

August 2018

## Building Capacity and Sustainability through Teachers Leading Teachers

William Woodland Johnson  
*University of South Florida*, woodland.johnson@sdhc.k12.fl.us

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Building Capacity and Sustainability through Teachers Leading Teachers

by

William Woodland Johnson

A graduate project submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Education Specialist  
Department of Leadership, Counseling, Adult, Career and Higher Education  
College of Education  
University of South Florida

Major Professor: Judith A. Ponticell, Ph.D.

Co-Major Professor: John Mann, Ed.D.

Zorka Karanxha, Ed.D.

Date of Approval:

May 10, 2018

Keywords: teacher leadership, teacher empowerment, building capacity

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## **ABSTRACT**

This capstone project was part of a group project completed by two principals in elementary schools and a principal coach in Hillsborough County, Florida. Each of the team members has a passion for the work of administrator and lead learner in a turnaround school. Through creating a culture of teacher leadership, especially in high poverty schools, we believe students will succeed. We were looking for what a high performing school culture would look like if teachers were leading the work through ongoing inquiry and personalized support.

My individual focus was, in what kinds of work experiences did teachers feel they learned the most? What were those situations? Who else was involved, and what did they do? What did teachers do to foster their own development? What made these situations high point learning experiences?

My review of selected literature was guided by an Appreciative Inquiry perspective. Themes in the literature reviewed included: teacher collaboration, teacher leadership, and job-embedded professional development.

Key insights to my area of focus included strong confirmation of the need for differentiated professional development for teachers to foster and improve teacher leadership. The research reviewed examined different professional development models and their relationship to teacher needs. School leaders should pay attention to how teachers are supported, how time is allotted, the degree to which a leader is committed, the need for collaboration among teachers, and the need for job-embedded learning and teacher support.

## SECTION 1. INTRODUCTION

Teachers are at the heart of efforts to improve student achievement. However, teachers are often the target of change initiatives rather than the leaders of those initiatives. When teachers are empowered to learn and are recognized as leaders within a school, they feel valued which results in a higher quality learning experience for students. By encouraging teachers to be reflective and own the work in schools, teachers see continuous learning as an opportunity for growth rather than a requirement. This moves learning from being compliance driven to reliance driven, where educators rely on their learning to stay current in their practice to provide students with high quality learning experiences each and every day. Such experiences are vital to all students but most important in turnaround schools. Our struggling students, more than any others, need high performing teachers who are engaged in their professional learning and growth.

Our project team was composed of three leaders from Hillsborough County Schools – two elementary school principals and a principal coach. Each of the team members has a passion for the work of administrator and lead learner in a turnaround school. Through creating a culture of teacher leadership, especially in high poverty schools, we believe students will succeed. The focus of our team’s inquiry was: What would a high performing school culture look like if teachers were leading the work of building capacity and sustainability through ongoing inquiry and personalized support?

**Personal focus.** My individual focus was, in what kinds of work experiences did teachers feel they learned the most? What were those situations? Who else was involved, and what did

they do? What did teachers do to foster their own development? What made these situations high point learning experiences?

### **School District Context**

Hillsborough County Public Schools (HCPS) is divided into eight areas and has more than 270 school sites, including 141 kindergarten through grade five elementary schools, 43 middle schools, 27 high schools, five kindergarten through grade eight schools and 47 charter schools. Of these schools 141 are Title I schools with high numbers or high percentages of children from low-income families. Title I schools receive federal financial assistance to help schools ensure that all children meet challenging state academic standards. All public schools receiving Title I funds are district schools operating as Schoolwide Programs. Schools utilize Title I funds to add highly qualified staff, support parent and community involvement efforts, improve staff professional development, purchase additional instructional materials and supplies, and add technology and needed equipment.

**Building district capacity.** School level support is provided by an Area Superintendent and an Area Leadership Team. The Area Leadership Team includes a Principal Coach, MTSS/RTI Facilitator, ESE Supervisor, ELL District Liaison, Elementary Generalist, Professional Development Liaison, and Human Resource Partner. Specific content and job-embedded curriculum support are provided by area On-the-Ground Coaches in ELA, math, and science. The goal of the Area Leadership Team is to support the Area Superintendent in providing differentiated supports to principals in his/her area and to support all schools. Support is focused on schools in turnaround, while also providing supports necessary for all schools to be successful.

**Turnaround schools.** HCPS focuses on using proven best practices to strengthen district capacity to assist and collaborate with turnaround schools while providing individualized supports



based on data points specific to each school. In addition to specialized plans for each school, the district continues to build its own capacity for supporting turnaround schools by working in tandem with several outside partners. The organizations chosen as partners all have an extensive, successful record of providing support to high-poverty, low performing schools nationally, as schools and districts build systems and structures that provide for the very best education for disadvantaged students.

**District priorities.** In 2015 Hillsborough County Public Schools hired a new superintendent. After collaborating with the School Board, a new vision and mission were created. The vision is “Preparing Students for Life,” and the mission is to provide an education and the supports needed to enable each student to excel as a successful and responsible citizen. The superintendent is invested in making sure all students are successful. Four Strategic Priorities were established: (1) increase graduation rates, (2) communicate with stakeholders, (3) build strong culture and relationships, and (4) strengthen foundations of financial stewardship. Our group project was directly linked to the district’s priority of building strong culture and relationships.

### **School Context**

The elementary school is a Title 1 Renaissance School in the Hillsborough County school district. The school is comprised of 823 students in grades K-5. The student demographic includes: Caucasians (12%), African Americans (27%), Hispanic (57%), (.003%), and Multiracial (3%). Seventy families are considered homeless with many other families living in multi-family single residence situations. The mobility rate within the school averages 50% each year, sometimes reaching as high as 60%.

Of the current 105 fifth graders in the school, 43 have attended the for all six years, and 62 have been enrolled or unenrolled throughout their elementary career. The average daily attendance

is over 90% with 6% having 10 or more days absence. The suspension rate over the past four years has decreased from 596 in and out of school suspensions to 12 in the 2014-2015 school year. The state school grade has increased from an overall “F” rating to a “D” rating for the 2015 school year.

The elementary school is located within the boundaries of the University Area Community in Tampa, FL. In May of 2015 a community survey was conducted by the University Area Community Development Corporation, Inc. (University Area CDC), a 501(c) (3) public/private partnership, to gather information from members of the community in the following areas: Education, Housing, Health and Well-Being, and Crime and Safety. The community study was conducted in the zip code areas of 33613 (48.4%) and 33612 (30.1%), using a voluntary random sampling of community members. The community members’ responses were gathered using printed surveys, walking surveys and online surveys. The survey included 375 responses with the majority being female (63.7%) with 42.9% having a marital status of single.

The current general demographics of the community showed that adults ages 25-34 make up an average of 32.7% of the community. The racial make-up consisted of African Americans (51.1%), Hispanic (27.5%), and Caucasian (15.7%). The primary language recorded is 71.4% speaking English.

**Education.** The education levels of the community varied from a basic Kindergarten to eighth grade education to having a master’s degree: Kindergarten through eighth grade 5.77%, some high school 21.70%, high school diploma or GED 29.12 %, some college 13.74%, trade training 10.71%, Associate degree 8.24%, Bachelor’s degree 8.24%, and master’s degree 2.75%. Survey respondents indicated the community school most attended was this Elementary School.

The employment status of the community shows that the majority of community members live below the poverty rate with an average income of less than \$15K (50.8%) a year. The response rates indicated the current employment status of surveyors to be 110 fully employed, 80 unemployed and 71 retired or disabled. The number one most needed improvement to employment situation was a need for better pay. The greatest barrier to employment was noted as a lack of transportation at 84 responses. The second highest need was a lack of reliable childcare at 55 responses and finally the lack of jobs within the University Area obtained 54 responses.

**Housing.** Rental properties make up 73.6% of the housing in the community. Of the survey participants, 11.5% were home owners, and 30.7% were families living with 4-6 people in the household. The average rental fees are \$600 - \$799 with 195 of the survey participants living in public housing.

**Crime and safety.** The University Area has long been referred to as Suitcase City due to its transient population. Many of the communities' issues have revolved around the safety of families in the community. The largest crime components from highest to lowest are: drugs, burglary, gang activity and domestic violence. The community houses a full time Sheriff's substation which has a high impact in the University Area. Survey respondents reported that they believe the sheriff's office has been a good advocate for the community (117 responses) and that they are helpful and respectful to the residents within the community area (99 responses). Additionally, they believe the officers are quick to respond to the needs of the residents within the area (86 responses).

**Well-being.** One hundred people responded that the cost of food is too high, 52 found it difficult to get children to eat the food, and 52 responded that fresh food expires faster than processed foods. Overall health concerns reported were: obesity (171 responses), high cholesterol

(94 responses), and high blood pressure (91 responses). Survey respondents who had health insurance was 60.4% with insurance and 31.3% without health insurance. Of the families responding, 51.9% indicated that their children do not participate in any after-school programming activities provided by UACDC or the YMCA.

### **Community Redevelopment Efforts**

The UACDC and the Tampa Innovative Alliance are working with Florida Hospital, The University Mall, County Commission and area businesses to bring stability to the area. The elementary school is in the process of converting to a community school model. The Children's Home Society, USF, Florida Hospital, UACDC, Van Dyke Church and Tampa Innovative Alliance are partnering in this implementation. Community organizations are working to bring parenting classes, child care, social services, health care, job training and affordable housing opportunities to the University Area. The partnership's goal to increase the school performance level and thus change the trajectory of poverty.

### **My Role**

I am the principal of this elementary school. I have been here for the past three years. This is my twenty-fourth year in the field of education. I have held positions as a music Teacher, Title 1 Lead Teacher, Assistant Principal and Principal. My career has been one centered on high needs schools serving impoverished and underserved students. One question guides my work every day: Do you make a difference in the lives of children? I believe helping my students advocate for themselves will help them lead a happy and fulfilled life. Their intelligence has nothing to do with their circumstances, but everything to do with their potential. As educators we must work to build their support systems in order for them to have an opportunity to be successful. My goal is to help my staff members understand their ability to change the lives of their students by helping them to

reach their potential. This is why I focus on building teacher leaders and a culture where teachers are empowered to take charge of their own learning. Empowered teachers empower students as learners.

I have built partnerships with local universities to develop a Teacher Leader Certification process at this school. Twenty-two teachers have successfully completed the certification program which is the first strand of the Master's in Educational Leadership degree. Building lasting partnerships is key in creating a school environment where voices are heard and where everyone shares a common focus on student success.

## **SECTION 2. PERSPECTIVES FROM SELECTED LITERATURE**

Currently, the School District of Hillsborough County (SDHC) provides professional development for teachers delivered in one-size-fits all delivery models. The district is so large that there are multiple initiatives each year, and each district department operates as though their area is most important. This universal approach, without prioritization of initiatives, provides teachers with a mixed message of what *is* most important. It also contributes to a lack of commitment from teachers and uncertainty among teachers deciding how to spend their time in the classroom. When teachers are provided with so many areas of focus, they may not develop a sense of ownership of their learning or leadership affecting decisions about learning at their school site.

Our project team believes professional development is most effective when it is based upon needs and when follow-up support is included specific to the school where teachers engage in their work with their students. Without a model that supports teacher leadership, we impact morale in a negative way which results in a decrease in teacher retention. Thus, it is time that we provide support at the school site that is more individualized and will lead other teachers to support what they individually need. It is important that we “transform professional learning so that it really supports educator learning...[E]ducation leaders will need to pay greater attention to the importance of teacher agency. In addition to analyzing data, visiting classrooms, and reviewing school and system goals, leaders must cultivate an environment of continuous learning that engages teachers in their professional learning at every step of the way” (Calvert, 2016, p. 3).

## **Focus**

My review of selected literature was guided by an Appreciative Inquiry perspective. The current professional development delivery model, I believe, reflects a deficit model instead of a strengths-based model. From an appreciative perspective, I was interested in the work experiences in which teachers felt they learned the most. What were those situations? Who else was involved, and what did they do? What did teachers do to foster their own development? What made these situations high point learning experiences?

**Methods used to conduct the review.** To prepare this literature review, the University of South Florida Libraries general keyword, title, and abstract searches were used to search a variety of databases including: Academic Search Premier, EBSCO, ERIC, Google Scholar, JSTOR, SAGE, and Web of Science. Searches included the following keywords: professional development, teacher motivation, teacher collaboration, teacher leadership. Sources within selected texts were cross-referenced, resulting in additional searches by author or source. Sources were limited to the last 10 years, and the primary focus was on studies conducted in the United States.

## **Teacher Collaboration**

Teacher collaboration has not been established as an important component of professional development programs for teachers. It has been noted that “[t]op-down school leadership approaches can hinder professional collaboration” (Gates & Watkins, 2010, p. ). Additionally, group dynamics can sometimes stymie well-intentioned efforts at collaboration (Bezzina, 2006; Grossman, Wineburg, & Woolworth, 2001). Furthermore, teachers have not been given time for collaboration. “School schedules, duties, and the multitude of demands on teachers often lead to a lack of meaningful communication within the same school, department, or grade level (Musanti

& Pence, 2010). In many countries, a lack of shared planning time complicates efforts to collaborate within the school day” (Lock, 2006 as cited by Carpenter & Linton, 2016, p. 99). These issues have led organizations, districts and schools to explore additional models in order to meet the needs of teachers through professional development.

One example of a less traditional professional learning experience is provided in Carpenter and Linton’s (2016) work on Edcamps “unconferences.” According to the authors, Worldwide, there is a dire need for high-quality professional learning opportunities for teachers. Given the historical failings of traditional educator PD in many countries and the importance of PD to school improvement efforts, the exploration and critique of new models of professional learning are important to the education field” (p. 106).

Edcamps is an approach to professional development that began in 2010 to replace or compensate for the limitations of the traditional approach (i.e., learning is more structured and predetermined apart from teacher input). Edcamps use Open Space Technology (OST), “a structure for meetings which holds that groups with a shared focus can self-organize, collaborate and solve problems together” (Carpenter & Linton, 2016, p. 97). The participant-driven and informal nature of unconference PD such as Edcamps means that they may differ in fundamental ways from other PD. Furthermore, Edcamps seem to feature a complicated mix of some of the maligned characteristics of traditional models (e.g., short duration) and the positive qualities associated with new PD approaches (e.g., active learning).

Two knowledge constructs are used to describe learning in Edcamps: andragogy and heutagogy. “Andragogy holds that adults need to be in the learning process . . . have reservoirs of experiences that are potential resources for learning . . . and are oriented towards learning which is problem-focused and has immediate relevance” (Carpenter & Linton, 2016, p. 98). In contrast,



heutagogy is “a more recent extension of andragogy that further empowers adult learners to more fully determine their own learning path and process” (Carpenter & Linton, 2016, p. 97). In heutagogy self-direction is key. Edcamps take a social constructivism approach as a theoretical perspective meaning that educators are expected to gain knowledge through a collaborative approach where they interact online to explain, dialogue and negotiate their learning. That educators attend Edcamps voluntarily, despite their busy schedules, suggests they perceive a need for PD. Edcamps provide access to PD that is led by teachers and is cost efficient.

Carpenter and Linton (2016) delved into the motivations for attending and experiences of a large number of participants from multiple Edcamp events. Their inquiry was guided by two questions: What are participants' motivations for attending Edcamps? What are participants' perceptions of their Edcamp experiences? The researchers found:

Participant motivations and perceptions alone cannot make the case for the value of a particular PD event or program, but the respondents to our surveys nonetheless indicated high levels of enthusiasm for their Edcamp experiences, consistent with the findings of previous research on Edcamps (e.g., Swanson & Leanness, 2012; Rhodes & Mills, 2014).  
(p. 104)

Research on Edcamps opens the door for additional research to be conducted on such programs and their long-term effect on the growth of teacher development.

### **Teacher Leadership**

Literature reviewed also pointed to the increased need for teacher leadership in today's schools. With new standards and accountability measures in place, there are not enough teacher leaders to help with improving the ever-changing instructional programs within schools.

Furthermore, current approaches to professional development do not increase the leadership skills of teachers.

Hunzicker's (2012) study explored the development of eight teachers in the area of informal teacher leadership using professional development and job-embedded collaboration in the Midwestern region of the United States. These teachers were compared to teachers in other studies on professional development focused on leadership. The study described how professional development was designed to improve teaching practice and build leadership skills. It involved job-embedded collaboration to support teachers towards leadership over time, as they accumulated professional experience and self-efficacy (Hunzicker. 2012, p. 267).

Hunzicker defines the term *teacher leadership* as “the process by which teachers, individually or collectively, influence their colleagues, principals, and other members of school communities to improve teaching and learning practices with the aim of increasing learning and achievement” (2012, p. 270). Additional research cited in the article showed a need for professional development and collaborative experiences for teachers in order to increase teacher leadership based on shared values, tasks, and dialogue (i.e., spurred through conversation or coaching).

Further examples showed that the collaborative experiences afforded to teachers with these follow-up opportunities were highly valuable in developing teacher leadership. Findings from a study by Ottenbreit-Leftwich (2010) supported professional development that centers on teacher values. Dozier (2007) and Danielson (2006) linked professional development on using data and research to job-embedded tasks to increase instructional conversations. Others have studied how providing coaching cycles to teachers as a follow-up solidified new learning and opened up dialogue among teachers. “Together, job-embedded professional development and collaboration

prepare teacher leaders through ‘personalized, work-based and process-rich experiences’ paired with opportunities for practice, high quality feedback and time to reflect” (Rhodes & Burnett, 2009, p. 269).

However, as Hunzicker (2012) asserted, “Contrary to findings of similar studies, leadership-focused professional development provided only peripheral support towards teacher leadership” (p. 286). Hunzicker further noted that school leadership must support progress toward teacher leadership. The time associated with collaboration and continuous learning opportunities must be supported in order to promote teacher leaders. Finally, the article showed there was indeed room for additional research on supporting teacher leadership.

### **Job-Embedded Professional Development**

An article published by the National Institute for Excellence in Teaching (NIET) cited work on job-embedded professional development (Biancarosa, Bryk, & Dexter, 2010). The study looked at job-embedded professional development in The TAP System which uses collaborative teams and coaching in the PD model. The model focuses on a four step process which includes: (1) Targeting Specific Student’s Needs, (2) Selecting and Field Testing Classroom Strategies, (3) Learning New Strategies in Cluster Group Meetings, and (4) Providing Follow-Up Coaching to EVERY Teacher (National Institute for Excellence in Teaching, 2012). This model must be implemented with a TAP Leadership Team to ensure the fidelity of the system and monitor the goals associated with the development plan. The TAP System (The System for Teacher and Student Advancement) reports meeting the needs of 20,000 teachers in ten states.

Biancarosa et al. (2010) found that the use of job-embedded professional development only worked sometimes. Many conditions were needed for the professional development to be meaningful and effective. No Child Left Behind was described as focused on high quality

professional development, which is sustained and centered on the classroom. The article referred to “sustained duration” as having solid research behind its role in job-embedded professional development (p. 2).

The article also points toward the need for a strong principal to lead the work of collaborative teams, which use explicit protocols and have time to meet regularly. Four questions are needed to assess the investment in PD pay off. They are:

1. Do all teachers experience high-quality PD?
2. Does the PD increase teachers’ knowledge and skills?
3. Do the new knowledge and skills translate into new classroom practices?
4. Do the new classrooms practices improve student learning? (p. 4).

The article further addresses the increased need for continued job-embedded professional development. The article shows this can be a great method to increase teacher learning; however, the professional development must be “consistent and reliable” (p. 19). Finally, the NIET states, “PD will not work consistently and reliably unless schools find ways to create a structure and assign specific authority and responsibility to those charged with supporting it, overseeing it, and reinforcing it at every turn” (p. 19).

Amendum (2014) explores the notion of job-embedded professional development in relationship to early intervention. The article explores this model in a school with ten first grade teachers and 45 students receiving interventions. The reading skills of the students were basic reading foundation skills that should be mastered by first grade students.

Several researchers were cited by Amendum, including Linda Darling-Hammond on high-quality professional development. Darling-Hammond supports the need for “sustained, ongoing, content-focused, and embedded professional development” (p. 349). Additionally, Amendum

referred to Wayne, A. J., Yoon, K. S., Zhu, P., Cronen, S., & Garet, M.S. (2008) which suggested four points for solid professional development components: (1) increased knowledge in content; (2) a practice of using the daily work of teachers; (3) data driven and integrated in professional learning communities; and (4) strong administrative support. Their study reviewed the need for early interventions in reading and effective reading instruction in the core areas defined in the 2000 National Reading Panel report.

Within the study, Wayne et al. (2008) looked at professional development using an ENRICH Coach who worked with the teacher on balanced literacy. The ENRICH model of professional development centered on intervention and included a three part model of: Familiar Reading, Word Study, and Guided Reading with weekly coaching and feedback sessions. These sessions focused not only on the teacher's practices but also students' needs within the lesson. The research supported the need for intervention strategies; however, there was an additional need for ongoing support for students. Some students' gaps in instruction may need to be supported by additional time.

Amendum also referred to the work of Lave and Wenger (1991) that supports the need to provide teachers with professional development while they are engaged in their daily practices. They call this learning "acquiring and applying knowledge within the context of daily instruction" (as cited by Amendum, p. 351). Biancarosa et al., (2010) "demonstrated how one-on-one teacher coaching improved students' literacy learning" (as cited by Amendum, p. 352).

Amendum (2014) further states "within such a study it would be important to collect data around fidelity of implementation, a further limitation of the current study...Therefore, longitudinal studies that can document the effect of intervention duration and intensity over time would be of great benefit to the field" (p. 372).

Finally, Fairman and Mackenzie (2015) study how teachers use their influence to impact teaching and learning with other teachers. Their study includes five schools in Maine and how teachers use a conceptual model, Spheres of Teacher Leadership Action for Learning. Within seven rural schools, teachers were committed to improve the student learning outcomes of their students. “Using York-Barr and Duke’s model (2004) as a lens for looking at teacher leadership, we found we could validate and expand the model by showing the many ways that teachers engage in leadership activity” (as cited by Fairman & Mackenzie, p. 77). York-Barr and Duke’s model is based on 140 studies of teacher leadership. Fairman and Mackenzie state that “teacher leadership implies that it is the job of all teachers to engage fully in fueling the forward movement toward improving learning for students” (p. 81).

York-Barr and Duke’s Framework was expanded upon when Fairman and Mackenzie (2015) “described spheres of leadership and depicted the complexity and multi-dimensionality of teacher leadership” (p. 62). These areas of the framework were expanded into “Means of Teacher Influence and Targets of Teacher Influence” (p. 62). “These spheres describe who is involved in the activity, what they are doing and the scope of the activity” (p. 63). The strategies used to influence others were modelled, coached, collaborated and advocated by teachers. Also, teachers had to build trust with other teachers and have a climate for working collegially.

Fairman and Mackenzie also discussed the importance of building relationships, as well as the importance of teachers not being placed in situations where other teachers perceived them as in a “hierarchical relationship.” Finally, teachers who took on the role of teacher leadership saw their roles shift from looking at student achievement from a classroom perspective to a school-wide perspective focused on learning for all. The authors “advocate for a shift away from notions of leadership in the narrow sense of the qualities a person has or what role he or she holds” (p. 81).

“It is about influencing each other to improve their own learning and ultimately student learning” (p. 81).

In order to create a professional organization where teachers are leading the work of leading one another, the principal must establish a clear vision of this work at the school as each school comes with its own unique strengths and needs. Creating a compelling vision is a vital part of impacting change in any organization and guides the decisions that are made by the members of the organization. “Vision is a destination - a fixed point to which we focus all our effort. Strategy is a route - an adaptable path to get us where we want to go” (Sinek, 2011, p. #?). It is especially important in schools because policies have been created in our educational system to promote competition instead of interdependence (Townsend, 2015). For example, teachers are rated on their instruction as well as the performance of their students, which creates silos in schools where teachers prefer to work in isolation so they control the results of their students’ performance since those results will impact their evaluation.

Meanwhile, districts are shifting away from centralized leadership models. Therefore, principals will need support that is different from what has been traditionally provided. They will likely need support in order to create systems of progress monitoring and engage in a shared decision-making process that will result in higher student achievement and a positive school culture where teachers remain and success is sustainable. As such, the role of principals in teacher (leadership) development is key in this conversation. For instance, according to Burke (2013), training should include theoretical grounding, observation, practice, and reflection of skills or strategies being introduced. Topics should be meaningful to teachers and cause them to look inside their classrooms to determine what improvement is needed, and training should reflect adult learning theory. Burke (2013) further suggests that learning should include opportunities to

engage in dialogue and reflection, be free from coercion, and strike a balance between accountability and professional responsibility. This suggestion begs the question of what leadership supports the leadership of teachers to guide their own learning.

### **Summary**

It can be seen through this review of selected literature that there is indeed a need for differentiated professional development for teachers to foster and improve teacher leadership. The research reviewed has examined different professional development models and their relationship to teacher needs. School leaders should pay attention to how teachers are supported, how time is allotted, the degree to which a leader is committed, the need for collaboration with teachers, and the need for job-embedded teacher learning and support. While the models described are not the only models of professional development, these models provide additional insight into the components necessary to increase job-embedded professional development in schools.



### **SECTION 3. PROJECT REPORT**

Appreciative Inquiry is based on the assumption that finding what works right in an organization helps it focus on what is important, effective, and successful (Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2008). Appreciative inquiry can enable teachers to dream and collaboratively design a plan, which results in team building toward a common mission and vision. Focusing on this positive core helps an organization think about ways to sharpen its vision, leverage its energy, and take action for change. It is strengths-based rather than deficits-based thinking.

#### **Teaching, Empowering, Leading and Learning (TELL) Survey**

Each year the Hillsborough County Public Schools district contracts with the New Teacher Center (NTC), a national non-profit organization, for administration of the Teaching, Empowering, Leading and Learning (TELL) Survey. The survey consists of a core set of questions that address the following teaching conditions: Time, Facilities and Resources, Community Support and Involvement, Managing Student Conduct, Teacher Leadership, School Leadership, Professional Development, Instructional Practices and Support, and New Teacher Support. The anonymous, online survey results are provided to school districts and schools, using the school as the unit of analysis. The district provides reports of results to schools. This information is then used to plan school improvement for the district as a whole and for individual school sites.

As principal I receive survey data reports annually from from the Hillsborough County Public Schools. My secondary analysis of the 2013-2015 results was approved by the district's Office of Assessment and Accountability.

When reviewing district data from the 2013-2015 school years (see Table 1), results show teacher responses to survey areas and items as a percentage of total respondents in the district and in the Renaissance schools. There is continuing need to address teacher professional development delivery models in our highest needs schools, referred to below as Renaissance Schools.

Table 1

*Teacher Responses to Survey Area and Items as a Percentage of Total Respondents in the District and in Renaissance Schools*

Survey Area/Item	Year	District	Renaissance Schools
<b>Teacher Leadership Composite</b>	2015	81.1%	<b>75.4%</b>
	2014	82.3%	<b>78.7%</b>
	2013	77.5%	<b>67.7%</b>
<i>Item: Teacher leadership</i>	2015	85.4%	<b>80.7%</b>
	2014	85.7%	<b>83.4%</b>
	2013	81.5%	<b>71.7%</b>
<i>Item: Teachers are encouraged to participate in school leadership roles</i>	2015	88.4%	<b>83.4%</b>
	2014	89.3%	<b>85.9%</b>
	2013	86.7%	<b>79.6%</b>
<b>Instructional Practices Support Composite</b>	2015	82.5%	<b>80.4%</b>
	2014	84.1%	<b>83.7%</b>
	2013	79.3%	<b>76.1%</b>
<i>Item: Teachers support one another.</i>	2015	89.8%	<b>87.5%</b>
	2014	89.5%	<b>87.7%</b>
	2013	87.9%	<b>83.3%</b>
<i>Item: Teachers have time available to collaborate with colleagues.</i>	2015	69.0%	<b>67.7%</b>
	2014	70.7%	<b>70.2%</b>
	2013	64.0%	<b>62.6%</b>
<b>Professional Development Composite</b>	2015	84.1%	<b>83.3%</b>
	2014	83.4%	<b>84.5%</b>
	2013	81.6%	<b>79.1%</b>
<i>Item: Sufficient resources are available for professional development in my school.</i>	2015	87.0%	<b>86.3%</b>
	2014	85.7%	<b>87.4%</b>
	2013	83.9%	<b>83.2%</b>
<i>Item: An appropriate amount of time is provided for professional development.</i>	2015	79.5%	<b>80.4%</b>
	2014	77.3%	<b>80.0%</b>
	2013	73.7%	<b>71.8%</b>

For both the district and the Renaissance schools, percentage of responses increased over the three year period, indicating a positive trend. However, the Renaissance schools consistently fell below district percentages on both composite areas and specific items except in four instances. One area of common and continued need is time available for teachers to collaborate with colleagues.

Table 2 presents teacher responses to survey composite areas as a percentage of total respondents in the district, the Renaissance schools, and this elementary school. Results show

Table 2

*Teacher Responses to 2016 Survey Area and Items as a Percentage of Total Respondents in the District, Renaissance Schools, and Elementary School*

Survey Item/Area	Year	District	Renaissance Schools	Elementary School
<b>Teacher Leadership Composite</b>	2016	83.2%	78.3%	<b>89.4%</b>
<b>Instructional Practices Support Composite</b>	2016	82.7%	81.1%	<b>89.7%</b>
<b>Professional Development Composite</b>	2016	85%	84.9%	<b>91.2%</b>

positive trends for the district and Renaissance schools in each composite area. The elementary school surpasses district and Renaissance school percentages in all three composite areas. What contributed these increases?

### **Professional Development Initiatives at the Elementary School**

In 2012-2013 the school participated in the USF Urban Teacher Residency Program. The teachers, a USF professor and I began talking about a different way to engage in professional development in partnership with the university. We developed a plan for a master’s degree program focusing on teacher leadership to be offered at the school. We presented a plan to the

district Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instructional Leadership for differentiated professional development for teachers through this program (see Figure 1). The plan

Professional Development Plan		
TRACK 1	TRACK 2	TRACK 3
<p>Track 1 teachers include new and experienced teachers. The school leadership team has identified these teachers as working towards building upon the fundamentals of practice. This track of professional development is designed to develop teachers in the areas of curriculum, foundations and best practices.</p>	<p>Track 2 teachers include experienced teachers. The school leadership team has identified these teachers as working towards mentoring and supporting the learning of teachers. This track of professional development is designed to develop teachers professionally in curriculum and pedagogy.</p>	<p>Track 3 teachers include the current and potential collaborating teachers. The school leadership has identified these teachers as qualified individuals who are capable of mentoring and supporting the learning of preservice teachers and eventually inservice teachers. This track of professional development is designed to develop teacher leaders for the school and possibly even the district.</p>
<p>Teachers will focus on the following Professional Development for the 2013-2014 school year:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opening Minds by: Peter Johnston</li> <li>• Guided Reading</li> <li>• Common Core Standards: Basics</li> <li>• Writing</li> <li>• Math</li> <li>• Management/Motivation</li> <li>• Clarity in Domains 1 and 3</li> </ul>	<p>Teachers will focus on the following Professional Development for the 2013-2014 school year:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opening Minds by: Peter Johnston</li> <li>• Common Core Standards</li> <li>• Written Responses: In-depth Training</li> <li>• Math</li> <li>• Motivation/ Classroom Culture</li> <li>• Domains 3a: Objectives</li> <li>• Questioning: 3b with Coaching Cycles</li> <li>• Engagement (3c) with Coaching, Training</li> </ul>	<p>Teachers will focus on the following Professional Development for the 2013-2014 school year:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opening Minds by: Peter Johnston</li> <li>• Reflective Practice</li> <li>• Mentoring</li> <li>• Coaching</li> <li>• Common Core Standards</li> <li>• Academic Conversations</li> <li>• Critical Friends Structure Training</li> </ul>
<p>Teachers: 20</p>	<p>Teachers: 20-25</p>	<p>Teachers: 15-18</p>
<p>Training Schedule:</p> <p>Twice a month training (Tuesdays)</p> <p>PLC's twice a month: Mondays</p>	<p>Training Schedule:</p> <p>Twice a month training (Tuesdays)</p> <p>PLC's twice a month: Mondays</p>	<p>Training Schedule:</p> <p>Twice a month training (Wednesdays)</p> <p>PLC's twice a month: Mondays</p>
<p>Resources: Reading Resource Teacher, Writing Resource Teacher, Math Resource Teacher, AIS, ESE Specialist, ART</p>	<p>Resources: Teacher Leader, Reading Coaches, APEI, Math Coach</p>	<p>Resources: Teacher Leader, Reading Coaches, APEI, Math Coach, USF Professors and PRT's</p>

Figure 1. Plan for differentiated professional development.

outlined the purposes, participants, content focuses, training schedule, and training resource personnel. Teachers were divided in to three professional development tracks. Residents were USF preservice interns, Group A and B were teachers with varied years of experience, and Cadre were the initial 30 faculty invited to embark on a new professional development journey through inquiry. Professional Development courses for each of three tracks where designed to meet the needs of each group through surveys and needs assessments.

An additional component of the plan was a description of training resources needed for each track, identification of inservice points that would accumulate for each track and enable teachers to move into another track, and means by which professional development implementation will be monitored (see Figure 2).

Professional Development Plan		
TRACK 1	TRACK 2	TRACK 3
<p>Resources Needed:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Opening Minds by Peter Johnston</b> (80 Copies) (\$11.01 each copy)</li> <li>2. <b>The Next Step in Guided Reading K-8</b> By Jan Richardson (20 Copies) (\$16.05 each copy)</li> <li>3. <b>Common Core Writing Book K-5</b> by Gretchen Owocki (20 Copies) (\$34.00 each copy)</li> <li>4. <b>Common Core Lesson Book K-5</b> by Gretchen Owocki (20 Copies) (\$37.00 each copy)</li> </ol>	<p>Resources Needed:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Opening Minds by Peter Johnston</b></li> <li>2. <b>Reading and Writing Genre With Purpose</b> by Nell Duke (25 Copies) (\$22.50 each copy)</li> <li>3. <b>Comprehension and Collaboration</b> by Stephanie Harvey and Harvey Daniels (25 Copies) (\$30.50 each copy)</li> </ol>	<p>Resources Needed:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Opening Minds by Peter Johnston</b></li> <li>2. <b>The Reflective Guide to Classroom Practice</b> by Nancy Dana (\$32.12)</li> <li>3. <b>The Reflective Guide to Mentoring</b> by Nancy Dana (\$30.04)</li> <li>4. <b>Academic Conversations</b> by Jeff Zwiers (\$19.60)</li> <li>5. <b>The Power of Our Words</b> by Paula Denton (\$23.02)</li> <li>6. <b>Inquiring into the Common Core</b> by N. F. Dana (\$22.00) Available in July 2013</li> </ol> <p>(20 Copies of Each Title)</p>
<p>Professional Development Inservice: Inservice points will be given for trainings and outside work associated with professional development. Through observations and evaluations this track of teachers will be able to move to track 2 in year 2.</p>	<p>Professional Development Inservice: Inservice points will be given for trainings and outside work associated with professional development. Through observations and evaluations this track of teachers will be able to move to track 3 in year 2. In January, teachers will have the opportunity to have a track 3 mentor.</p>	<p>Professional Development Inservice: These professional development courses and practices will receive inservice points and course credit from the University of South Florida. Year 1 will focus on Inquiry and differentiated Professional Development structures. In year 2, teachers will work on mastering coaching and mentoring with additional course credits. <b>This 2 year modal will give teachers the opportunity to complete their teacher leadership certificate.</b></p>
<p><b>Evaluation of track 1:</b> Evaluations will be based on Walkthroughs, Classroom informal, formal and evaluations. <b>A research component will be developed.</b></p>	<p><b>Evaluation of track 2:</b> Evaluations will be based on Walkthroughs, Classroom informal, formal and evaluations. <b>A research component will be developed.</b></p>	<p><b>Evaluation of track 3:</b> Evaluations will be based on Walkthroughs, Classroom informal, formal and evaluations and course artifacts. Teachers will have the different opportunity to present their work. <b>A research component will be developed.</b></p>

Figure 2. Plan for training resources, professional development points, and implementation monitoring.

In 2013-2014 the Teacher leadership Academy was implemented, providing job embedded professional learning including inquiry into practice and coaching. Participants included the principal, a USF Professor in Residence, two Partnership Resource Teachers, and 23 Collaborating Teachers, Resource Teachers, and Instructional Coaches. Coursework for a USF graduate certificate in Teacher Leadership was taught at the school weekly.

At the end of the year we looked at our experiences. Participants from all groups believed they had gained knowledge, confidence, resources and strategies to use in their classrooms. Participants felt what they were learning was specific to their needs; they also felt that they were growing professionally and building stronger relationships through coaching. Challenges expressed included time to apply what we were learning and a sense of lack of community with teachers seeing their group members only. We changed classroom and training schedules to enable more collaboration across groups and balance instructional time and professional learning time.

In 2014-2015 we took a deeper look into Professional Learning Communities, which became the focus of the professional development courses for all groups. We have learned it's a growing process. We didn't start with perfection (and we still don't have perfection), but we learned through time, practice, and an ongoing cycle of learning, applying, reflecting, and inquiring. Additionally, with time for strategic planning, total buy-in from administration as well as teachers, Professional Learning Communities can be successful in moving instruction forward. By having a clear understanding of a shared goal, inquiry, and collaboration, teachers will improve their students' achievement, with PLCs as the vehicle.

## **SECTION 4. INSIGHTS AND REFLECTION**

Schools benefit greatly when principals are seen as lead learners and lead the learning community where each member learns and teaches each other. Teachers participate in something they are willing to do; this creates a shared sense of ownership in the learning process with a focus on student success (Dana, Tricarico, & Quinn, 2009). Just as students' needs are different, so are the needs of adult learners. A one-size-fits-all approach to training and professional development is outdated and ineffective.

The Hillsborough County School District has strengths in recognizing that a new delivery model for the professional development of teachers is needed, one that will empower them to develop as leaders. The Superintendent is redefining roles and responsibilities to better support district initiatives. He is working to foster the change in the role of the principal to allow for more autonomy and more flexibility in decision-making at the site level. The area where this can be enhanced is in creating a vision for each department so everyone is clear about their role. Currently, we are providing a mixed message to our schools about what is best and what can be done. Calvert (2016) captures this tension:

Former teachers now working in district offices said that it is often difficult for districts to lighten their control over professional learning. 'There is a central office fear of letting go, of giving educators agency to make decision. Various departments each have their thing, the program they want to emphasize. They believe this is the most important thing. They are afraid that if they don't direct the PD, teachers will lose sight of their thing,' said a former teacher working on professional learning in a district office." (p. 14 ).

Research supported the need for individuality and follow up support at the school level for professional learning to be effective and impact positive change in instruction. It takes a growth mindset to change the norms that have been established for decades to shift the focus from a one-size-fits-all learning platform to a more real-time, job-embedded, applied learning approach. Time must be used to learn what principals' and teachers' interests are at each individual school—and particularly in turnaround schools—in order to build a professional development plan that will change the quality of instruction for students.

The district currently has a goal of creating a positive culture focused on preparing students for life. “Values characterize what an organization stands for. Qualities worthy of esteem or commitment. Unlike goals, values are intangible and define a unique distinguishing character. Values convey a sense of identity, from boardroom to factory floor, and help people feel special about what they do” (Bolman & Deal, 2013, p. 249). We can leverage this focus to have the freedom to make decisions at our sites. Teachers would be supporting one another by visiting classrooms to learn and share best practices on a consistent basis. We would see fewer directives that are constantly being sent to schools to complete for compliance. We would see initiatives being developed at the individual school level. We would see one plan developed at the school site individualized to focus on the school's priorities. Professional development would be personalized and differentiated to allow teachers to engage in meaningful, personal learning and to connect that learning directly to their classrooms. This can be completed through job-embedded work.



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