good behaviors….academic and

otherwise…. that you want from students, and those behaviors allow you to be heard by

students in times of crisis.

This is a valuable piece of insight by Participant B, as it speaks to the long term benefits

of leading students by example, one of the central characteristics of idealized influence. When a

student has a teacher that is serving as a great role model, the student is more likely to access that

teacher during a time of crisis and model their response to the crisis after how they have seen the

teacher respond. In an age of increasing levels of school violence, this piece of information is

incredibly pertinent.

Participant B gives more insight into their use of idealized influence here:

R: What contributions have you made as a teacher leader in your school, district, and classroom?

Participant B: I try to lead by example. I know that preparation is of the utmost importance to success as a teacher. Trying to stay ahead of things means less work later, whether that be in my classroom, in the school, or with my colleagues. By keeping busy, I set an example to staff and students of how one can use down time and the consistent work then translates into more successful lessons and classes with fewer behavioral issues. Additionally, having seen, and early on being involved in, less successful interactions with students or colleagues, I try to maintain a professional attitude as much as I can. I've seen where emotional reactions or whatever have led people into less than ideal outcomes. I try to keep the emotion out of it, by taking care of myself ….well-rested, well fed, prepared, etc….. I have also been told that my ability to articulate, diagnose, and propose solutions to problems has led to my colleagues often turning to me in times where leadership is needed.

With this answer, Participant B outlines a few different ways that leading by example has had an impact on their success with students, and in fact, other colleagues. One interesting insight here is that Participant B makes the point that they interact with everyone in a positive and professional manner, including both staff and students. This is an important piece of information. Students, of course, are learning all the time. They learn many things from teachers that are not related to the content of the lesson. When a teacher behaves in a disrespectful manner toward a colleague or a student, other students see this and learn from it. Participant B is conscious of this and makes a consistent effort to role model respectful behaviors

at all times to all people. Additionally, Participant B makes an attempt to role model the importance of school itself. Rather than dilly dallying during prep periods or perceived downtime, Participant B tries to demonstrate the value of taking the job seriously. That is a powerful message to students who have developed a strong connection to Participant B and want to emulate their behavior.

Individualized Consideration

Participants A and C both displayed behaviors consistent with the individualized consideration component of transformational leadership as described by Bass (1999). Transformational leaders use individualized consideration to exhibit sincere concern for the wants and feelings of their followers. This personalized attention is a crucial factor in motivating followers to give their very best efforts, and in spurring forward the development of the follower's own leadership skills. Transformational leaders do this by:

- Developing a culture where there is an open line of communication between followers and the leader

- Guaranteeing each follower has his or her voice appreciated

- Serving as mentor and coach while taking a personal interest in the success and growth of every follower

- Tailoring learning opportunities for each follower centered on that person's individual interests, abilities, and goals

- Learning what type of feedback works best for each follower

Transformational leaders use individualized consideration to not only individualize the learning experience for followers, but display a profound faith in the potential of each follower as well. In a practical sense, this might appear in a classroom setting like:

- The teacher takes time to get to know each student on an individual basis

- The teacher uses differentiated instruction to meet the needs of all learning styles, ability levels, and student interests

- The teacher is aware of basic human needs and how it impacts learning if one of these needs is not being met for an individual student

Evidence of Individualized Consideration Collected During Classroom Observations

Participant A displayed characteristics of individualized consideration as described by Bass (1999) in three central ways:

1. Classroom setup and student materials

2. Interactions with students during unique situations

3. Rewards and motivators specifically tailored to the group

Classroom setup and student materials

Participant A had clearly designed the classroom space to meet the needs of each individual student. While the classroom did have traditional rows of student desks and chairs, there was also a separate round table where students could move if they were able to continue focusing on the lesson but did not want to verbally participate. Additionally, rather than traditional student desk chairs, some students in the room had rocking chairs so that they could move and yet remain at their desks and engaged in the lesson. It was apparent that this was an accepted part of the classroom routine, as no student conflict erupted over which student got which chair or over who could sit at the round table. Some students in the class had manipulatives on their desk or in their hands that they could use to access sensory stimulation and help them concentrate. Items observed included fidget spinners, stress balls, slime, Rubic's cubes, and liquid motion toys.

Interactions with students during unique situations

Participant A demonstrated great understanding of basic human needs and compassion for the students in their classroom. At one point a student entered the class approximately ten minutes late. Rather than demand to know why the student was late, Participant A greeted the student enthusiastically and then asked, "Johnny, have you eaten lunch, do you need to eat?" The student replied, "I don't know, probably." Participant A at this point used the phone in the classroom to call a colleague who came down and brought Johnny to the cafeteria. Johnny returned, a lunch in hand, about five minutes later. The behavior of the other students during this time indicated that this type of event was normal, as they did not tease nor give Johnny a hard time for being late or having permission to eat in the classroom even though some of them had been asked to put away Gummy Bears earlier in the lesson. It appeared understood that Participant A would take care of their individual needs. In this particular case, where a traditional course of action would have been to discipline the student for being late, Participant A displayed a strong understanding of that student's needs and as a result, the student was able to access the lesson with only minor disruption to the overall flow.

Rewards and motivators specific to the group

The students in Participant A's classroom were a mix of students diagnosed with social-emotional learning disorders and Autism Spectrum Disorder. Many of them displayed sensory needs and high levels of needing physical stimulation. While the lesson itself did not offer physical stimulation, as mentioned earlier, Participant A met the specific needs of the students in the room by allowing the use of a variety of sensory items. In addition, Participant A had created an incentive for the group to earn ten minutes of gym time upon successful completion of the lesson. At various times during the lesson, Participant A would motivate the group with

statements such as, "Six more minutes of work and then we can go to the gym!" The students appeared extremely motivated by this, and even followed the lead of Participant A by verbally encouraging each other to successfully respond to the incentive.

Participant C displayed many of the same elements of individualized consideration that was observed with Participant A. Like A, Participant C made use of classroom space and materials to meet the needs of students in the classroom. A similar use of sensory tools such as puzzles and foam manipulatives were observed to allow students in need of physical stimulation to access it without having to miss the lesson. Additionally, similar to Participant A, there was a part of the room designed for students that needed some quiet time but could remain in the room. In the case of Participant C this space was created with the use of a small area rug and comfortable love seat for students to sit on. In addition to these techniques, Participant C displayed an element of individualized consideration that Participant A did not during classroom observations. This was differentiated instruction.

Differentiated instruction

It was clear during classroom observations that Participant C routinely used differentiated instruction to meet the learning needs of each student in the class. Some of this was in the form of differentiating by interest. For example, in one writing assignment observed, Participant C allowed the students to choose from a variety of writing prompts based on their individual interests and preferences. That served as a fantastic motivator for students and they were all engaged in the assignment with little prompting from Participant C.

Participant C also differentiated instruction by student ability level. During one reading assignment observed, for example, Participant C allowed some students to move to quiet areas, even allowing some to sit in the hallway adjacent to the classroom, so that they could read the

assignment independently. Other students sat with Participant C in a small group while Participant C read the material to them and they followed along. And still others accessed the material on computers in the classroom with interactive text and headphones. In this manner Participant C was able to give every student access to the same reading material regardless of their actual reading ability.

Evidence of Individualized Consideration Collected During Participant Interviews

Data collected from interviews of Participant A and Participant C indicate a true commitment to strategies that are consistent with the idea of individualized consideration as defined by Bass (1999). This commitment is illustrated in the emphasis on preparation and differentiated instruction found in their answers.

R: Please describe what strengths you have in the classroom relative to the topic of study?

Participant A: I know my classroom management skills are also a strength of mine. I constantly evaluate a student's motivations or reasons when acting up. That allows me to tailor my response to best meet the need. Working to know what motivates each individual student is vital. I also find that other students learn from their classmates infractions. By explaining all the consequences…. Mostly natural consequences….every student in the room gets a strong scaffolding of all the outcomes of a behavior….good or bad. For example, student N, when you bang on the desk like that it is hard for me to teach, it's distracting to me, which makes it harder to do my job. Also, the other students are trying to listen to me and you're making it harder for them to do their work. If you need to get some energy out you can take a walk or use a fidget… etc. Meeting the students at a mature level is also very important to this. Simply stopping and asking them,

why are you doing that? Is often enough to get them to stop knowing that they're in the spotlight and they'll have to support their actions.

Participant A clearly understands that behaviors are driven by individual needs, and that by individualizing the feedback to each student or group the chance of a particular student understanding and accepting the feedback is maximized. Participant C also demonstrated high levels of beliefs consistent with individualized consideration as described by Bass (1999) during the interview. However, unlike Participant A, who emphasized this area through behavior intervention and classroom management, Participant C viewed it through the lens of lesson planning:

R: Please describe what strengths you have in the classroom relevant to the topic of study.

Participant C: I have learned that teaching is more than teaching the classics….not that they aren't important, but it is more important to me to have kids want to read, to find out what happens next. Being flexible and open to new and different texts that are more appealing to students is helpful. I have had success with students who hate reading because the content draws them in. by meeting them where they're at with content and reading level, students are able to learn and practice applying bigger concepts like identifying theme and other parts of literature, using literary devices, and connecting texts….Most students have gaps in their learning. Spiraling curriculum, pre-assessments, ongoing communication with students during work time, and allowing students to work at their own pace helps to close the gaps and minimize frustration. All kids want and enjoy success and when they have success they're likely to be more willing to comply with other classroom expectations.

Participant C displays strong levels of individualized consideration in this answer. More than once, they highlight the importance of "meeting kids where they are" rather than meeting them where we might want them to be. A commitment to designing assignments in a manner which will appeal to individual interests and lead to individual success are indeed two of the hallmarks of individualized consideration as described by Bass (1999). Combined with Participant A's attention to classroom management, Participant C's lesson planning philosophy gives us the full spectrum of what individualized consideration would look like in the classroom.

Intellectual Stimulation

Participant B and C both displayed behaviors consistent with the intellectual stimulation component of transformational leadership as described by Bass (1999). Transformational leaders push followers to grow through intellectual stimulation. As described by Bass (1999), this means that the transformational leader challenges followers to be innovative and creative. Because transformational leaders most often present as positive, a common misunderstanding is that they are "soft," but in actuality the transformational leader constantly challenge followers to tackle obstacles on their own by:

- Including followers in addressing organizational problems and stimulating and supporting them in being as creative and innovative as possible in identifying solutions

- Encouraging followers to challenge assumptions, reframe problems, and approach existing problems in novel ways

- Creating an environment where no idea is considered stupid and failure is an expected part of growth

- Shaking the established norms and questioning the status quo, thereby amplifying creativity and fostering open mindedness toward new avenues of learning

Transformational leaders use intellectual stimulation to ensure that followers find their work meaningful. In practice this might manifest itself in the classroom by:

- The teacher providing opportunity for inquiry

- The teacher branching away from whole-group instruction and engaging in hands-on or real-world activities

- The teacher encouraging higher level thinking skills

- The teacher creating an environment where mistakes are not only accepted, they are expected

Evidence of Intellectual Stimulation Collected During Classroom Observations

Participant B demonstrated high levels of intellectual stimulation strategies as described by Bass (1999) during classroom observations. The topic observed during classroom observations was ancient Spartan culture and politics. Students were asked to read and discuss two primary source documents which described elements of Spartan culture which oppressed segments of the population. The documents were clearly difficult for the students to understand. However, Participant B was able to generate interest in the topic by connecting the topic to real-world current events by asking, "Are there any other examples in history or current events when a people within a civilization have been kept down?" Students answered enthusiastically, "The Civil Rights Movement," "Immigrants," "Muslims today." In this manner, Participant B was able to keep students engaged in the learning process through techniques consistent with the idea of intellectual stimulation developed by Bass (1999).

Participant C also demonstrated high use of intellectual stimulation strategies. Students in this class were reading a high school level novel. However, many of the students in the class were diagnosed with processing disabilities. The reading level itself was difficult for many of

the students, and yet Participant C was able to scaffold the reading in such a manner that individual students were able to keep up. Additionally, a series of journal prompts that connected the novel to personal experiences helped students not only digest the novel, but also focused them on higher order thinking skills. During one observation, one of the students looked at the researcher and proudly proclaimed, "This is the first novel I've ever read." Participant C walked over and gave the student a high five. It was clear that Participant C made use of intellectual stimulation in a manner that created a serious amount of meaning for the students in the class.

Evidence of Intellectual Stimulation Collected During Participant Interviews

Data collected from interviews of Participant B and Participant C indicate that they view intellectual stimulation strategies as essential to their effectiveness as teachers. Resisting any temptation to placate students with less difficult work, they take seriously their roles as classroom leaders assisting students to stretch themselves. This is made clear by the emphasis both participants made on ensuring student safety in class. A central element of intellectual stimulation as described by Bass (1999) was that the leader establishes a culture wherein it is safe to take risks and fail. A classroom where students will be teased by peers or ridiculed by faculty for wrong answers would be detrimental for students with social-emotional learning disabilities, and Participants B and C demonstrate an acute awareness of this fact.

R: What kind of impact does teacher leadership have on student behavior and performance?

Participant B: Teacher leadership has everything to do with student behavior and performance. If a student doesn't respect you or doesn't feel safe in your classroom then they are not going to be motivated to behave or perform. If they don't feel safe,

emotionally, physically, or socially, then they may not be able to behave or perform due to heightened anxiety.

R: How do you know you are being effective as a teacher leader?

Participant B: You know you are being successful as a teacher leader if you are able to teach during class time without there being a ton of disruptions. If the students feel like they can take risks, academically and socially, in the class.

R: Please describe what strengths you have in the classroom relevant to the topic of study?

Participant C: I have really good classroom management skills and I naturally connect with hard to reach students. When working with hard to reach students, the most important thing is to show them respect and follow through with promises. Most hard to reach students have a difficult time trusting adults so it is very important to build that trust. They need to feel heard, so it is important that, no matter how small we think their issue is, that we give them the safe space and time to talk. Humor is a great tool to use with the more streetwise students as long as you are able to read the situations well and know when it's ok to joke around.

These responses by Participants B and C illustrate a heightened awareness of how unsafe a classroom can feel to students. This unsafe feeling can be amplified for students diagnosed with social-emotional learning disabilities, as many of them have experienced years of teasing by the time they reach secondary grades. Participants B and C both pay close attention to establishing a classroom culture that respects safety as a prerequisite for student learning and success, an essential element of intellectual stimulation as described by Bass (1999).

Inspirational Motivation

The transformational leader inspires followers toward new ideas or goals through inspirational motivation as described by Bass (1999). The major characteristics of inspirational motivation include:

- Articulating a clear and appealing view of the future

- Developing a shared vision so that the followers see meaning in their work

- Making sure each follower has a role in the fulfillment of the shared vision, and setting high standards for the followers

- Encouraging followers to integrate and become part of the overall organizational culture and environment

Transformational leaders have the ability to inspire and motivate followers. Combine this with idealized influence, and it is the source of the transformational leader's charisma. In practice inspirational motivation my look like this in the classroom:

- When students are skeptical that classroom lessons have value outside of school, the teacher is able to illustrate that they do

- The teacher demonstrates a contagious enthusiasm for the subject

- The teacher demonstrates a contagious enthusiasm for learning

- The teacher demonstrates profound faith in the student

Evidence of Inspirational Motivation Collected During Participant Interviews

While no observable evidence of inspirational motivation was apparent in classroom observations, strong teacher beliefs that are consistent with the description of inspirational motivation as defined by Bass (1999) were noted during teacher interviews. Some of the interview responses that demonstrate elements of inspirational motivation are recorded below.

R: What inspires and/or encourages you as a teacher?

Participant A: I pride myself in being the teacher that refuses to give up on a kid. I am encouraged by students who offer to help one another with their schoolwork. I am encouraged by the way the kids play together with the new kid despite hating his guts earlier in the day. I am inspired by the academic risks my students are starting to take.

R: What inspires and/or encourages you as a teacher?

Participant B: Being able to help students make connections to the past, present, and possible futures gives my job meaning. As far as being encouraged, when a class goes well, it really energizes me and makes me want to continue that success.

R: What inspires and/or encourages you as a teacher?

Participant C: Seeing the students everyday inspires me. Knowing that I have made a difference in so many lives over the years inspires me. I love having a job that is unpredictable on a daily basis and can push me to every edge of emotion and vulnerability a human can experience. I laugh every single day, either with the students or the staff...usually both. I love seeing students accomplish goals that they didn't think they could achieve, academically, personally and, or, socially. I love learning and being challenged and I feel like I always have to be on my toes.

An interesting point made by all three participants as they described elements of inspirational motivation was that this characteristic seemed to be the driving force behind why they loved being educators. A common theme in participant answers was the joy it brings to see students take academic risks and be successful. In a field with a burnout rate as high as public education, it behooves educators to take note when they identify reasons teachers actually enjoy

the field, and having characteristics which are consistent with inspirational motivation appear to make a major impact on participant levels of satisfaction.

Teacher Beliefs Regarding the Source of their Leadership Skills

The data for this section was taken completely form the participant interviews. Participants identified three main ways they believed they acquired their classroom leadership skills: 1) trial and error, 2) informal mentors, and 3) natural ability. It is perhaps disconcerting that none of the participants attributed this skillset to formal teacher preparation programs or professional development of any kind, thus indicating that the acquisition of these skills is somewhat up to chance.

Trial and error

Participant A attributed much of the classroom leadership skills they had acquired to trial and error.

R: How did you develop these connection building techniques?

Participant A: I suppose trial and error, failing miserably….talking to my boss about what works and what doesn't. Education programs are a joke. I spent more time learning how to write outdated IEPs and memorizing SPED law that has since changed than I spent getting real experience in my practicum. I don't know if anybody knows how they'll be their first time in a classroom. It's kind of scary and everything matters.

Participant A not only reveals that they believe trial and error was a major source of skill development, but also railed against the formal teacher preparatory programs in Massachusetts. While it is natural for teachers to learn a certain amount of their skills through trial and error, the blatant lack of leadership training in the teacher preparatory programs experienced by Participant A is concerning.

Informal mentors

Participants B and C both attributed informal mentors as a source of leadership skill acquisition.

R: What inspires and or encourages you as a teacher?

Participant B: Much of my inspiration and tactics have come from teachers I either had or had the privilege of working with closely. As a behavior therapist I got to be in the classroom of another teacher on a regular basis. Some were great teachers and I adopted their better skills and some were less successful and I made sure to do the opposite of their failings.

In this exchange Participant B is clear that much of the leadership skills they have acquired are in fact learned behaviors that they witnessed on other teachers. Participant B also made a point to note that this process of observing also helped them to witness what kind of teacher behaviors did not work well.

Natural Ability

Participant C offers little insight into how their classroom leadership skills were acquired and attributed them instead to natural ability.

R: How did you develop these connection building techniques?

Participant C: I honestly think they came naturally. I definitely fine-tuned my strategies over the years and watched the approaches that others use to see if they are successful or not. When I was working in the public schools I found that the students who gave other teachers a really hard time were drawn to me and I felt like they were misunderstood. I gave them space to talk, to hear what was going on with them, and I showed them

respect. I do think that I struggled with boundary setting when I was first starting out and that was something I needed to work on as I progressed in my career.

With this response, Participant C offers the opinion that their leadership techniques are simply the manifestation of innate ability, and has no real insight as to how these skills were developed. Like Participant A, Participant C espouses an overall belief that they developed these skills as a fledgling classroom teacher, and was not taught to them in any formal manner.

Researcher's Thoughts

This section was developed by using the researcher's journal and notes taken during the participant observations and interviews. This journal was kept in order to account for personal biases and sort out prospective themes as the participant observations and interviews unfolded. The researcher made journal entries before, during, and after interviews and observations. This process enabled the researcher to supplement data collected from the participants to develop an in depth understanding of teacher leadership in the classroom. By documenting personal thoughts, the researcher was able to identify personal biases while at the same time keep the thoughts of the participants and researcher separate. The following section outlines the researcher's thoughts on the findings. The section is divided by the two major themes of this chapter, classroom leadership and teacher beliefs regarding the source of their leadership skills, with connections made to the data taken from classroom observations and participant interviews.

Transformational leadership in the classroom

The researcher's thoughts on how leadership manifested itself in the closely mirrored the elements of transformational leadership witnessed during classroom observations of the participants. The researcher has long suspected that idealized influence as described by Bass (1999) was a pivotal part of creating connections in the classroom. Observing teachers using

techniques, such as Participant A role modeling polite behavior and how to deal with difficult

situations, was not a surprise to the researcher. Additionally, the researcher has long held the

belief that students learn some of their most valuable lessons outside of the formal planned

lesson. In fact, students are watching and learning from their teachers all the time, even when

the teachers themselves are not aware this is happening. At times they learn as much from what

teachers do not do as from what they actually do. Students pick up who the teacher believes

should be respected, who the teacher blames for certain situations, and how valuable the teacher

thinks certain things are. Therefore, the researcher found Participant B's efforts to consistently

role model appropriate behavior all day even outside of formal instructional time to be quite

refreshing.

The researcher has always found one of the most difficult components of

transformational leadership to employ in a classroom was individualized consideration. Given

the vast amount of standards, frameworks, and curriculum public educators are expected teach,

the idea of individualizing instruction so that each student can best access it can seem quite

daunting. However, the researcher was incredibly impressed by the sheer scope of sensory

materials used by the participants in the study. Fidget spinners, stress balls, slime, Rubic's cubes,

and liquid motion toys were all low cost ways to keep students with sensory needs in the

classroom and thereby able to access the lesson. In addition, the researcher was impressed by the

manner in which different prompts were given to students and yet all tied to the same lesson,

thereby increasing the chances students felt personally connected to the content.

The researcher was similarly unsurprised by the data collected on intellectual stimulation.

When students are stimulated by the lesson, they are more engaged and more connected to the

learning environment. Therefore, it was not surprising to see the participants place a great deal

of effort into planning engaging curriculum and challenging material. The participants in this study clearly mirrored the researcher's belief that all students can learn, as even though their students were challenged by social-emotional learning disorders and Autism Spectrum Disorder, they did not choose to lessen the classroom expectations.

Where the researcher did find themselves surprised was that no evidence of inspirational motivation was discernable in classroom observations, despite it seemingly serving as a driving force for participants during interviews. The researcher had a preconceived notion that inspirational motivation was at the core of leadership and excellent teaching. This may still be true, as it would be difficult to quantify this particular trait without actually interviewing or surveying students about whether or not they found their teachers inspirational.

Teacher beliefs regarding the source of their leadership skills

The researcher was not surprised to find that trial and error as well as informal mentors played a big role in how participants believed they acquired leadership skills. The researcher clearly remembers stumbling upon techniques that worked well and developing relationships with informal mentors at the beginning stages of their own career in the field of education. Those formative years are indeed important. What struck the researcher, however, was how the participants seemed to focus heavily on the early years of their career and did not seem to speak much about how they may be continuing to develop these skills. It appeared as if the participants were speaking about themselves as mostly finished products in this regard. It may be that, due to a lack of formal teaching on leadership and how it evolves, the participants have developed a static view of leadership skills. Additionally, the researcher believes that it was difficult for participants to always see themselves as leaders, as this is not the traditional view of teachers in the classroom. This phenomena seemed particularly glaring to the researcher as they reflected

on Participant C's belief that their leadership skills were largely innate. The researcher could not help but be struck by the fact that Participant C did not believe that skills were simply innate within their students, but in fact could be learned and acquired even by students with serious learning disabilities. With so little emphasis put on developing teacher leadership skills, it appeared participants had given very little thought to them before this study.

Conclusion

The findings offered in this chapter demonstrate an abundant amount of data with regard to classroom leadership condensed into just a few pages. Classroom observations, participant interviews, and the researcher's own thoughts were combined to construct a view of what classroom leadership looks like. The data analysis process also led to the insight that while teachers do in fact make use of transformational leadership techniques in the classroom, they do not always exhibit the full range of transformational leadership techniques and are not always cognizant of the fact that they are using these type of skills or how they acquired them. Chapter 5 offers a discussion of the data with recommendations for practice, policy and future research.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study was constructed using a phenomenological qualitative design. This method was chosen to garner meaningful knowledge from teachers on how they acquired and utilized leadership skills in the classroom. The study has two main objectives: to identify transformational leadership techniques usually linked with business leaders that are used by classroom teachers at the collaborative to maintain strong levels of student connectedness with fragile at-risk adolescent populations, and to determine what experiences and beliefs teachers at the collaborative have regarding leadership in the classroom and to ascertain what the source of these experiences and beliefs are.

Both classroom observations and 1:1 interviews with three participants serve as the data for this study. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed upon completion. In addition to classroom observations and interviews, the researcher recorded thoughts in a journal to help identify themes and identify biases. This journal was recorded in a notebook.

Participants were interviewed in order from the first person observed to the last person observed. Throughout the data analysis, themes emerged that were consistent with transformational leadership theory, as well as themes which were connected to teacher beliefs and attitudes. While some of the themes which emerged were consistent between participants, each participant also displayed their own unique leadership tendencies and attitudes. The themes that emerged have systematically categorized and organized by which research question they best answered for this chapter. These themes then became the data for discussing the two research questions of this study:

1. What leadership techniques traditionally associated with business leaders are being used by classroom teachers at the collaborative to support high levels of student connectedness with vulnerable at-risk adolescent populations?

2. What experiences and attitudes do classroom teachers at the collaborative have regarding their own leadership and what is the source of those experiences and attitudes?

An analysis of the data revealed that all of the participants displayed elements of transformational leadership in their classrooms, however they did not all display the exact same elements. In addition, although each participant shared the belief that they did not learn these skills from traditional teacher preparatory programs or professional development opportunities, they had differing beliefs about where and how they developed the skills. The significance of this study was in uncovering data regarding what transformational leadership skills these participants displayed in the classroom as well as their individual beliefs on how these transformational leadership skills were developed.

Research Question #1: What leadership techniques traditionally associated with business leaders are being used by classroom teachers at the collaborative to support high levels of student connectedness with vulnerable at-risk adolescent populations?

Data gathered through classroom observations and subsequent interviews of the three participants indicate that the participating special education teachers do indeed exhibit traits consistent with transformational leader theory developed by Bass (1999) in their classrooms. Classroom observations revealed evidence of intellectual stimulation, idealized influence, and individualized consideration. While not every participant showed signs of all three traits, every participant did show signs of some of the traits. Intellectual stimulation was manifested in the

classroom through the use of personalized journal prompts, challenging content, and linking topics to relevant events in the lives of students. Idealized influence was observed in the form of heavy use of symbolism and by the teacher acting as a role model. Individualized consideration was evident through classroom setup, material selection, teacher-student interactions, rewards and motivators, as well differentiated instruction. Interestingly, no clear evidence of inspirational motivation was noted during classroom observations. Table 3 below illustrates the links amongst major research findings from this research and how it aligns with the characteristics of transformational leadership theory as described by Bass (1999).

Table 3

Research findings and transformational leadership theory

Transformational Leadership Theory	Participant behaviors / beliefs
Idealized Influence	• Role modeling polite/respectful language • Role modeling how to respond to unexpected or difficult situations • A deep belief that students learn more than just content from their teachers • Role modeling outside of the classroom
Individualized Consideration	• Classroom setup and student materials are chosen to meet specific student needs • Interactions display a personal interest in each student • Rewards and motivators are specifically tailored to specific individuals and groups • Lessons are differentiated by ability and interest • An understanding of how basic human needs impact the learning process • A belief that a teacher should meet kids where they are at
Intellectual Stimulation	• Lessons are comprised of challenging content

	- Lessons show evidence of higher order thinking skills - Content is liked to student lives and experiences - Assignments are personalized - The creation of an environment where it is safe to take academic risks and fail
Inspirational Motivation	- A sincere pride in the field of education - Finding deep meaning in developing strong connections with students

Follow-up interviews with participants gave greater insight into their use of the transformative leadership qualities observed by the researcher in the classroom. Answers which were consistent with characteristics of idealized influence included a desire to behave in the same manner as expected of students, a belief that the culture of the classroom was the result of the teacher's efforts to lead by example, an understanding that role modeling positive behavior made it easier to work with students in time of crisis, and an understanding that one must behave as a role model at all times. Characteristics of individualized consideration could be identified in participant interview answers which discussed topics such as a willingness to meet kids where they are at, differentiated instruction, and understanding how basic needs can impact learning. Traits of intellectual stimulation were evident in participants heightened awareness of how unsafe a classroom environment can feel to special education students, and a sincere desire to make the classroom safe for academic risk taking. Participant interview answers also made it clear that while no evidence of inspirational motivation was documented during observations, the participants found many of the qualities of inspirational motivation to be critical aspects of the teaching and learning process. In fact, many participants noted that the feeling they get when they have inspired a student in some way is at the very essence of why they find so much meaning in their roles as educators.

Research Question #2: What experiences and attitudes do classroom teachers at the collaborative have regarding their own leadership and what is the source of those experiences and attitudes?

Three general themes emerged from the analysis of the data collected from participant interviews: trial and error, informal mentors, and natural ability. Important to note was that none of the participants cited formal mentoring, professional development, or teacher preparatory programs as the source of their classroom leadership skills.

Trial and error is certainly a natural part of the learning and skill development process, and was clearly indicated as one of the ways in which participants developed their classroom leadership skills. While developing skills in this manner is normal and appropriate, it also leaves much to chance. When leadership skills are not emphasized as an overt and concrete skill, teachers may not recognize them as such and therefore fail to see themselves as leaders. In the long run, not only does this potentially leave to chance whether or not teachers acquire leadership skills, but it serves to undermine the role of teachers as leaders.

Participants also identified informal mentoring as a way in which they acquired classroom leadership skills and developed their own individual views on leadership. Most of the mentors mentioned were other, more veteran teachers. However, in some instances it was in fact people with formal leadership positions acting in nonsupervisory roles. The role of the informal mentor in the development of classroom leadership skills is an important part in the current cycle of leadership development in our public schools, for it is here where these skills are passed on from teacher to teacher. Informal mentoring serves as a system which fills the void left by professional development and teacher preparatory programs which do not emphasize teacher leadership skills as a crucial component of the classroom. In this system, a teacher learns

classroom leadership skills through trial and error, and passes them on through informal mentoring, thus increasing the chances that the skills are learned by future generations of teachers. However, the informal nature of this process leaves much to chance, as the skills are not universally identified and such a system does not lend itself to creating a common language by which aspiring teachers can identify these skills.

A third, and perhaps the most concerning, theme which emerged was a belief that perhaps classroom leadership skills were not acquired at all, but instead were simply the result of innate ability. This belief is of particular concern because it contributes to the notion that classroom leadership skills are perhaps not teachable and can only be attained by certain people with natural abilities. This notion runs counter to the informal mentor system by which these skills are currently being passed on from teacher to teacher, and indicates that in some cases teachers may have a difficult time identifying exactly how they developed these skills. This may stem from the fact that participants in the study generally did not identify their skills as leadership, and were not particularly inclined to recognize themselves as leaders. When one doesn't know they are displaying a skill, it will certainly be difficult to identify where it came from.

Discussion and Conclusions

A review of chapter two indicates that there are indeed many links between transformative leadership theory and classroom teachers as leaders of their classroom organizations. Table 4 below illustrates the links amongst major research findings from this research and how it ties with the relevant literature on transformational leaders.

Table 4

Study Findings and the Literature

Study Findings	Related Literature
Teachers demonstrating transformational leadership skills in the classroom place a heavy emphasis on creating strong student connections	Blum (2005) Pounder (2009) William, Kern, & Waters (2016)
Teachers demonstrating transformational leadership skills in the classroom leverage their strong connections with students when faced with difficult situations and disciplinary issues	Bullis and Yovanoff (2002) Roffey (2012) Marzanno (2003)
Teachers demonstrating transformational leadership skills in the classroom often do not identify those skills as leadership nor do they necessarily view themselves as leaders	Bowman (2004) Koh (2008) Stein (2010)
Teachers demonstrating transformational leadership skills attribute the acquisition of those skills to places other than traditional teacher preparatory programs or professional development opportunities	Treslan (2006) Stein (2010) Burkett (2011)
Teachers demonstrating transformational leadership skills place a heavy emphasis on creating a classroom culture where it is safe for academic risks and failure	Eisenberg, Nuemark-Sztainer, & Perry (2003) Can (2009)

A major finding of this study was that the participants involved all placed a considerable emphasis on creating strong student connections. They do this through both a blend of behaviors that are consistent with aspects of idealized influence and a belief system which incorporates elements of inspirational motivation as described by Bass (1999). Looking at these behaviors through an organizational lens, William, Kern, and Waters (2016) report that it is a longstanding tactic for leaders to strengthen connections with followers in order to increase productivity. Blum (2005) notes that the importance of connectivity is also valuable in a classroom setting. Pounder (2009) takes this thought further by revealing the strength of student connections is the most often spoken about topic amongst faculty members in his study of university professors.

Another major finding in this research was that participants not only emphasize building connections with students, they rely on them during difficult moments or when behaviors that might be disciplinary in nature appear. This can be clearly seen on how Participant A responded to the student reporting late to class, or how Participant B related the manner in which strong connections help diffuse poor behaviors. These findings are consistent with the relevant literature on student connections and behaviors at school. Bullis and Yovanoff (2002) note that student rates of disciplinary infractions are often used as a measuring stick to discern levels of school connectedness. Research conducted by Marzanno indicates that teachers with high levels of connections with students experience far less discipline problems in the classroom. Finally, data collected by Roffey (2012) suggests that teachers with high levels of connections with students are more adept at navigating stressful situations at school when compared to their less connected peers.

A third major finding in this research was that participants involved in the study often did not view themselves as leaders nor speak about their skills as leadership skills. While the behaviors observed were consistent with skills described by Bass (1999), and answers provided during interviews were similarly consistent, participants did not always link these skills with leadership skills. They were much more apt to describe their skills as classroom management techniques or teaching skills. These findings were consistent with research conducted by Bowman (2004) who reported that people who enter the field of education rarely see themselves as leaders. Koh (2008) attributed this to the fact that teacher leadership is generally recognized only as it manifests outside of the classroom by those teachers who are willing to take on more formal leadership or mentoring roles. Despite this, Stein (2010) argued that it is essential for teachers to gain some knowledge of leadership in order to successfully run a classroom.

One reason why teachers may not view themselves as leaders is the lack of any formal leadership training offered in traditional teacher preparatory programs or professional development offerings. A significant finding of this research was that participants attributed the acquisition of their skills to places other than traditional teacher preparatory programs or professional development opportunities. In fact, at least one of the participants (Participant A), demonstrated complete disdain for the teacher preparatory program they took part in and referred to it as a "joke." Participants identified areas such as trial and error, informal mentors, and even innate ability as the source of their leadership skill development. None of them identified teacher preparatory programs or professional development programs. This is right in line with both Burkett (2011) and Stein (2010) who note that leadership is not a topic often included in teacher preparatory programs. Treslan (2006) goes so far as to call teacher leadership a "sleeping giant in most schools" (p. 62).

Another major result from this research was that teachers demonstrating transformational leadership skills place a heavy emphasis on creating a classroom culture where it is safe for students to take academic risks and experience failure. This was evident in participant responses which frequently spoke of "academic risks" and "a safe learning environment." Participants in this study seemed to genuinely understand the inherent risk adolescents take when they participate in a class in front of their peers, and made a concerted effort to create an atmosphere where it was safe to take these risks. These results support research conducted by Eisenberg, Nuemark-Sztainer, and Perry (2003) which indicates students demonstrate a high degree of emotional well-being when teachers forge strong connections and create a safe learning environment. Can (2009) also reported that effective teachers were able to adapt to unforeseen

situations, project honesty and trust, and create an environment which supported academic risk taking.

Significance of the Study

As stated earlier, of major significance is this study's contribution to the limited existing research on teacher leadership in the classroom, as well as contributing to our overall understanding of leadership itself. Leadership is seldom viewed within the confines of a classroom, as it is more often studied within the realm of a business organization. However, it is quite clear that the classroom acts as its own small organization (Cheng, 1994). There is a vast amount of research which examines the ways leadership influences an organization, but very little of that research has been connected to the classroom (Bolger, Caspi, & Roccas, 2013). The research on teacher leadership that does exist most often focuses on teachers in more formal leadership roles outside of the classroom itself (Koh, 2008). Those that do exist primarily look at university level classrooms (Pounder 2009). There are very few studies which have looked at teacher classroom leadership in the special education classroom at a special education collaborative setting. This study, in fact, may be one of the only studies which investigates teacher leadership within a special education classroom at a special education collaborative.

As transformational leadership theory is one of the most widely studied leadership theories, it served as the basis for this study. The researcher observed and interviewed three teachers at a special education collaborative to ascertain if they were demonstrating signs of transformational leadership within their classrooms. All three participants showed evidence during observations of characteristics that were consistent with transformational leadership theory as described by Bass (1999).

Transformational leadership theory was also chosen because research indicates that a transformational leader is extremely adept at forging strong connections with followers. A great deal of research indicates that when adolescents feel connected to school they are dramatically less likely to display harmful behaviors (Blum, 2005; Capern & Hammond, 2014; Monahan, Oesterle & Hawkins, 2010; Pounder, 2009; Roffey, 2012; Treslan, 2006). That notion alone should encourage educational researchers to investigate transformational leadership and how it might manifest itself in a classroom setting. However, student connectedness not only pays dividends for students, but for teachers as well. The demand for qualified teachers is at an all-time high as many individuals are hesitant to enter the education field (Siniscalco, 2002). When compared to the private sector, the low salaries of the education field drive many prospective teachers away (Frijters, Shields, & Price, 2004). Additionally, increasing demands and government scrutiny have driven many veteran teachers away from the field (Smithers and Robinson, 2003). Current research suggests that teachers with strong connections to their students have a better chance of managing the stressors of the education field in comparison to peers with weaker connections (Roffey, 2012). The participants in this study all revealed characteristics of transformational leadership which may indeed offer hope that their levels of connection to their students is strong.

As stated earlier, of major significance is this study's ability to contribute to limited research on classroom leadership. As with all qualitative research, the findings from this study offer a deep and meaningful understanding of classroom leadership at a very specific setting, but is limited in its ability to be transferred into other settings. However, the results of the data analysis is consistent with other studies on leadership and therefore may be of interest to those who are looking to incorporate leadership training into formal teacher preparatory programs or

professional development opportunities. It is hoped that this research can begin to address misconstructions in the existing literature by expanding the traditional view of leadership as well as teaching and learning. While this research is limited to one special education collaborative, the results stretch far beyond that. The results from this research have the potential to make an impression on the field of education in three major areas: Student behavior and outcomes, teacher morale and retention, and school leadership structures.

Strengths and Limitations

This study has several strengths. The study was well grounded in leadership and organizational theory. This enabled the researcher to make links between the study findings with the existing literature in chapter four. Phenomenology was an excellent approach to this study, as it allowed for the phenomenon to be described by the participants themselves. The sincere nature of the answers given by the participants during interviews allowed the data to take on a personal flair that gave real insight into their view on leadership. The journal kept by the researcher allowed for biases on the part of the researcher to be identified and not taint the insights provided by the participants. Finally, the study itself is unique, as there is very little research concerning teacher classroom leadership at a special education setting, if any at all.

There are, however, clear limitations and shortcomings to conducting the research at a special education collaborative as well. First, although the research was conducted at more than one school site, all students at those sites were receiving special education services. Future research at regular education sites is required to confirm the findings and conclude whether or not the results are slanted by the unique nature of the site in the study. Secondly, the number of participants in the study is small, consisting of only one teacher from each site, and may not accurately represent the majority of teachers at the state level. Finally, the existing literature

suggests that student connectedness to school and leadership are related to many factors. It is difficult to make a definitive link between the two without directly interviewing students, and the researcher chose not to do so for this particular study. While there are certainly limitations to this study, it can serve as a starting point for future studies on classroom leadership. This study focused solely on teacher behaviors and viewpoints. Future research could include student behaviors and viewpoints.

<div align="center">**Recommendations**</div>

This study has provided some compelling data which can be used by teachers, administrators, and teacher preparatory programs to improve teaching and learning. The researcher has three recommendations based on the study listed below.

Recommendation one: teachers run leadership institutes

Participants in this study identified informal mentoring as a major source from where they learned classroom leadership skills and formed their own distinct views on leadership. While some of the informal mentors mentioned during interviews were administrators acting in nonsupervisory roles, the majority of informal mentors identified in interviews were veteran teachers. The informal mentor plays a central part in the current system of leadership development in our public schools, for they serve as the gatekeepers of this knowledge. In effect, they have filled the leadership development vacuum in a system wherein leadership development is ignored by formal teacher preparatory programs and professional development opportunities. In the informal mentoring system, a teacher develops classroom leadership skills through a process of trial and error, and then passes it on to a future generation of teachers through informal mentoring. While effective, the informal mentoring system leaves much to be

desired, as the leadership skills are not always identified as such and no consistent common language exists to identify them.

The information presented in chapter four and illustrated in table 4 could be used to begin the process for formalizing a framework for understanding how teacher leadership manifests itself in the classroom. This initial framework could be shared and expanded over time as further research takes place in order to truly deepen our understanding of teacher classroom leadership. The informal mentoring system could be formalized through the use of teacher-run leadership institutes using this framework. While the data in this particular study is unique to the site, teacher run leadership institutes would be able to customize the framework to address problems of practice pertinent to their own individual school sites. A sample of how a teacher run leadership institute might be used to address the needs of a particular school site is illustrated in table 5.

Table 5

Example Teacher Run Leadership Institute Initiative

Action Steps	Specific Examples
Problem of practice identified for site	High school teachers at Generic High School are frustrated by rates of student tardiness to class.
Teachers study existing literature	Teachers at Generic High School read current literature regarding student tardiness and attendance. Additionally, teachers read literature referenced in chapter two of this research on the subject of student connectedness, organizational leadership, teacher leadership, and transformational leadership.
Teachers collaborate to produce a localized study	Teachers at Generic High School reflect on their current behaviors and how they may impact rates of student tardiness, collect data on the current methods being used to intervene with student tardiness, and discuss the data.

Teachers analyze data	Teachers at Generic High School analyze data collected on student tardiness and how it impacts classroom achievement.
Teachers form an action plan	Using the information learned from the literature and local data analysis, teachers at Generic High School develop a pilot program to address student rates of tardiness which will last one quarter. Results of the pilot program will be reviewed and reported to the entire faculty.

The teacher run leadership institute is a way to formalize the informal mentoring system currently passing on teacher classroom leadership skills. It does this by bringing teachers together to study leadership techniques and talk about them in an attempt to solve a problem of practice that is unique to their school site. In this manner, classroom teachers are given an opportunity to use classroom leadership to improve their school sites from within. The teacher run leadership institute offers a way to empower teachers to become leaders in their own buildings and classrooms.

Recommendation two: administrators adopt a shared leadership model

The literature reviewed in chapter two of this study clearly indicates that an essential element of transformational leadership is that the leader is instrumental in helping to develop the leadership skills of his or her followers. Data from this study supports the existing literature by revealing moments when participants found their own views and behaviors transformed by both formal and informal leaders. Take, for example, the statements of Participant A described in chapter four when they detail how they transformed their response to trash in the hallways based on the actions of their building principal. Administrators who take seriously their role in developing the leadership capabilities of their faculty support an environment where teachers are

more likely to feel comfortable taking innovative approaches to the many challenges facing educators in the classroom today.

Administrators should become familiar with the classroom leadership framework that is proposed under recommendation number one, and use it during discussions with teachers about the teaching and learning process. In addition to helping their teachers broaden their skills in the classroom, this will help to groom them as potential leaders as well. The stresses of the educational field are extremely high, and the number of qualified candidates looking to move into educational leadership roles is shrinking. As Malone and Caddell (2000) point out, "The demand for effective school principals is at an all-time high, the result of reform efforts, constant pubic criticism, and demographic realities. Half of America's public school teachers will leave the profession over the next decade, and the same pattern is likely to hold true for principals" (p. 162). With a shortage of qualified leaders looking for administrative leadership positions, grooming and retaining internal candidates is increasingly important. Identifying leadership skills that can be used successfully by teachers at the classroom can alleviate this in three ways: 1) Equip teaches with skills which research suggests will help them overcome the stresses involved in a demanding field, 2) Increase rates of teacher retention by inspiring and motivating them, and 3) groom a future generation of school leaders.

Recommendation three: teacher preparation programs adopt the leadership frameworks

In addition to teachers and administrators, those who design teacher preparation programs could garner much information from this study. As stated previously in the research findings, the teachers involved in the study did not believe the formal teacher preparatory programs they participated in had helped them develop the leadership skills they were displaying in classroom observations. In addition, the participants did not view themselves as leaders and did not

identify the skills they were displaying in the classroom as leadership skills. This was perhaps due to the lack of exposer to literature on leadership and how it can impact an organization or classroom. Teacher preparatory programs that used the leadership framework proposed in recommendation one would be able to address this current void in teacher preparatory programs. If new teachers were infused with leadership training during their preparatory programs, they would be better able to identify theses skills and incorporate them into their classrooms.

Research Dissemination

The results of this study will be circulated in numerous ways. First, the researcher will share the results of the research with the participants from the study itself. Second, the researcher will share the study with members of the leadership team within the researcher's special education collaborative at a leadership retreat. Third, the researcher will share the results of the study with the faculties at the various schools within the special education collaborative and structure leadership institutes for the upcoming year. Lastly, the special education collaborative where the researcher is currently employed has approached the researcher and asked that the findings be shared with member school districts in the form of professional development classes offered by the collaborative.

Conclusion

The researcher came to the research with two biases that needed to be monitored in the researcher's journal in order to assure that any biases did influence the research data. The first bias was the belief that teachers are the true leaders in any given school. The researcher has worked with principals that were gifted leaders, and principals that were not. In both cases, the researcher has observed that the excellent classroom teacher was able to remain excellent. Given the research on leadership and its importance to an organization, the researcher had come to

believe that these teachers were excellent, at least in part, because they themselves had taken on the role of leaders within their classroom and in some cases outside of their classrooms as well. The fact that many the participants in the study did not view themselves as leaders nor did they identify their skills as leadership skills emphasized to the researcher just how much of this is left up to chance.

The second bias that the researcher had to be aware of was the belief that one of the hallmarks of extraordinary teaching was the manner in which it inspired students. When compared with transformational leadership theory as described by Bass (1999), that aspect of teaching most closely resembles inspirational motivation. As detailed in chapter four, the researcher was unable to detect concrete signs of inspirational motivation during classroom observations of participants. Participant interviews, however, indicated that aspects of inspirational motivation were at the core of what they aspired to be as teachers and achieve with students. The researcher believes that inspirational motivation, as it plays out in the classroom, may be difficult to witness in a classroom observation and that further research studies which more directly involve students would be necessary to ascertain how effective it is.

While the researcher came into the study with his own biases, it is believed that the methodological steps used in analyzing the data, the reflective journal, and the honest reporting of them in this section have kept them from tainting the research. Additionally, the fact that the researcher found no evidence of one of their strongest biases during classroom observations should provide evidence that the researcher's biases did not slant the research findings.

This research has provided the beginnings of a classroom leadership framework that can be used by administrative leaders, policy makers, teacher preparatory programs, future researchers, and teacher leaders as a reference point to continue the discussion on classroom

leadership. By incorporating this classroom leadership framework into formal teacher training and preservice programs we can be better assured that our teachers are prepared for the complex times they find themselves in. The development of teacher leadership institutes offers a path for current administrative leaders to not only tackle some of the specific problems facing their individual schools, but also a vehicle to increase teacher retention rates and groom future leaders.

Finally, it is important to reemphasize that a major benefit of increasing teacher classroom leadership skills is the impact the literature suggests it has on student connectedness. The existing literature on adolescents is quite clear that they perform better in the classroom and demonstrate healthy behaviors when they are strongly connected to their schools and teachers (Blum, 2005; Capern & Hammond, 2014; Oesterle & Hawkins, 2010; Pounder, 2009; Roffey, 2012; Treslan, 2006).

The link to school connectedness stretches well beyond academic results, and has the potential to make a major impact on two concerning trends in the field of education. First, there is evidence that high levels of school connectedness can combat adolescent use of drugs and alcohol (Catalano, Haggerty, Oesterle, Fleming, & Hawkins, 2004). In an era where the nation is besieged by an opioid crisis, the need to increase teachers' ability to connect with students seems clear. Second, research conducted by Reinke and Herman (2002) suggests that low levels of school connectedness is one of most reliable predictors of school violence. In fact, research conducted by Wilson (2004) determined that school connectedness was a better predictor of violent behavior than other factors such as school size, ethnic makeup, and academic performance. In a post-Columbine world where instances of school violence are an increasingly normal event, equipping our teachers with the tools to connect with students and diffuse potentially violent situations seems to be of the utmost importance.

The findings in this research supports the existing literature as the participants noted that it is in fact their strong connections with students that enables them to effectively intervene during moments of crisis or difficulty. While there are many factors which impact levels of teacher and student connectedness, the case made by this research that one component is levels of teacher leadership skill is quite compelling. Increasing teacher levels of leadership skills through teacher run leadership institutes and formal teacher preparatory programs offers us a path to equip our teachers to act as leaders and guide our students through moments where they may be prone to make poor decisions which carry with them lifelong consequences.

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APPENDIX A
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. Please share with me the following:(a) Your educational background (degrees, certification, teaching) (b) Your teaching experience

2. Please describe what strengths you have in the classroom relevant to the topic of study. What particular strategies do you use to connect with hard to reach students?

3. How did you develop these connection building techniques?

4. How would you define teacher leadership that is classroom based?

5. What contributions have you made as a teacher leader in your school, district, and classroom? How did you become involved in making these contributions?

6. What are some examples of good leadership (students, classroom, teachers, support staff, parents, community, etc.)?

7. What inspires and/or encourages you as a teacher? Are there any specific experiences that have inspired/encouraged you?

8. Can you describe any experiences where you were hindered from teaching or making strong connections with students?

9. What kind of impact does teacher leadership have on student behavior and performance?

10. How do you know if you are being effective as a teacher leader?