

VETERAN TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES IN CONNECTION TO TEACHER  
EMPOWERMENT WITHIN THE SCHOOL

By

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VETERAN TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES IN CONNECTION TO TEACHER  
EMPOWERMENT WITHIN THE SCHOOL

This thesis by Jessica Aho is recommended for approval by the student's Thesis Committee and Department Head in the School of Education, Leadership, and Public Service and by the Dean of Graduate Education and Research.



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## ABSTRACT

### VETERAN TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES IN CONNECTION TO TEACHER EMPOWERMENT WITHIN THE SCHOOL

By

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This narrative inquiry has been designed to explore the perspectives and experiences of veteran elementary teachers in connection to leadership and teacher empowerment within the school. This study examines the narratives of seven veteran elementary teachers from four different schools in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. Each veteran teacher was interviewed one-on-one by the researcher via Zoom, due to the COVID 19 pandemic. Participants were identified through purposeful sampling. The researcher used an inductive approach to the analysis of the data, to identify themes within the narratives. Analysis of the data determined that teacher empowerment does impact veteran teachers' experiences and overall morale within the school. The data that was gathered presented six themes. The researcher made theoretical predications that emerged during the coding process. These included leadership style, trust, communication, and morale. The other themes that emerged during the coding process, were autonomy and mentorship.

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This thesis follows the format prescribed by the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (APA), Seventh Edition and the Department of Educational Leadership and Public Service.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	i
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iii
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
Definition Of Terms.....	2
Research Question.....	3
Theoretical Framework.....	4
Researcher Positionality Statement.....	5
Chapter 2: Literature Review.....	5
Introduction.....	5
Empowerment Through Distributed Leadership Within The School.....	7
Mentorship.....	9
Potential Benefits Of Teacher Empowerment.....	10
Teacher Empowerment Through Effective Leadership.....	14
Teacher Empowerment In Connection To Morale.....	17
Factors Affecting Job Satisfaction For Veteran Teachers.....	19
Summary.....	20
Chapter 3: Methodological Design.....	22
Participant Selection Process.....	25
Data Collection.....	26
Procedures For Analyzing Data.....	27
Summary.....	28
Chapter 4: Research Results.....	29

Veteran Teacher Narratives.....	29
Holly: Teaching and Leadership Experience.....	30
Katherine: Teaching and Leadership Experience.....	33
Linda: Teaching and Leadership Experience.....	37
Leslie: Teaching and Leadership Experience.....	41
Joan: Teaching and Leadership Experience.....	45
Julia: Teaching and Leadership Experience.....	49
Janice: Teaching and Leadership Experience.....	53
Key Themes.....	57
Summary And Findings.....	69
Chapter 5: Overview, Limitations, Recommendations, And Concluding Remarks.....	73
Overview Of The Study.....	73
Limitations.....	74
Recommendations For Future Research.....	75
Concluding Remarks.....	76
References.....	78
APPENDIX A: Informed Consent Form.....	83
APPENDIX B: Interview Questions.....	85
APPENDIX C: IRB Approval.....	86
APPENDIX D: Email to Participants.....	88

## **Chapter One: Introduction**

Berry, et, al. (2010) suggested that there is a great need for teachers to take on leadership roles within the school. These leadership roles could be either formal or informal. However, there are impediments to teachers becoming leaders. These obstructions may be due to school leadership, lack of professional development opportunities, or the teacher's feelings of inadequacy for leadership. Berry, et, al. (2010) emphasized the importance of teachers' perspectives on morale in relationship to leadership roles within the school. If teachers are given the opportunity to function in leadership roles, it builds pride and confidence within the teaching profession. In addition, teacher empowerment is a leading factor in successful school reform (Lowery-Moore, et, al., 2016).

Additionally, in schools where teachers feel empowered, there is often positive teacher morale. This is due to the fact that the teachers feel trusted and valued in the school they work at. Wells, et, al. (2010) discussed the importance of the focus of control being directed to the teachers rather than solely the administration. In other words, teachers should feel that they are carrying out initiatives because they believe in them and have had a hand in the decision-making process. Likewise, when teachers become more confident, their abilities increase. When teachers are empowered within the school, teachers often show more enthusiasm for their profession (Wells, et, al., 2010).

Wells, et, al. (2010) discussed the importance of teachers being leaders. However, in order for teachers to feel confident as leaders within the school, they must be in a school climate conducive to fostering professional growth. The cultural conditions of the school greatly impact a teacher's self-confidence to take on leadership roles. When

school leaders are able to effectively empower teachers, teachers are able to gain confidence and assist their colleagues with professional growth. To have this kind of school culture, it is essential that school leaders are open to support teachers and develop opportunities for teachers to successfully lead (Wells, et, al., 2010).

The topic of teacher empowerment within the schools is important to understand. Exploring veteran teachers' experiences having leadership roles within the school will foster a better understanding of how empowering teachers with leadership roles, as well as implementing distributed leadership can increase morale, lead to better teacher retention, and help to improve the overall school culture (Lowery-Moore, et, al., 2016).

### **Definition Of Terms**

**Veteran Teacher:** For the purpose of this study, a veteran teacher is defined as a currently practicing teacher with that has been teaching for a minimum of twenty years.

**Teacher Empowerment:** Bolin (1989) defined teacher empowerment as “investing teachers with the right to participate in the determination of school goals and policies and to exercise professional judgment about what and how to teach” (p. 82).

**Morale:** For the purpose of this study, Morale will be defined using the Merriam-Webster definition as “the mental and emotional condition, as of enthusiasm, confidence, or loyalty of an individual or group with regard to the function or tasks at hand” (*Merriam-Webster's Dictionary*, 2020).

**Leadership Role:** For the purpose of this study, Leadership Role will be defined as a currently practicing teacher's responsibilities other than typical teaching responsibilities that provide the teacher with opportunities to engage in the decision-making process within the school.

**Rural School:** The National Center for Education Statistics (2006) defined a rural school, as a school that is located more than 25 miles from an urbanized area.

### **Research Question**

**In what ways does teacher empowerment impact veteran teachers' experiences within the teaching profession?**

The education system has been tasked with ever-increasing expectations for teachers, however there has been little done to increase teacher compensation. With expectations high for teachers, it is imperative that the subject of teacher empowerment in connection to morale is explored. The professional expectations for teachers continue to increase. Teachers within the last few decades have been asked to expand their role within the school, outside of the classroom. Often these expanded roles are leadership roles within the school. Exploring veteran teachers' perspectives on how these leadership roles contribute to morale within the school, is critical in understanding what motivates teachers to engage in a shared vision and work in conjunction with administrators (Barth, 1990).

Expanded expectations on schools have created more responsibilities for schools. Traditional top-down leadership is no longer as effective. To attempt to meet increasing demands, the approach to leadership in many schools have shifted to distributed leadership, in which teachers engage in leadership roles outside of the classroom and participate in the daily decision-making process in the school system (Michigan State Board of Education, 2013). Though teachers that participate in distributed leadership have more responsibilities, evidence points to higher morale for teachers that engage in leadership roles. Exploring how does a teacher's perception of autonomy connect with

teacher morale will increase understanding of how teachers obtaining leadership roles within the school can significantly contribute to school reform. It is important to explore how empowerment changes how teachers view their position (Blasé & Blasé, 1996).

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework that is the underpinning of this study is Transformational Leadership Theory. James V. Downton first coined the term “Transformational Leadership”. James MacGregor Burns further developed this concept. According to Burns (1978) Transformational Leadership is when both leaders and followers advance to higher levels of motivation through the sharing of a vision. In addition, Transformational Leaders are able to inspire others to work towards common goals (Stewart, 2006).

This study examined the perceptions of empowered teachers as transformational leaders within the school. Transformational Leadership and empowerment have been notably intertwined in research exploring perceptions of empowerment in the workplace. Empowerment has been noted as an outcome of Transformational Leadership, which will enable the researcher to explore the impact of teacher empowerment on morale within the school (Stewart, 2006).

Creswell (2012) emphasized the importance of using a theoretical framework in a study to provide guidance for the study. The theoretical framework connects the researcher with existing research pertaining to the chosen topic. Furthermore, using a theoretical framework allowed the researcher to explore key variables that influenced a specific phenomenon. A theoretical framework was also used to limit the scope of the data that will be examined for this study. This study applied the Transformational

Leadership Theory in conjunction with teacher empowerment. Specifically, this study will aim to examine relationships between Transformational Leadership and teacher empowerment in connection to morale (Creswell, 2012).

### **Researcher Positionality Statement**

In addition to my role as the researcher, I am also an elementary school teacher. I have taught grades pre-k through sixth grade throughout the fourteen years that I have been teaching. Within those fourteen years of teaching, I have taught at a private Catholic school, a charter school, and am currently teaching at a public school. All schools that I have taught at are considered rural, according to The National Center for Education Statistics (2006). Furthermore, I have also participated in leadership roles within the schools I have taught in. Moreover, I identify as a thirty-seven-year-old, White female. To account for natural biases that I may have, the use of seven participants with various perspectives from four different rural schools in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan have been used to triangulate the data that was collected. To further reduce the concern of the researcher's biases, I also engaged in Member Checking (Candela, 2019) to validate the results of the Active One-on-One interviews that were conducted with the participants of this study.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **Introduction**

Murphy (2005) describes the complication of explaining teacher leadership. However, researchers agree that empowered teachers have the ability to increase student learning, further develop the teaching profession, and improve the overall climate of the school. When novice teachers enter a school district that has a

positive morale and is receptive to teacher empowerment; novice teachers are more likely to commit to the teaching profession. Veteran teachers are generally the opinion leaders within the school. Giving veteran teachers leadership roles makes them feel respected, valued, and essential. When teachers are involved in the planning process and their opinions are valued; the overall morale of the teacher population within the school will increase. Lowery-Moore, et, al. (2016) suggests that teacher morale and retention is a major issue concerning countless schools across the nation. Research has shown that teacher leadership can be a powerful force in school reform. However, many novice and veteran teachers are not given leadership opportunities within the school, outside of the classroom. According to Bond (2015), teacher leadership was documented as a significant field of study (Bond, 2015).

According to Berry, et, al. (2010) both novice and veteran teachers view leadership roles within the school as vital. Teachers influence other teachers, administrators, and school stakeholders. Teacher's attitudes and perspectives toward leadership roles are hopeful when teachers know there is an opportunity for growth within the school. Teachers that report having a say in the decision-making processes within the school, have a higher sense of job satisfaction, confidence in their position, and professional motivation (Berry, et, al., 2010).

Teachers have had increasing stressors attributed to the teaching profession within the last few decades, so how could increased responsibilities through teacher empowerment and leadership roles within the school be beneficial? Common stressors associated with the teaching profession can include, increased work assignments in conjunction with an already chaotic daily schedule, a significant increase in class sizes,

increased paperwork, lesson planning, dealing with behavioral problems in the classroom, committee assignments, communicating with parents, and adhering to the demands of the administration. These increased demands on top of teaching can lead to emotional exhaustion and teacher burnout. However, when given the opportunity to have autonomy with their profession, through leadership roles within the school; teachers often displayed increased job satisfaction. Leadership roles when compared to increased tasks within the teaching profession differ, because teachers have described feeling valued and empowered when given the opportunity to have leadership roles within the school, as opposed to feeling increased stress and resentment towards administration when given increased tasks without autonomy (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011).

Teacher job satisfaction has been associated with increased autonomy in the workplace. Literature supports that teacher job satisfaction is positively related to having the opportunity to participate in decision-making and to transformational-leadership. In addition, teachers have also attributed their job satisfaction through intrinsic rewards, such as student and teacher relationships and attributed their dissatisfaction to factors such as decreased autonomy, increased workload, and oppressive administrations. Interpersonal relationships developed while teaching has been studied as a major factor in teacher job satisfaction. Moreover, autonomy within the profession of teaching has also been shown to be a significant factor in teacher retention.

### **Empowerment Through Distributed Leadership Within the School**

Throughout the decades, the role of the teacher has evolved. Traditionally, the teacher has been recognized as the leader within the classroom, however; the leadership role of the teacher has greatly evolved. Hamzah, et, al. (2016) explain that teachers have

begun to take on leadership roles within the school, because their role within the school is expanding. Within the last few decades, teachers have been involved in the decision-making process within their organizations. Teachers understand that the leadership of the school does not rest solely on the shoulders of the school administrators. Teachers have realized that their expertise is invaluable to administrators when making decisions about student learning (Hamzah, et, al., 2016).

Harris (2003) describes the various types of teacher leadership roles. Teachers are leaders of students and often other teachers. These types of leadership roles include that of a mentor, coach, instructional facilitator and curriculum specialist. Teachers can also take on greater leadership roles within the school, outside of the classroom. These roles include, being head of a department, researcher, or committee member, such as a School Improvement Team member. These types of leadership roles often give teachers the opportunity to engage in the decision-making process within the school or district (Harris, 2003).

At the core of teacher leadership, is the idea of distributed leadership. Distributed leadership is a form of empowerment, in which the school leader, such as the superintendent effectively distributes power and involves teachers in the decision-making process. When distributed leadership occurs, all individuals are seen as potential leaders within the organization (Michigan State Board of Education, 2013). In a school that practices distributed leadership, tasks are often accomplished through the work of multiple individuals working together with a shared vision. When distributed leadership is practiced, teachers often gravitate towards leadership roles that are of importance to them. However, distributed leadership within a school is dependent on those in formal

leadership positions, such as the superintendent, to relinquish power and willingly distribute it amongst school staff and teachers in meaningful ways (Harris, 2003).

## **Mentorship**

Mentorship programs have long been used for the purpose of guiding novice teachers. Mentorship is a tool in which veteran teachers instill knowledge and guidance upon novice or student teachers. The impacts of mentorship have been widely studied regarding novice teachers. Most K-12 schools utilize a mentor program for novice teachers. These programs are generally used to benefit the novice teachers. Often, veteran teachers are selected to be mentors to novice teachers, as veteran teachers are attuned to the procedures of the school, have had many years successfully running a classroom, and are knowledgeable in their subject matter. Mentors are often carefully selected by their school leaders, based on their abilities and experiences. School leaders may pair mentors and mentees according to personality type, subject matter expertise, and grade level. School leaders understand that a successful mentor mentee relationship can be valuable for the school as a whole (Harrison & Killion, 2007).

According to Harrison and Killion (2007) teacher preparation courses often mandate the student teacher to have student teaching experience, in which they engage in a mentor mentee relationship with a currently practicing teacher. Mentoring can significantly increase the student teacher's abilities and confidence for obtaining a teaching job. There are obvious benefits for the mentee, such as gaining knowledge, forming professional relationships, and acquiring valuable insight into what the expectations are of a professional teacher. However, mentorship also positively impacts veteran teachers as well. Some benefits of mentoring for mentors, include; increased

networking opportunities, recognition as a leader in the school, management experience, opportunity for self-reflection upon own teaching, increased confidence in teaching abilities, and personal fulfillment. The mentor mentee relationship is often described as mutually beneficial, though the mentor and mentee gain different benefits from the experience. Teacher leaders that take on the role of mentor face many responsibilities. To be an effective mentor, teachers must draw upon that extensive knowledge and expertise (Harrison & Killion, 2007).

### **Potential Benefits of Teacher Empowerment**

Since World War II, worker empowerment in all fields has gained popularity. Studies have determined that worker empowerment has led to enhanced job satisfaction, improvement on overall job performance, increased motivation, and positive morale within the work place. This was found to be especially evident within the teaching profession. Furthermore, teachers that have been empowered within their workplace, have been known to have higher self-esteem, are more knowledgeable in the subject matter that they teach, and produce higher student achievement. Empowerment within the school has also been an effective method of school improvement and reform (Keiser & Shen, 2000).

Goyne, et. al. (1999) argued that positive school change can only be achieved through the empowerment of teachers. Teachers must feel a sense of ownership in regards to the decisions that are being made in order to participate in a shared vision within the school. Teachers should have a sense of autonomy within the school. Crowther, et. al. (2009) state that the potential of teacher leadership has not been fully explored. The concept of teacher leadership should be more widely embraced in teacher

preparation courses. According to Lieberman (2015) researchers need to further investigate the concept of teacher leadership to better understand the practices that help to nurture teacher empowerment. Exploring these practices will enable the importance of teacher leadership to become more widely recognized (Goyne, et, al. 1999).

Khan and Malik (2013) emphasized the importance of advancing teacher leadership practices. Khan and Malik's (2013) rationale for advancing teacher leadership practices, is that it can help support in recruiting, motivating, and rewarding accomplished teachers. Advocating for teacher leadership is essential for retaining high quality teachers. Buchen (2000) stated, "The only leadership that will make a difference is that of teachers. They alone are positioned where all the fulcrums are for change. They alone know what the day-to-day problems are and what it takes to solve them" (Buchen, 2000, p. 35).

According to Gabriel (2005) "a resourceful teacher does not accept a shortage of funds as the bottom line; a teacher knows whose pockets to pick or finds people to subsidize the team's needs. Being professional means putting aside personal prejudices for the good of the students. A fair leader hears all voices, does not play favorites (although a teacher may have them), and is not self-serving. Treating everyone fairly is more important than treating everyone equally, and a fair leader is an impartial leader" (Gabriel, 2005, p. 12). Teacher leaders are seen as more approachable than administrators. Teacher leaders are open and willing to admit when they do not know an answer, and are eager to learn. Teacher leaders model humility and display innovativeness (Gabriel, 2005).

Teachers that have been micromanaged have reported feeling undermined and unhappy within their profession. In addition, when teachers do not have a voice in the decision-making process, they have a higher likelihood of talking about the school negatively. However, expanding leadership roles within the school for teachers is a strategic and cost-effective way to retain high quality teachers, improve student learning, and increase teacher morale in both novice and veteran teachers (Berry, et, al., 2010).

Leithwood and Riehl (2003) explain that effective leaders are essential for quality education. Teachers in leadership roles provide direction and exercise influence. Empowered teachers have the ability to mobilize and work with others that have shared goals. Teachers in leadership roles do not impose their vision on others, but instead work cooperatively with others, while creating a shared sense of purpose. Teachers given leadership roles within the school have the ability to establish the conditions that allow others to be effective. Essentially, leadership should be seen as a function, rather than a role. Given the opportunity, teachers can be effective educational leaders that work to develop a vision that embodies the best ideas from those that surround them. In addition, teachers within leadership roles feel empowered. This feeling of empowerment leads novice and veteran teachers to have positive morale within the school. Positive morale ultimately leads to high teacher retention rates, which positively impacts the overall school climate (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003).

There have been many innovations to teaching and learning. Teachers are continuously seeking out and implementing new methods within their classrooms to improve student learning. However, unless there is a school leader that supports advancements and creativity, these innovations are often lost within the walls of

individual classrooms and not celebrated. A school leader should celebrate innovative teachers and encourage teachers to share their ideas with their colleagues (Wells, et, al., 2010).

Barth (1990) articulated,

A school can fulfill no higher purpose than to teach all of its members that they can make what they believe happen and to encourage them to contribute to and benefit from the leadership of others. A community of leaders is a vision of what might become a vital part of the school culture. Without shared leadership, it is impossible for a professional culture to exist in a school. (Barth, 1990 p. 155).

It is essential that a superintendent is able to effectively use school faculty and staff within the district. One way in which a superintendent can effectively use school staff members is by using their vast range of talents and strengths on various teams and committees that work to improve the school district. Green (2017) states that school leaders must understand and respect diversity amongst their staff. Administrators alone cannot lead the school. Administrators need the support and leadership of a strong staff that helps to promote a positive school culture within the district. A school leader should collaborate with innovative teachers and encourage teachers to share their ideas with their colleagues (Wells, et, al., 2010).

Teachers that feel empowered within their position in the school have identified pride, confidence, and increased self-esteem within their profession. A teacher's self-esteem refers to a teacher's view of their importance within the school and community. A teacher that exhibits high self-esteem within their roles often feels important and valued in their workplace. Teachers that feel confident within their profession, often have a

sense of independence in regards to daily decision-making within their own classroom. In addition, teacher confidence also correlates with teacher involvement in school wide decision-making that directly involves teachers and student learning (Blase & Blase, 1996).

### **Teacher Empowerment Through Effective Leadership**

There are many ways in which school leaders can empower teachers. School leaders can empower teachers by distributing leadership within the school. One example of this would be establishing school committees and allowing teachers to lead these committees. In addition, teachers should also be involved in decision-making. School leaders should seek out the opinions of the teachers before making decisions that will directly affect teachers and students. Teachers should be put into leadership positions within the school. In addition to working on committees, teachers can also lead by being teacher mentors, academic advisors, and leading professional development. However, it is important for school leaders to understand that distributing power is not the same as delegating. Distribution of power gives teachers the ability to not simply carry out a task they were given, but to be able to be directly involved in the decision-making process (Wells, et, al. 2010).

In order for teachers to feel empowered by their school leader, trust needs to be established. To build trust, school leaders need to be supportive of teacher's opinions and ideas. Furthermore, school leaders need to be open to other's perspectives. A leader should be able to listen and include the viewpoints of others. In addition, empowerment cannot be given without support. A school leader needs to continually support teachers in their endeavors (King, 2002).

Good leaders are able to empower teachers when they feel a connection with them. Effective school leaders have a presence within the school or district. In addition, supportive school leaders are also present in the classroom and involved in daily school routines. Innovation in a school can occur when school leaders realize that the best ideas do not always come directly from the superintendent. Sometimes the best ideas come from a great teaching staff. School leaders must actively provide teachers with leadership opportunities. Bolin (1989) defines teacher empowerment as “investing teachers with the right to participate in the determination of school goals and policies and to exercise professional judgment about what and how to teach” (Bolin, 1989, p. 82). To increase student growth, school leaders must have teachers that are dedicated to the overall success of the school district. To have teachers that are dedicated and share a vision, school leaders need to promote teacher leadership within the school (Bolin, 1989).

Empowering others is a process that formal leaders should employ. In order for formal leaders to empower other, trust must be built and opportunities must be given. It is essential that leaders not just delegate leadership, but distribute leadership amongst their staff. A strong leader is able to surround themselves with others that have leadership capabilities. Leadership needs to challenge the status quo. Leaders should promote ideas, such as peer observations, teacher developed professional development opportunities, and teacher participation in the decision-making process (King, 2002).

Furthermore, Berry, et, al. (2005) discuss the importance of school leaders developing opportunities for teachers to become leaders within the district. Teachers are directly linked to the student success, therefore giving teachers opportunities to lead and engage in decision-making about student learning, will ultimately improve overall

student learning within the district. It is up to school leaders to encourage teacher leadership and support teacher's capabilities in decision-making, especially when it comes to student learning (Berry, et, al., 2005).

Maxwell (2007) explained the need for leaders to empower others. Good leaders, should lead others in a shared vision, build relationships, and empower others to succeed. Maxwell (2007) also noted that good leaders should not lead to enrich themselves, but to empower others to participate in the leadership process. Kouzes and Posner (2011) argue that our experiences, values, convictions, and passions, shaped us as individuals. A leader must be able to establish an enabling presence. A school leader must be able to build up others and recognize talents within the district. Moreover, having an enabling presence implies openness and transparency. Using an enabling presence when leading, will allow the leader to encourage teachers to use their talents to be creative and cultivate a culture of learning. Acting with integrity and fairness will help to establish trust within the district. It is crucial for school leaders to consider their words and actions through self-reflective practices to determine if they are acting with integrity and fairness (Starratt, 2013).

At times, it may be easier for a leader to be the lion as described by Murphy (2013) however, the unheroic leader is the type of leader that empowers others and ascertains trusting relationships. The path to building and maintaining trusting relationships may not always be the easiest, but it is the right path for effective leaders.

## **Teacher Empowerment in Connection to Morale**

Empowerment in the teaching profession has been described as a teacher's power to contribute in the decision-making process. When describing job satisfaction within the teaching profession, teachers often attributed their satisfaction within their profession to these circumstances; decision-making ability, student achievement, self-esteem, and confidence within the profession. Research that has explored conditions to job satisfaction for teachers, often has shown that empowerment is a contributing factor to job satisfaction within the teaching profession. Nevertheless, there has been limited research investigating the influence of job satisfaction in regards to teacher empowerment (Terry, 1998).

Empowerment is associated with shared decision-making within the school setting. Traditional leadership in the school setting has lost momentum throughout the decades. Instead, many school leaders choose to practice shared leadership within the school district. Practicing shared leadership gives teachers the opportunity to participate in making decisions that directly impact their professional lives. Teachers have long been seen as the authority figures within the classrooms, however current school reform efforts have been focused on teacher empowerment and leadership within the schools (Lumsden, 1998).

Empowerment through shared leadership roles has been linked to improved job satisfaction amongst teachers. In addition, teachers' commitment to the school organization is often increased, when teachers participate in shared leadership roles within the school. Teachers are the backbone of the educational system; they are responsible for motivating students to succeed. However, teachers themselves need

motivation in order to perform well. Teacher morale often suffers due to many factors, such as stress, low pay, feeling undervalued within the professional field, and high stakes teacher evaluations. Teachers that exhibit high morale often show a higher performance within their profession. Moreover, empowered teachers tend to have higher morale. Teachers that are empowered also are more effective in the classroom, because they have a say in how their students are being taught. Furthermore, empowering teachers within the school is attributed to overall higher morale within the school (Lumsden, 1998).

Teachers that are involved in the decision-making process regarding curriculums often feel a sense of importance. This feeling of importance, leads to higher morale and more confidence within the teaching profession. Teachers that are involved in making decisions regarding the curriculum have reported more motivation towards teaching. In addition, teachers also acknowledged increased cooperation between teaching staff and administration. When teachers have become involved in curriculum committees and are given autonomy to choose the curriculums they will be teaching, teachers have a strong investment in the curriculum that has been chosen (White, 1992).

Historically, teachers have had limited power outside of their classroom walls. Within the classroom, teachers are expected to have complete control of students, teaching content, student evaluations, and the use of effective teaching strategies. However, decisions regarding the overall operation of the school have been the out of reach for most teachers. Additionally, teachers also have little say regarding the educational system as a whole. Collective bargaining has had a hand in giving teachers a voice in regards to the overall operation of the school. Regular communication between a school board and a negotiations team is an essential factor in the negotiations process. The

board of education for each school district should establish expectations and guidelines for the negotiations team. The bargaining process does have initial steps. First, the teacher's union presents a list of requests to the board. The school board then refers to state and federal policies and laws in regards to the teacher's union requests. Though this process does benefit teachers and allow them to be included in some decision regarding the school, it can be painstaking (The School Superintendents Association, 2019).

Teachers are continuously finding themselves not included in the decision-making process, nevertheless, the decisions that are made by others, directly affected by these decisions. Often the decisions that are made by others, can limit the teachers' abilities to effectively meet the educational needs of the students they are teaching. Moreover, when others make decisions about what teachers teach and how teachers teach content, this can lead teachers to feel insignificant (Short, 1992).

### **Factors Affecting Job Satisfaction for Veteran Teachers**

Hargreaves (2003) stated, "One of the most serious crises and challenges facing the public-school system and the teaching profession is the mass exodus from teaching related to the demographic turnover of teachers in the profession" (p. 121). Many veteran teachers have described their job as stressful and this has led to many teachers leaving the teaching profession. However, research does indicate that there are factors that affect job satisfaction for veteran teachers. Many veteran teachers noted that autonomy within their profession led to them being more satisfied with their choice to continue teaching. Those that felt they were trusted and competent within their profession, described feelings of satisfaction (Hargreaves, 2003).

Veteran teachers conveyed that when given autonomy by their administrators, they felt they were trusted to do their job. In addition, veteran teachers that felt trusted choosing and implementing curriculums within their classroom, also described feeling competent in their profession. These feelings of competence, have also led veteran teachers to pursue leadership roles within the school, such as Curriculum Committee leaders and lead teachers. Obtaining these leadership roles enabled veteran teachers to participate in the decision-making process, which has been shown to yield higher morale (Veldman, et, al., 2016).

For decades the notion of teacher salary has been connected to job satisfaction among veteran teachers. Though salary is a factor, research has indicated that there are other contributing factors to job satisfaction among veteran teachers. A prevalent factor to job satisfaction among veteran teachers is empowerment. Veteran teachers were more likely to thrive in a work environment that included recognition, job security, and a sense of autonomy in regards to decision-making. Moreover, the influence that formal leadership has on teacher morale is significant. Formal leaders that have distributed leadership practices within their school, often have veteran teachers that feel empowered and thus have a higher morale than those teachers working in a more authoritarian setting. It has been suggested that leadership should be seen as an action rather than as a position. Veldman, et, al. (2016) describes individuals have a need for meaning and purpose within their professions.

### **Summary**

According to Grant, et, al., (2009) there is research regarding teacher empowerment. However, there is a lack of the narrative involving the impact of

empowerment and how that has affected the experiences of veteran teachers within the teaching profession. There is a need to delve deep within the experiences of veteran teachers in a narrative format to discover the themes that emerge regarding empowerment. It is important to understand the impact having leadership roles within the school have been on veteran teachers' careers. What we learn from their experiences could be invaluable for the future of the teaching profession.

The early history of the teaching profession, encompasses little autonomy for teachers. Teachers were subjected to strict guidelines within their profession and were not given opportunities to participate in the decision-making process. Throughout the decades, distributed leadership practices have become more prevalent in the school. Understanding how distributed leadership impacts teachers' experiences is instrumental in obtaining knowledge about how morale can be improved amongst teachers (Grant, et, al., 2009).

Grant, et, al. (2009) describe the profession of teaching as a "slow revolution" (p. 2). Throughout the decades, school teachers have slowly become more autonomous within their profession. Traditional authoritarian leadership within the school has yielded few positive results regarding educational reform. In addition, this type of top-down leadership has resulted in low morale and teachers leaving the teaching profession. Research does indicate that providing teachers with leadership roles within the school and inviting teachers to engage in the decision-making process increases morale and overall job satisfaction. It is vital that the narratives of veteran teachers that have participated in leadership roles within their school are explored. Analyzing the themes that emerge from

these narratives will yield a better understanding of the impact empowerment has on teachers and morale within the school (Grant, et, al., 2009).

### **Chapter 3: Methodological Design**

For this study, a qualitative, narrative design was used to explore my research topic. Clandinin and Connelly (2006) explain that narrative inquiry is able to capture human experiences. As the researcher, I took on the role as the narrative inquirer, in order to collect and analyze the experiences of veteran elementary teachers. According to Creswell (2012) a narrative study aims to focus on the story or stories of an individual person or small group of individuals, by the process of gathering data through qualitative means, such as collecting and discussing stories, conducting interviews, and addressing the experiences of the individuals whom participate in the study.

While conducting this study, I explored veteran elementary teachers' experiences having leadership roles within rural schools in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. According to The National Center for Education Statistics (2006), a rural school is defined as a school that is located more than 25 miles from an urbanized area. I gained individual perspectives by conducting one-on-one interviews with veteran elementary teachers that have taken on leadership roles within the school. According to Anderson (2008) elementary teachers are more likely to progress as transformational teacher leaders in the context of the rural school. Moreover, Anderson (2008) argued that teachers within an elementary school are more likely to work towards a common goal or a shared vision for the overall improvement of the school as a whole. Whereas, middle school and high school teachers are more likely to focus on their specific subject area.

For this reason, I focused on interviewing veteran elementary teachers that teach in rural schools located in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan.

For the one-on-one interview process, I employed the use of Active Interviews. According to Holstien and Gubrium (1995) during Active Interviews, the interviewer and the interviewee are seen as equal partners in the process. In addition, respondents during an Active Interview are regarded as narrators. The interviewer and the interviewee work together to construct meaning regarding the experiences or stories that interviewee provides (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995).

For the purpose of this study, Leadership Role will be defined as a currently practicing teacher's responsibilities other than typical teaching responsibilities that provides the teacher with opportunities to engage in the decision-making process within the school. I will define veteran teachers, as teachers that are still currently practicing with a minimum of twenty years in the teaching profession. I conducted this research during the COVID 19 Pandemic, so my one-on-one interviews were done via Zoom. A qualitative, narrative approach has allowed me to explore the various experiences of veteran elementary teachers' in regards to empowerment within the school, and how those experiences have impacted their teaching career.

To begin the research process, I selected seven veteran teachers; through purposeful sampling that have had experience with leadership roles within the school where they teach. Participation in this study was voluntary. Butina (2015) explains, narrative studies help to deeply explore experiences of individuals. Purposeful sampling was my preferred method for selecting participants, so that I had a range in variation of the narratives from the individual participants. Moreover, Patton (2002) suggested the use

of no more than ten participants for a qualitative narrative study. The use of less than ten participants will yield richer and more in-depth narratives for each individual participant. I had direct access to seven veteran teachers within the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. To gain access to selected veteran teachers to participate in this study, I emailed each potential participant individually. Conducting one-on-one interviews with seven veteran teachers enabled me to delve deep into each individual participant's story and explore the various themes that result from the one-on-one interviews (Patton, 2002).

Creswell (2012) suggested that humans are natural storytellers and the use of a narrative design enables the researcher to gather in depth information that provides rich details of the individual participants' experiences. I used the narrative thematic process to conduct my study. The narrative thematic process has five stages, the five stages are organization and preparation of the data, obtaining an understanding of the data that has been collected, coding the data, putting the data into categories and or themes, and interpreting the data (Creswell, p. 197).

Organization of the data began by transcribing the data from the one-on-one recorded interviews with the participants, which is the first stage of conducting a narrative inquiry, according to Creswell (2012). After transcribing the recorded interviews, I then sought to find any patterns or themes that emerged from the data. Finding patterns and themes from the transcribed data, is the second stage of the narrative inquiry process. Reoccurring themes that emerged were coded. There were six key themes that were identified and coded during this stage of the process. The coding process consisted of re-reading the transcribed narratives and further identifying patterns and themes that emerged, these themes and patterns received a code, so I was easily able

to identify recurring patterns. Finally, the researcher interpreted the data that was collected. To interpret the data, the researcher transcribed each one-on-one interview and examined each narrative to identify commonalities across participant narratives. In addition, the researcher conducted Member Checking to validate the data I collected via the Zoom interviews. According to Birt, et, al. (2016), Member Checking is when the researcher validates their data, by allowing the participants to check for accuracy. Birt, et, al. (2016) suggests that Member Checking will yield quality and accurate results of my findings (Butina, 2015).

### **Participant Selection Process**

Creswell (2012) identified five steps for the process of conducting a qualitative study. The first step Creswell (2012) identified, is selecting the participants for the qualitative study. The population being studied for the purpose of this research was veteran teachers that have had leadership experience in the school. Once the population was clearly identified, the researcher employed a purposeful sampling approach. The participants in this study were selected on the assumption that they could help the researcher understand how teacher empowerment impacts veteran teachers' experiences within the teaching profession.

According to Creswell (2012) the second step in this process was gaining access to the participants for the study. The researcher contacted eight potential participants via email (see appendix D) that met the purposeful sampling criteria of veteran teachers that have had experiences having leadership roles within the school. The researcher knew these potential participants professionally in the educational field. Of the eight participants that were contacted by the researcher, seven agreed to participate in the study

being conducted. Upon agreeance of participating in the study, the researcher emailed all participating participants an informed consent document (see appendix A) that was prepared by the researcher, to confirm the participants understood the scope of the study. All the participants signed and returned the informed consent form via email.

### **Data Collection**

The third step in conducting qualitative research according to Creswell (2012) is the data collection process. For this study, the researcher determined that conducting one-on-one interviews via Zoom, would be the best procedure for collecting data. The process of conducting one-on-one interviews also aligns with Creswell's (2012) suggestions regarding qualitative narrative research designs. In addition, the practice of conducting one-on-one interviews with participants allowed the researcher to collect personal stories of the participants. For this study, interview questions were developed by the researcher and in regards to the research question. In addition, the researcher allowed for an open discussion process during the one-on-one interviews to collect personal experience stories from the participants involving their experiences with leadership roles in the school.

After the seven participants returned their signed informed consent form, the researcher contacted the individual participants to set up dates and times for their interviews via Zoom. The use of Zoom was the preferred method for interviews all study participants, as this study was conducted during the COVID 19 Pandemic. Once interview dates and times were agreed upon by the participants and the researcher, the researcher sent each participant their own personal Zoom link for their one-on-one interview. Each Zoom interview lasted approximately 45-60 minutes. Prior to each Zoom interview, the researcher reviewed the informed consent form (see appendix A) with each

individual participant to ensure the interview could be recorded for the purposes of this study. All interviews were recorded on the researcher's personal computer and later transcribed. To validate the interview transcriptions, the researcher used Member Checking and emailed the transcriptions notes to each individual participant to check validity (Candela, 2019). Once the validity of the transcriptions was determined, the researcher was ready to analyze the data that was collected. The researcher employed the use of pseudonyms for the participants to create a connection with the participants and the reader, while protecting the participants' identities. All data collected for the purpose of this study will be stored on the researcher's password protected personal computer. The transcribed data from the one-on-one interviews via Zoom, will be stored as word documents. The informed consent forms were scanned and saved as PDF files (2012).

### **Procedures For Analyzing Data**

The data that was analyzed for this study, was acquired from the one-on-one interviews conducted via Zoom. While examining the data, the researcher looked for themes, connections, and related categories amongst the transcriptions from the interviews that were conducted. The researcher used an inductive approach to the analysis of the data, to identify themes within the narratives. Creswell (2012) identified the importance of deriving themes within narratives during a qualitative narrative study. The researcher began analyzing the data by transcribing the interviews. After transcribing each individual interview, the researcher searched for commonalities amongst the participants' experiences. Once commonalities were identified, the researcher further inquired into the participants' narratives to determine categories and themes. The researcher used a cross-case analysis method to code the data. The coding of the data was

done by the researcher. According to Khan and VanWynsberghe (2008) the cross-case analysis method involves the researcher to deeply explore similarities and differences across cases while supporting theoretical predictions made by the researcher. There were theoretical predications made by the researcher that emerged during the coding process, these were leadership style, trust, communication, and morale. The other themes that emerged during the coding process, were autonomy and mentorship.

### **Summary**

In this section, the researcher defined the research methodology, research design, the participant selection process that was used for this study, explanation of the analysis of the data, information regarding data storage, and a copy of the informed consent form given to the participants, as well as the one-on-one interview questions that were used. The purpose of this study was to collect narratives from veteran teachers about their experience having leadership roles within the school, and how those experiences with empowerment impacted their teaching career. The research question that was presented, guided that inquiry.

The researcher determined that purposeful sampling was the best protocol for the participant selection process. Research sampling included seven veteran teachers with a minimum of twenty years teaching experience that are still currently practicing. All participants that were selected reside in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. The researcher knew the participants personally through teaching. All participants that were selected have had experience with leadership roles during their teaching career. All participants reviewed, signed, and returned the informed consent form to the researcher. Data was

collected using one-on-one interviews that were conducted via Zoom, due to the COVID 19 Pandemic.

#### **Chapter 4: Research Results**

For the purpose of this study, seven veteran teachers were interviewed using one-on-one interviews via Zoom to gain perspective regarding their experiences from obtaining leadership roles within the school. The researcher sought to gain knowledge of how teacher empowerment through leadership roles impacted the participants' experiences in the teaching profession. The personal stories of the participants, that the researcher collected during the interview process provided the researcher with each participants' perspective of how their personal experiences with leadership roles and empowerment impacted their experiences as a teacher. Though each interview provided a unique perspective, common themes did emerge across the participants narratives.

This chapter is intended to introduce the participants of this study and present the findings to the research question posed: *In what ways does teacher empowerment impact veteran teachers' experiences within the teaching profession?* This section will begin by introducing the seven participants and providing the reader with information about each of the participants and their experiences as a teacher. The section following, will discuss the themes that emerged during the interview process. In addition, the overall research findings will be explored.

##### **Veteran Teacher Narratives**

This section of the study, will familiarize the reader with the participants. This section will delve into each of the individual participants' teaching experience, leadership experience, and provide information about how their experiences with leadership roles

and teacher empowerment within the school has impacted their overall experience as a teacher.

### **Holly: Teaching and Leadership Experience**

Holly has been a teacher for twenty-four years. Most of her teaching experience has been at a private Catholic school in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. Holly holds a Bachelor of Science Degree in Education. Holly identifies as a fifty-five-year-old, White female. She has worked under a handful of different principals during her time as a teacher and each change in formal leadership has directly impacted her career. At the school where Holly works, there have been leadership roles available in the form of committees. In addition, in the past, there have also been lead teachers, however that leadership role no longer exists. Holly was lead teacher when the role was available. She took on the role of the principal when the principal was not in the building. Since then, Holly has been a diligent member of the math committee. This leadership position, allowed her and the other committee member to be directly involved in the decision-making process regarding teaching math and choosing math curriculums within the school.

According to Holly, being part of the decision-making process and working as a team, allowed Holly and the other members of the Math Committee to proceed with a shared vision. Furthermore, having a committee select and make decisions about math and the math curriculum aided in bringing the teaching staff together as a whole in a shared vision regarding teaching math within the school.

Feeling like I had a say, a voice, gave me a feeling of importance in the school. I felt like I was respected and that my knowledge of mathematics was valued by the

other teachers and the administration. Being part of the Math Committee allowed me to be part of the decision that was made in choosing how we would teach math and what we would use to teach math. (Holly, veteran teacher, 55 years old)

Holly also spoke about distributed leadership. She felt that when the administration gave the teachers a chance to be part of the decision-making process, overall morale was higher within the school. The most common ways in which Holly was involved in the decision-making process was during her time on committees. Being a committee member allowed Holly to assume a leadership role regarding the use of curriculums within the school. Holly also mentioned that the notion of distributed leadership was becoming more prevalent. Holly discussed how committees within the school are now more trusted to carry out decisions than in the past. In the past committees could give input, but their voices were not always heard by the administration. Holly noted, that the current administration is more trusting and trusts that the teachers are experts in the fields. This trust, leads the teachers to feel empowered. Having been empowered, by feeling trusted to make decisions regarding curriculums and teaching methods, Holly, felt more confident and satisfied in her teaching position.

Holly also discussed how mentorship contributed to her leadership roles. Throughout her twenty-four-year teaching career, Holly has mentored five student teachers. Holly discussed how mentorship made her feel empowered as a teacher.

Having the responsibility of being a mentor teacher, allowed me to share my knowledge of teaching with someone who was just starting out in the profession. Being a mentor teacher, I felt respected, knowledgeable, and helpful. It was exciting to be able to share my teaching skills and techniques with my student

teachers. I felt empowered as a teacher, because I was trusted to show my student teachers how to carry out lessons in the classroom. The success of my student teachers was also my success as a leader. (Holly, veteran teacher, 55 years old)

The establishment of trust from the administration was also a key component that led Holly to feel empowered within her position. Holly discussed how the current administration in her school established a trusting environment for the teachers. “We feel trusted to do our job; the administration understands we are experts in our field. We don’t feel micromanaged” Holly, veteran teacher, 55 years old). Holly discussed how not every administrator she has worked with established a trusting environment. Working in a school, where she felt trusted, Holly also felt the overall morale at the school was higher. “Morale can always be better, but it is better than it has been in a long time, because we feel trusted to do our jobs and trusted that we know how to do our jobs our own way”. (Holly, veteran teacher, 55 years old)

Holly has shared her experiences working with various administrators throughout her time working at the private Catholic school in Michigan’s Upper Peninsula.

We have had some good principals and some not so good principals. I have worked with principals that have worked hard to include the teachers in the day to day. But, I have also worked with some principals that have shut out the teachers. One principal worked alone in her office with the door closed. She was very unapproachable. We never knew what was going on and always left in the dark. If her door was open, she wasn’t there and no one seemed to know where she was. She wasn’t principal for long, but during that time, morale was really low. (Holly, veteran teacher, 55 years old)

Holly discussed the leadership style of her current administrator and emphasized that this administrator has established trust within the school. In addition, Holly also explained that her current administration tends to lead using a distributed leadership approach. Holly explained that the feeling of trust she currently experiences in her work environment has made her feel a higher sense of job satisfaction. “I enjoy what I do. I have always loved being a teacher. My job can be difficult though, and working with principals that don’t respect or value their teachers can be discouraging”. (Holly, veteran teacher, 55 years old)

### **Katherine: Teaching and Leadership Experience**

Katherine has been teaching for twenty-five years. Katherine identifies as a fifty-three-year-old, White female. Katherine received her education degree from Northern Michigan University. “I remember my education well. I had many wonderful experiences in college and the experiences I had helped to solidify my desire to become a teacher” (Katherine, veteran teacher, 53 years old). During her time teaching, Katherine has worked at three different schools. She has taught at a Catholic School in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, an elementary school in Skanee, Michigan, and currently teaches at a public elementary school in Baraga, Michigan. All of her teaching experience has been at rural schools in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. Katherine currently holds a Master’s degree in Special Education.

I have always wanted to be a teacher. I knew at an early age that I wanted to work with kids. I was always attracted to the idea of teaching others, especially those that struggled in school. Becoming a teacher seemed liked a natural choice for me. (Katherine, veteran teacher, 53 years old)

Katherine knew at a very young age that she wanted to become a teacher. She was attracted to the idea of helping kids. She said choosing to go into the teaching field felt natural for her. When Katherine began her career as a teacher, she mainly worked with students diagnosed with various learning disabilities. However, Katherine explained how the demands on teachers have steadily increased since she has begun teaching. “Now, I am working with students that have social and emotional disabilities as well as students with cognitive disabilities, while working to meet the needs of my students with learning disabilities. Sometimes, I feel spread too thin” (Katherine, veteran teacher, 53 years old). However, even with increasing demands, Katherine’s commitment to teaching has never wavered.

You have to make it what you want it to be. You need to get involved. When you get involved, you have the power to make decisions about how you want to teach.

I became part of the School Improvement Team, because I wanted to make my job better. (Katherine, veteran teacher, 53 years old)

Throughout Katherine’s teaching career, she has engaged in many leadership roles in the schools she has taught at. Most notably, working on the School Improvement Team, allowed Katherine to be directly involved in the decision-making process. Katherine explained that her participation in this leadership role allowed her to voice her opinions about the best ways to support students and teachers in the school. However, Katherine did emphasize that different administrators directly impacted the amount of involvement she had in the decision-making process. Though she spent many years as a School Improvement Team member, the type of administration at the time greatly impacted the power of the School Improvement Team. While working with administrators who

practiced distributed leadership, or as Katherine stated, (Katherine, veteran teacher, 53 years old) “a shared leadership approach”, she felt more involved in the decision-making process regarding how she taught and her role as a teacher in the school.

While working with administrators that allowed the teachers to participate in the decision-making process through committees, Katherine found that the entire teaching staff along with the administration shared common goals. “When we were all able to openly communicate, it felt like we were on the same page as to how we envisioned the school in the future” (Katherine, veteran teacher, 53 years old). This shared vision, described by Katherine, was only experienced when she worked with administrators who allowed the teaching staff to openly share their thoughts and ideas.

I once worked with an administrator who was a teacher at the school first. During his time as a teacher, he made friends with some of the other teachers. The problem with this was, when he became the principal, he was buddy, buddy with these certain teachers. There wasn't open communication with the rest of the staff and he often let his friends make decisions. If you weren't his friend, you weren't involved. The good thing is, he realized his leadership style was an issue and decided to return to teaching. (Katherine, veteran teacher, 53 years old)

When working with administrators that lead using a distributed leadership style Katherine felt she was able to have more involvement in making decisions about how she taught and what types of professional development opportunities she and the other teachers had.

In addition, Katherine explained how trust was a critical factor in the overall morale at the school she currently teaches at. Katherine communicated that in the last few years, she has been able to work with an administrator that trusts her to make decisions

regarding how she teaches. “I felt that I was empowered when my principal trusted me” (Katherine, veteran teacher, 53 years old).

A few years ago, a student with severe emotional issues was placed in my room. This student was very violent and had several outbursts throughout the day. When he first came to me, there was a long list of how others thought I should handle this student. However, my teacher’s aid and I had different ideas of how we could reach this student. I approached my administrator and explained that I was the expert and I wanted the chance to try out my ideas first. My principal said he trusted me and gave me the go ahead to work with this particular student the way I wanted to. What I decided to do, ended up working. I was able to use strategies I learned during my graduate courses to work with this child. My administrator told me he was glad he trusted me and acknowledged my abilities to make decisions about how to handle students in my room. This acknowledgement and positive reinforcement, made me feel even more empowered in my position. (Katherine, veteran teacher, 53 years old)

Katherine attributed her feelings of empowerment were do to her being trusted by the administration to make decisions about how she taught. In addition, receiving positive reinforcement, acknowledgment of a job well done from her administrator also made Katherine feel significant in her role. Katherine believed that she had autonomy regarding her position as a teacher. Her education and experience gave her confidence to voice her opinions to her administration. This confidence enabled Katherine to gain autonomy and teach in a way that she felt best met her students’ needs.

Though Katherine felt the administration she currently worked with was open and honest when communicating with the staff, it is important to mention that Katherine felt this changed due to the COVID 19 Pandemic. “Before the pandemic began, I felt the administration communicated openly and honestly. But, now morale is very low, because we are all scared and the administration is not being honest about what is going on” (Katherine, veteran teacher, 53 years old). Katherine believed the administration was not being transparent about the COVID cases in the school. Because of this, Katherine felt that morale was extremely low. “Communication between the administration and the staff is so important. Without honest communication, there is a major breakdown and morale is low” (Katherine, veteran teacher, 53 years old).

Moreover, Katherine also attributed her role as a mentor teacher as a significant part of her leadership experience. Throughout her career, Katherine worked with multiple student teachers. “Helping student teachers find their teaching style and voice, helped me to develop as a leader. I was able to share my knowledge with someone just starting out and help guide them in the right direction” (Katherine, veteran teacher, 53 years old). Being a mentor to student teachers helped Katherine to realize her abilities as a leader. In addition, Katherine also explained that she felt proud when her student teachers graduated from college and were successful in their own classroom as teachers.

### **Linda: Teaching and Leadership Experience**

Linda has been a teacher at a rural K-12 school in Crystal Falls, Michigan for twenty-nine years. Linda identifies as a fifty-nine-year-old, White female. “I always felt like I was never really good at just one thing. I wanted to do many things, so I thought teaching would allow me to do that” (Linda, veteran teacher, 59 years old). Linda holds a

Bachelor of Science Degree in Elementary Education. Immediately following graduation, Linda obtained a teaching position in Crystal Falls, Michigan. Linda has taught in multiple grades and subjects while teaching in Crystal Falls. Currently, Linda teaches third grade. Linda discussed how she experienced many stressful experiences as a teacher, nevertheless, Linda never thought about leaving the profession. “Though I did experience many stressors throughout my teaching career, I never thought about leaving. I like the schedule, the students, and the feeling I get as a teacher” (Linda, veteran teacher, 59 years old). There were many ups and downs during Linda’s teaching career. She had difficult years and wonderful years as a teacher. This was dependent on the types of students she had in her class and her relationships with the various administrators she worked with.

Throughout Linda’s teaching career, she participated in various leadership roles. However, according to Linda, her most notable leadership role was that of the union president for the school she teaches at.

This role did cause stress for me. Often times I had to go head to head with the administrator at the time and I didn’t like that, because I do not like confrontation. Even though this leadership role did cause stress, I felt like what I was doing was really important. I needed to use my voice to make my working conditions what I wanted. I also had to be the voice of other teachers. Without speaking up, we were at the mercy of the school board and the administration. Being involved as the union president, allowed me to have my voice heard. I knew my role as union president wouldn’t be without stress, but I also knew that it was worth it to make my teaching job better. (Linda, veteran teacher, 59 years old)

Although Linda admitted that being the union president was stressful, Linda also acknowledged the importance of her role as union president. Linda understood that in order for her to be satisfied within her profession, she needed to speak up for her rights as a teacher. Linda believed that through negotiations, she gained more autonomy as a teacher. In addition, Linda also emphasized the importance of being involved with the decision-making process. “Getting involved is important. If you don’t like how things are going or the decisions that are being made, you need to get involved and speak up” (Linda, veteran teacher, 59 years old).

Linda’s role as the union president enabled her to feel empowered in her position as a teacher. Though Linda did experience stress and sometimes strained relationships with certain administrators, Linda felt that her role as the union president was worth the stress, as it gave her and other teachers a voice in the school. Linda explained that when she felt the administration and the school board heard her ideas and opinions, she gained autonomy in her profession.

In addition, to gaining autonomy, Linda also believed that she had more power regarding the daily operations of the school. Linda spent most of her career working along side her husband in the school, who worked as the industrial arts teacher. Linda and her husband both became involved with the union, because they believed that their involvement would enable them to participate in the decision making process, as well as negotiate for better working conditions and pay for themselves and the other teachers at the school.

Before my husband retired, he worked on the grievance committee for the union. Our roles as union officers really helped to shape the school into the kind of

working environment we wanted it to be. We understood the contract and knew what was asked of us. We also knew that if it wasn't in our contract, we could stand up for ourselves. Some teachers, especially new teachers didn't know the contractual language and felt like they needed to please the administration at all costs. My role as union president helped other teachers to understand what they were contractually obligated to do and what they didn't have to do. That gave everyone power in their position. I always made sure to encourage teachers to know their contract and to become involved. (Linda, veteran teacher, 59 years old)

Linda recalled many positive experiences she had during her teaching career "Some of my favorite experiences, was when past students would come back and tell me about their accomplishments" (Linda, veteran teacher, 59 years old)). Working with the students and knowing she had a positive impact on them was very rewarding to Linda. Linda described many occasions when students would come back to visit her. She thoroughly enjoyed seeing how much her students had progressed after leaving her class. "That will be what I miss the most when I retire. I will miss the students coming down to my classroom and visiting with me" (Linda, veteran teacher, 59 years old).

Linda also recalled her time as a mentor teacher for student teachers and new teachers in the school. "My time as a mentor, allowed me to not only help someone learn how to be a teacher, but it let me reflect on my own teaching" (Linda, veteran teacher, 59 years old)). Mentorship gave Linda confidence in her abilities to teach. Not only could she teach her students, but she also found she was able to guide new teachers. Linda enjoyed being a mentor teacher for student teachers and newly hired teachers. Linda

believed that her time spent as a mentor, helped her to become a better teacher. It also gave her confidence and a feeling of satisfaction. Linda will retire next year. She feels as though she is ready. “I am ready to retire. I know there will be things that I will miss, but I am ready, especially after this year” (Linda, veteran teacher, 59 years old). The COVID 19 pandemic contributed to Linda’s readiness to retire. Linda explained how the pandemic added a new level to stress for her as a teacher. Linda also noted that the COVID 19 pandemic led low morale in the school. “It is difficult to be positive as a teacher when you are scared and uninformed by the administration. After this year and all the extra stress because of COVID 19, I am ready to retire” (Linda, veteran teacher, 59 years old).

### **Leslie: Teaching and Leadership Experience**

Leslie has been teaching for twenty-six years. Leslie identifies as a fifty-four-year-old, White female. She began her teaching career in Houghton and taught there for seventeen years. After many years of communing from L’Anse to Houghton, Leslie finally was able to accept a teaching position in Baraga teaching elementary technology. Leslie always wanted to be a teacher. “I just always wanted to be a teacher. I knew early on that I wanted to work with children, so there was never a question of what I wanted to do, I just always knew I wanted to be a teacher” (Leslie, veteran teacher, 54 years old).

Leslie received her teaching degree from Northern Michigan University. After attending college, Leslie moved back to her hometown of L’Anse Michigan. She was immediately offered an elementary teaching position in Houghton. She was thrilled to finally be teaching in her own classroom. During Leslie’s time teaching elementary school in Houghton, she taught at all elementary grade levels, including some middle

school business classes for a brief time. When Leslie was hired in Baraga, Michigan, she was hired as the elementary technology teacher. “I am responsible for teaching the elementary computer classes, which includes keyboarding and technology” (Leslie, veteran teacher 54 years old).

Leslie did contemplate leaving the teaching profession for a variety of reasons. She believed she was underpaid and under appreciated by her administration at times, however Leslie couldn’t imagine being satisfied in another profession. “Although being a teacher did have its challenges, especially financially, I couldn’t picture myself being happy doing something else” (Leslie, veteran teacher 54 years old).

It’s really the students that keep me going. I have received thank you notes from students years after they have taken my classes. When I realized that I was actually appreciated and made a difference in a student’s life, I knew I had made the right decision to continue teaching. There will always be frustrations, but as long as the rewards outweigh the frustrations I encounter, I will continue teaching. (Leslie, veteran teacher 54 years old)

Throughout Leslie’s twenty-six years teaching, she has participated in various leadership roles.

It’s hard to remember all the leadership roles I have taken on at the schools I have worked at. There have been so many. I would say, the leadership roles that have had the most impact on me as a person and on my teaching, career were my time spent as technology department head, mentoring student teachers, and my participation as a union officer. I can speak in front of my students, but when it comes to speaking in front of other adults, I become very shy. Being the

department head for the technology department helped me to overcome my anxiety of speaking in front of adults. As the department head, I had to lead every technology committee meeting, I also had to express my ideas about how we could improve technology and technology instruction in the school. This wasn't easy at first and I remember being nervous, but when I realized that the other committee members and the principal valued my ideas, my self-esteem grew. Being a mentor teacher also helped me to overcome my shyness. I had to be confident in my abilities in order to guide these new teachers. (Leslie, veteran teacher, 54 years old)

Leslie also stated that her time working as a union officer also helped her to gain confidence. In addition, Leslie also believed that she was more involved in the decision-making process at the school, while she was a union officer. When Leslie felt empowered, she felt like she had ownership of some of the decisions that were made. "I felt like I knew what was going on. I also felt like I had the power to give input, especially when it came to negotiating our contract" (Leslie, veteran teacher, 54 years old).

During Leslie's teaching career, she has worked with several different administrators. Leslie discussed the different leadership styles she experienced. She experienced administrators that were overbearing and lead with an authoritarian style of leadership. She also worked with administrators that she believed played favorites and were not fair. Additionally, Leslie also worked with administrators that demonstrated a distributed-leadership style. Leslie explained that the style of leadership significantly impacted the overall morale at the schools she worked at. While working with the

principal that practiced distributed-leadership, Leslie noted that she felt trusted to make decisions about how she taught her students. “I felt trusted to make decisions in my classroom. The principal didn’t question my abilities, and that was a good feeling” (Leslie, veteran teacher, 54 years old). When Leslie felt trusted by the principal, she believed she had autonomy in her classroom. This feeling of autonomy enabled Leslie to become more self-confident in her teaching abilities, as well as feel more satisfied as a teacher.

Leslie stated that when she worked with an autocratic principal, she felt micromanaged. She stated that her ideas and opinions were not valued or taken into consideration when decisions were made. According to Leslie, the principals that lead with an autocratic leadership style made the teachers feel micromanaged. “When we felt micromanaged, we felt like we weren’t trusted as professionals” (Leslie, veteran teacher, 54 years old).

There have been many different principals at Baraga. They come and go often.

There was one I worked with that made the teachers feel valued. He was a teacher for many years at a different school, before becoming principal at Baraga. I think that helped him to understand that the teachers’ opinions need to be taken into consideration when making decisions. When we felt valued and respected by him, the morale at the school was high. Many of us were disappointed when he left and took a job at another school, because we felt like he was a good leader. (Leslie, veteran teacher 54 years old)

Leslie also described mentorship having a significant impact on her teaching career.

“Like during my time as the technology department head, being a mentor teacher gave

me more self-confidence. Helping new teachers gave me a sense of self worth and helped me believe in my abilities” (Leslie, veteran teacher 54 years old). Leslie has always struggled with self-confidence, anxiety, and overcoming shyness. Her time spent in leadership roles in the school and mentoring others helped Leslie build her self-esteem and become a more confident teacher.

According to Leslie, the COVID 19 pandemic had a powerful impact on the overall morale of the school. Leslie noted that morale was extremely low, because teachers felt like the administration was not effectively communicating with the teaching staff. Leslie also believed that at times, the administration was not completely honest about COVID 19 numbers in the school and this made Leslie feel that she was not trusted by the administration. “Morale is at an all time low. Teachers are scared. We are not being told the truth about the COVID numbers in our school. We are not trusted to know what is really going on. We are very divided as a staff” (Leslie, veteran teacher, 54 years old). Furthermore, Leslie stated that there is more pressure than ever on teachers. “We are expected to work harder than ever and just adapt to every change without complaint. We are stressed, scared, and over-worked” (Leslie, veteran teacher, 54 years old).

### **Joan: Teaching and Leadership Experience**

Joan has been a teacher for thirty-three years; most of Joan’s teaching experience has been teaching at a K-12 school in Crystal Falls Michigan. Joan identifies as a sixty-year-old, White female. When Joan graduated high school, she originally wanted work in the field of recreation park management. However, at that time, park ranger jobs were scarce, so Joan decided to peruse a degree in education. Joan believed, that as an

educator, she could share her passion of the outdoors and nature with children and help future generations embrace the beauty and wonder that the outdoors has to offer.

Even though teaching was not my first choice, I do not regret going into education. In fact, I still think about joining my passion for education and the outdoors. I have always wanted to run an educational outdoor camp, where students learn in an outdoor setting. As a teacher, I have incorporated nature and the outdoors into my teaching. I also always liked kids, so education felt natural to me. The kids make your day. (Joan, veteran teacher, 60 years old)

Throughout Joan's thirty-three-year teaching career, she has engaged in various leadership roles within the school. Though Joan participated in several leadership roles, her most memorable and rewarding experience in a leadership role, was her time spent as a member of the Blended Learning Committee. Joan's experience as the technology director on the Blended Learning Committee, made her feel empowered about what was being taught and how it was taught. "I have always been good with technology and I loved the idea of incorporating technology in everyday learning, so being a part of this committee was very rewarding to me. I felt like I was truly involved in the process of deciding how we as a school wanted to move forward teaching students" (Joan, veteran teacher, 60 years old).

Joan's experience as the technology director on the Blended Learning Committee, made her feel empowered about what was being taught and how it was taught. In addition, Joan was also part of the Social Studies Committee for many years. During this time, she was able to travel to different schools in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan and collaborate with other Social Studies teachers. Joan believed that being involved in

committees was important. She felt that participating as a committee member in the school gave her more autonomy about how she taught and what she taught. Joan often chose to be part of committees that corresponded with her interests, such as technology and social studies.

Although Joan mostly chose to join committees that aligned with her interests, Joan was also a union officer at the school. Joan admitted that she was not passionate about being a union officer, but felt that it was an important role. Joan believed that in order for her and her fellow teachers to be satisfied with their profession, they needed to become involved in the union. Joan discussed her time spent being a union officer felt like a chore, she still believed that she was filling a vital role for the teaching staff. Joan acknowledged that being involved in the union helped her to attain autonomy as a teacher.

Joan was also a mentor teacher. She worked with many new teachers and student teachers. Joan explained that being a mentor to hopeful teachers, allowed her to reflect on her own teaching and gain confidence as a teacher. “Being a mentor helped me recognize my own talents as well as reflect on my teaching. I felt that being a mentor to someone else, made me a better teacher” (Joan, veteran teacher, 60 years old). Joan’s time spent as a mentor enabled her to gain confidence in her teaching abilities as well as reflect on her teaching.

In the midst of her career, Joan’s husband suffered a car accident in which he became paralyzed from the waist down. Following his accident, Joan found out she was pregnant with her second child. “This was a very stressful time. I knew I was going to have to support my family and care for my husband. I was a mother, a teacher, a wife,

and a caregiver” (Joan, veteran teacher, 60 years old). Joan was also worried her new role as a caregiver would interfere with her teaching and vice versa. She had to call for a sub many times because her husband needed her to care for him. However, Joan knew that it was vital for her to continue teaching, because her income as a teacher was important for her family. Because it was critical that Joan maintained her career to support her family, Joan felt it even more vital to be involved in committees and the union to ensure she remained satisfied and fulfilled as a teacher.

Moreover, Joan emphasized that the type of administration impacted her feelings of autonomy and empowerment. Joan felt more empowered when she was working with administrators that trusted her to do her job. In addition, Joan preserved administrators that practiced open communication and that trusted the teachers to make decisions “When I felt the principal trusted me, I felt like I was able to bounce ideas off of them and work collaboratively” (Joan, veteran teacher, 60 years old). In Joan’s thirty-three years, she worked with administrators with different leadership styles. Some were more authoritarian, while others practiced a distributed leadership style. Those that practiced distributed leadership and openly communicated with the school staff, in Joan’s opinion enabled her to feel more empowered in her position as a teacher.

Joan also discussed how the administration’s ability to openly communicate with the staff directly impacted staff morale. Generally, when working with administrators that communicated well, Joan felt morale was high. When administrators were not transparent in their communication, Joan believed these were times when morale was low in the school. Joan also emphasized the impact that the COVID 19 pandemic had on the overall morale. When the teachers believed that the administration was not forthcoming with

information during the COVID 19 Pandemic, Joan felt the morale was extremely low. “The fear and feeling that we were left out of the communication, really brought morale down” (Joan, veteran teacher, 60 years old). Joan strongly emphasized the importance of communication between the administration and the teachers and implied that morale suffered when communication from the administration was ineffective.

### **Julia: Teaching and Leadership Experience**

Julia has been a teacher for twenty-three years. Julia identifies as a fifty-six-year-old, White female. Julia attended Northern Michigan University and obtained her Bachelor of Science degree in Elementary Education. “I always wanted to be a teacher. I always liked kids, younger kids and knew I wanted to be an educator” (Julia, veteran teacher, 56 years old). When Julia went into the teaching program at Northern Michigan University, she was encouraged by friends and family to pursue a different degree.

At the time when I went into teaching, the teaching field was over-run and I was told it would be very difficult to find a job teaching. However, I couldn’t deny the fact that the only thing I wanted to do was teach, so I decided to continue my courses and eventually graduated with my teaching certificate. The thought of not finding a job when I graduated college was scary, but I really couldn’t imagine doing something else. (Julia, veteran teacher, 56 years old)

After graduation, Julia worked part time at a pre-school in Traverse City, Michigan. “I enjoyed this job, as my children were young and working part time, allowed me to be home with them more” (Julia, veteran teacher, 56 years old). When Julia moved back to Marquette, Michigan, she applied for a Kindergarten position at a Catholic elementary School. “Being Catholic, as well as being interested in teaching younger children, this

seemed like the perfect fit for me” (Julia, veteran teacher, 56 years old). Julia has been teaching at the Catholic school in Marquette, Michigan for the past twenty-three years. She has taught Kindergarten and currently teaches first grade.

There is a lot of pressure when you teach first grade. First grade is a big reading year and I am expected to have my students reading by the time to move onto second grade. Even though, I feel pressure to do this, I love it! I love when my students finally figure it out and can read. When I am in the classroom with my students, I am genuinely happy. (Julia, veteran teacher 56 years old)

Throughout Julia’s twenty-three-year teaching experience, she has seen many things change. The technology and increase of technology use in the classroom has drastically changed since she first started teaching. Julia has also worked for a several different administrators with various leadership styles.

We have had a handful of principals come from the public school. They do this, because they can get an extra pension from the Michigan Catholic Conference if they put in at least five years. The problem with these principals, was they were just going through the motions and were not truly invested in the school, the students, or the teachers. They worked with the door closed and didn’t communicate. This was frustrating. (Julia, veteran teacher, 56 years old)

Julia explained that when she worked with administrators that were “behind closed doors” (Julia, veteran teacher, 56 years old) there was not adequate communication between the administration and the teachers. According to Julia, this inadequate communication significantly brought the overall morale of the teaching staff down.

When the communication between the administration and the teaching staff suffered, morale was down. We didn't feel appreciated, we weren't told we were doing a good job, and we didn't know what was going on. This made morale low and created a strained work place. Communication is huge! When administrators do not communicate appropriately, there is a huge impact on morale. (Julia, veteran teacher, 56 years old)

Julia emphasized the importance of the administration communicating with the teaching staff. "I feel like our current principal communicates well. Communication can always improve, but I feel like she does her best to effectively communicate with the teaching staff" (Julia, veteran teacher, 56 years old).

Julia also discussed the importance of establishing trusting relationships. Julia described feeling trusted by her principal. Julia stated that her administration trusted her in her position and that made her feel valued. Moreover, Julia also stated that throughout the years she has also gained autonomy within her position as a teacher. She believes that because she is trusted by her principal, this gives her a feeling of autonomy in regards to the decisions she makes about teaching in the classroom.

I feel like I have proven myself as a competent teacher over the years. My principal recognizes this and trusts me to do my job. I do feel like I am a valued teacher. I feel like I have the power to make decisions about the way I teach in my classroom and as long as the students are learning and things are going well, the principal trusts me to make these decisions. (Julia, veteran teacher, 56 years old)

During Julia's teaching experience, she participated in many leadership roles within the school. Julia has been a member of various committees, such as the Math Committee, the Reading Committee, Virtue Committee, and the School Improvement Team. In addition,

Julia also spent many years as Lead Teacher. As the Lead Teacher, Julia was responsible for taking on the responsibilities of the principal when the principal was out of the building. Moreover, Julia acted as a liaison between the teachers and the administration. This gave Julia insight into the responsibilities of an administrator. “Having this insight, made me more aware of how I could do my job better” (Julia, veteran teacher, 56 years old). Julia felt that having the experience of being lead teacher gave her perspective about what being an administrator entailed. Having that perspective helped Julia reflect on her teaching and in her opinion helped her to become a better teacher.

I didn't want to be lead teacher, because I wanted to become an administrator, I became lead teacher, because I really thought I could be a good liaison between the teachers and the principal. I also wanted to see what it was like on the other side. I thought having this perspective would help me to understand the responsibilities of the principal more and how those responsibilities impacted the teachers. I really feel like my time spent as Lead Teacher was incredibly valuable. It gave me an understanding of what it was like to be a principal. It also helped me to understand how I, as a teacher could communicate better with the principal. This was not only helpful to me, but to other teachers in the school too. My role as Leader Teacher also helped me to mentor other teachers, as well as student teachers. (Julia, veteran teacher, 56 years old)

Julia's experiences as Lead Teacher made her feel more empowered in her position, she believed that her experiences helped her to better understand how to communicate effectively with the administration and that in turn helped her to feel more confident and empowered as a teacher. In addition, Julia also felt that her role as Lead Teacher enabled

her to me an effective mentor to the other teachers she worked with as well as student teachers.

Julia worked with many student teachers throughout her twenty-three years teaching. She stated that working with student teachers made her feel valued. “I felt like I was making a difference for these young teachers just starting out. I enjoyed guiding them and then watching them run the classroom” (Julia, veteran teacher, 56 years old).

Mentorship was a large part of Julia’s leadership experience. She enjoyed being able to guide new teachers and watch them flourish. She also felt it was vital to encourage others to pursue teaching as a career and mentoring student teachers enabled her to do just that.

### **Janice: Teaching and Leadership Experience**

Janice has been teaching for twenty-five years. Janice identifies as a fifty-eight-year-old, White female. She attended Grand Valley University, but did not complete her degree. During her time at Grand Valley, Janice got married and had her first child. “I wanted to finish college, but at the time, I felt like I needed to concentrate on my new family” (Janice, veteran teacher, 58 years old). Although Janice was a new mother and wife, she still desperately wanted to teach, so she enrolled at Northern Michigan University and was expected into the education program. Janice finished her education classes and obtained her Bachelor of Science degree in Elementary Education from Northern Michigan University.

Upon graduation, Janice accepted a teaching position at a Catholic school in Iron Mountain, Michigan, teaching preschool.

When I was a child, I always wanted to play school. I came from a large family and had many brothers and sisters I could “teach”. I’ve never really thought of

doing anything else, teaching was it for me. I did consider staying home after I had my first child, but my desire to finish college and to eventually teach, won out; so, I decided to finish my degree at Northern. I was thrilled when I got my first teaching job, it felt right. (Janice, veteran teacher, 58 years old)

Janice spent two years at the Catholic teaching preschool. Janice then accepted a teaching position at a public elementary school in Kingsford, Michigan teaching fourth grade. Since then, Janice has taught kindergarten through sixth grade, she currently teaches fourth grade and hopes to remain teaching fourth grade until she retires.

Teaching is always a challenge and never boring. I've enjoyed switching grade levels, it has kept my career interesting. Each year is also a fresh start too. No two years are ever the same. I love being able to go into each year, knowing that I will be challenged in different ways. I also love the connection I am able to build with the kids. I enjoy running into them years later. I remember one year, I gave each student a Christmas ornament. Now, as adults, these former students will send me pictures of them putting this ornament on their tree. These relationships that I have built with my students has been the ultimate reward for me. (Janice, veteran teacher, 58 years old)

Throughout her time teaching at the public elementary school, Janice has taken on various leadership roles. Janice lead the Science Curriculum Committee and established the annual Science Fair, was leader of the Parent Teacher Organization, and also a member of the Crisis Committee. Due to COVID 19, Janice found herself and her Crisis Team members busier than ever developing guidelines for returning to school in 2020.

Everyone had an opinion, and everyone felt differently about how we should move forward. This was quite a challenge. Our principal has been very transparent about his desire for the students to remain in person. Not everyone feels this way, especially with steadily rising COVID cases in our area. Though, we do not all agree with the principal's opinion, we appreciate his honesty. He isn't telling us what he thinks we want to hear.

We know what his position is. (Janice, veteran teacher, 58 years old)

Janice stated that effective communication from the administration is crucial, especially this year with COVID 19. Throughout Janice's twenty-five years, she has worked with a handful of different administrators. "Some were better than others. With a few, you knew where you stood and you could trust them. With others, it was like hot or cold, you never knew how they were going to react" (Janice, veteran teacher, 58 years old).

Janice described the different types of leadership styles she experienced with the administrators she worked with. Those that were able to effectively communicate and worked with the teachers in their committees, gave Janice a more positive experience. Administrators that did not communicate effectively and rarely engaged with the teachers, in Janice's opinion were more difficult to work with. Janice stated that having an administrator that listened to the teachers' concerns, were good communicators, and trusted teachers to do their jobs, made the overall school climate positive. Janice called these types of administrators the "I've got your back" administrators. "We want to feel supported, with the decisions we make in the classroom. We want to know that the principal will have our back" (Janice, veteran teacher, 58 years old).

Throughout Janice's teaching career, she participated in many leadership roles within her school. Most leadership roles were in the form of committees, however founding and leading the Trauma Informed Team in her school was the most meaningful to Janice.

I have participated in a few different leadership roles during my career. Most of them were as a committee member. I was a member of the School Improvement Team and on the Crisis Committee. But, what I am most proud of, is establishing our school's Trauma Informed Team. I went to a professional development seminar a few years back that was about identifying trauma and understanding how that trauma effects student learning and behavior. In order to understand why a student acts and behaves the way they do, we need to understand what kind of trauma they may have experienced and the lasting effects of that trauma. (Janice, veteran teacher, 58 years old)

Janice was so inspired about what she had learned during professional development about trauma and its impact on students, she decided to approach her administrator and asked to form a new committee in which the focus would be on students' social and emotional well being and understanding trauma and it impact on students' behavior and academic abilities. To Janice's delight, the principal approved her plan and she immediately began forming the new committee, which she decided to call the Trauma Informed Team.

Janice stated that before the establishment of the Trauma Informed Team, her school had been mainly focused on academics and test scores. "They weren't taking other factors into consideration. It was all about the academics. No one was focused on why students were failing" (Janice, veteran teacher, 58 years old). Janice explained that her

Trauma Informed training helped her to view students through a new lens. “I could understand why they weren’t succeeding, and I felt like knowing what I know now about trauma and its impact on kids, I could help them. This made me feel incredibly empowered in the classroom” (Janice, veteran teacher, 58 years old).

Throughout Janice’s time teaching, she also mentored student teachers, new teachers, and presently, teachers new to trauma informed instruction. “I am considered to be the “go to person” in my school. Everyone knows that I am always willing to listen and help” (Janice, veteran teacher, 58 years old). Mentoring others has been a highlight for Janice. She discussed feeling that she is an essential teacher at her school, because of her establishment and participation as a mentor to others and for her involvement in the school’s Trauma Informed Team. “I feel like I have made an important contribution to my school by helping others become trauma informed. I feel like this has made a huge impact on not only the way I teach, but how other teachers teach” (Janice, veteran teacher, 58 years old).

### **Key Themes**

The research question that was posed: “*In what ways does teacher empowerment impact veteran teachers’ experiences within the teaching profession?*” led to six key themes. The six main themes that were identified through the interview process, were Autonomy, Leadership Style, Trust, Communication, Mentorship and Morale. Each of the seven participants’ experiences with leadership roles shaped and impacted their careers in significant ways. The first key theme that was identified, was Autonomy. The second key theme that was identified was Mentorship. Each participant discussed their

roles as a mentor and how mentorship helped to contribute to their success as a leader within the school.

The third key theme to be identified was Leadership Style. Each of the seven participants acknowledged that the style of leadership within the school was a vital factor in their ability to obtain leadership roles and partake in the decision-making process. The fourth key theme to be identified was Trust. Each of the seven participants discussed the importance of the administration establishing trust in order for the teachers to feel empowered within their position. The establishment of trust within the school, allowed each of the seven participants to feel valued, respected, and successful within their position. Moreover, each of the seven participants mentioned that their administration trusted them to make decisions within their leadership roles. The fifth key theme identified was Communication. All participants described effective communication between the administration and the teaching staff as a crucial factor that directly impacted morale in the school. Finally, the sixth key theme that was identified was Morale. Each of the seven participants mentioned how their experiences and perceptions directly impacted morale. Those that felt autonomous, valued, and trusted, had an overall higher morale.

***Autonomy:***

According to the participant narratives, Autonomy was a theme common to each of the seven participants. Each participant commented on feeling autonomous in their role as a veteran teacher. However, each participant did explain that autonomy did not come until later in their career. In addition, all participants explained that their professional autonomy was directly impacted by the type of leadership style demonstrated by the administration.

Some participants that worked with more authoritarian administrators during the beginning of their teaching career, explained that they felt little autonomy regarding decisions about what they could teach and how they could teach it. Participants that experienced authoritarian administrators all felt a lack of autonomy and believed they were micromanaged. Furthermore, the participants that worked with authoritarian administrations also felt less confident and satisfied within the teaching field.

Participants that worked with administrators that practiced a distributed-leadership style, believed they were given professional autonomy. Working with a principal or superintendent that practiced distributed-leadership, allowed the participants to be autonomous regarding what they taught and how they taught it. All seven participants felt like they were trusted to make the best decisions regarding their students. Participants agreed that teachers should be treated like other professionals, in which they should have the ability to choose the best practices for their students. Pearson and Moomaw (2005) described the freedom to make such decisions, regarding what to teach and how to teach it, is referred to as teacher autonomy. Through distributed-leadership practices, teachers are seen as professionals that are trusted to make appropriate decisions regarding their students' learning in the classroom. Each of the seven participants experienced working with administrators that allowed them to be autonomous regarding their decisions about student learning in their classrooms.

Holly stated, she felt autonomous in the classroom, because she believed that her administration trusted her to fulfill her job requirements. Holly also stated that she did not feel micromanaged and believed she had the ability to make decisions regarding what she taught and how she taught. Additionally, Holly believed that her involvement as a

member of the Math Committee, led her administration and fellow teachers to gain respect for her as a competent professional. This in turn led to increased feelings of autonomy for Holly, because she felt like she had professional independence regarding math instruction in the school.

Katherine felt autonomous when her administration trusted her to make decisions about how she handled behavioral issues in the classroom. Katherine mentioned that she believed her autonomy was due to her experience and proven abilities. She believed that she was able to prove to her administrator that, because of her experience and knowledge; she knew the best procedures for successfully handling students with behavioral issues in her classroom.

Linda described how her vast knowledge of her contract gave her autonomy. She understood what she was contractually obligated to do. Moreover, working as union president, also gave Linda autonomy, because she felt she had the power to negotiate to make her job better. Linda stated that being involved in the negotiation process, as union president, gave her more professional freedoms. Linda believed her leadership role, as union president, gave her autonomy in the classroom.

Joan felt like her professional autonomy was dependent on the type of leadership style the administration practiced. When working with administrators that practiced distributed leadership and collaborated with her, Joan felt she had autonomy. When Joan worked with administrators who micromanaged her or led with an authoritarian style of leadership, she felt like she had less autonomy regarding how and what she taught.

Julia believed that her autonomy came with increased experience as a teacher. Julia discussed how over time, her administration grew to trust her abilities as a teacher.

When Julia felt trusted, she felt autonomous regarding the way she taught her students. Janice's narrative shows, that she believed she had the authority to use her knowledge regarding the impact of trauma on students to differentiate her teaching in the classroom. This feeling of autonomy, allowed Janice to have a sense of professional independence in her classroom. Furthermore, Leslie believed she had professional autonomy when her principal trusted her. This led to feelings of satisfaction and self-worth for Leslie.

***Leadership Style:***

All seven participants in this study discussed working with different administrators who demonstrated various types of leadership styles throughout their career. Alonderiene and Majauskaite (2016) suggest that leadership style has a direct and significant impact on job satisfaction. The different types of leadership styles each had an impact on the participants' perceptions of their careers. Those that worked with administrators that practiced an authoritarian leadership style, described feelings of unrest and dissatisfaction within their profession as a teacher. However, all seven participants did describe experiences working with administrators who led the school using a distributed-leadership style. When the participants described their experiences working with administrators who practiced distributed-leadership, the participants described feeling trusted and more satisfied within their profession.

In exploring the narratives of each participant, it is clear that, each of the seven participants had experience working with principals and superintendents that demonstrated different leadership styles. The most common leadership styles were authoritarian and distributed-leadership. In all cases, when participants described their time working with autocratic leaders, participants described feelings of dissatisfaction

and division. In Leslie's narrative, she described feeling micromanaged while working with principals that lead with autocratic style of leadership. Katherine mentioned that the type of leadership practiced by the administration impacted morale. When Katherine worked with administrators that allowed her to be part of the decision-making process regarding how she taught her students and handled behavioral issues in her classroom, she felt empowered.

Janice described feeling valued by administrators that listened to her ideas and gave her the power to create a new committee. In Joan's narrative, she described the differences in leadership styles she experienced throughout her time teaching. Joan stated that the type of leadership style demonstrated by the administration directly impacted her feelings of empowerment and autonomy. Joan felt empowered when she worked with an administrator that allowed her to be part of the decision-making process. Joan felt respected and valued as a teacher when she was trusted to make decisions regarding how she taught.

Linda's role as union president was impacted by the various leadership styles she experienced. When working with authoritarian leaders, she felt tension during the negotiation process and believed her relationship with the administration suffered. However, when working with leaders that extended leadership practices to the teaching staff; Linda believed these administrators entered into negotiations with the best interests of the teachers in mind.

Holly stated that when she worked with an authoritarian administrator, she felt uninvolved in the decision-making process. "We were kept in the dark. Her door was always closed, and when it wasn't no one knew where she was. We just didn't know what

was going on” (Holly, veteran teacher, 55 years old). Furthermore, Julia described working with administrators that lead “behind closed doors” (Julia, veteran teacher 56 years old) as frustrating. When Julia worked with principals that established trust and respected her teaching style, Julia described feeling empowered in her classroom.

***Trust:***

The third key theme to arise from the participant narratives, was Trust. Tschannen-Moran (2007) describe the establishment of trust as a key factor in the smooth operation of an establishment. Without trust, there can be a breakdown in communication and problem that arise are often difficult to resolve. All seven participants noted that trust was a vital factor in their abilities to perform in leadership roles within the school. Each of the seven participants said they felt trusted during some point in their career as a teacher. All seven participants described trust as being a critical factor in their journey to empowerment in the classroom.

Katherine felt trusted by her principal when she was given permission to use her knowledge, expertise, and ideas for creating a safe and structured environment in her classroom for a student with extreme behavioral issues. Janice felt trusted by her administration and her fellow teachers when she was encouraged to start a new committee at her school. Janice’s new committee focused on teachers becoming trauma informed to better meet the needs of their students that have been impacted by trauma. When Janice was trusted by her administration to establish a new committee, she felt empowered to make changes regarding how teachers taught students impacted by trauma in the school. Joan believed that when she and the administration were able to build a trusting relationship, she became more empowered and satisfied in the classroom. Joan

thrived when she was able to work with superintendents and principals that trusted her to make decisions in her classroom.

Linda believed that when the administration worked to establish trust with the teachers and went into negotiations honestly, with the best intentions to improve the work environment for the teachers; the overall morale of the teaching staff was high. Leslie explained that during the COVID 19 pandemic, trust greatly suffered in her school. She believed the administration was not honest about the school's COVID 19 numbers with the teaching staff. Leslie stated that the distrust that was created by the administration's omissions lead to an all-time low morale amongst the teaching staff. Holly was able to create a trusting relationship with her current principal. She discussed feeling trusted to teach her students in her own way. Holly stated that because she was trusted, she felt empowered in her classroom. Additionally, Julia also described feeling trusted by her principal to teach her students in her own way. Julia emphasized the importance of the administration acknowledging the successes of the teachers. According to Julia, when her success as a teacher was acknowledged by her administration, she felt valued.

***Communication:***

Communication was a common theme throughout all seven participants' interviews. According to White (1992) teachers' sense of efficacy is impacted by effective communication within the school. When administrators effectively communicate with teachers, teachers are empowered with more influence in the school. In addition, participants described better work place relationships with their administration when there was transparency. When there was a breakdown in

communication from the administration to the teachers, work relationships suffered and morale was negatively impacted (White, 1992).

In Katherine's interview, she described communication as extremely important. Katherine felt that her current administration was generally open and honest when communicating with the teachers. However, Katherine felt that communication began to suffer at the onset of the COVID 19 pandemic. In Janice's narrative, she explained how communication varied depending on the administrator. Janice felt that administrators that listened to teachers' concerns were effective communicators. In Janice's interview, she also explained that when she was able to openly communicate with her administrator, she felt she was able to anticipate their reactions, which made her feel like she knew what to expect.

In Joan's narrative, she discussed how she enjoyed being able to discuss ideas with the administration. Joan stated, that when she worked with an administrator that was a good communicator and willing to discuss ideas with her, she felt encouraged to use new and innovative teaching strategies in her classroom. Linda emphasized the importance of being able to effectively communicate with the administration regarding negotiations. Linda felt that when she worked with administrators that were able to communicate honestly with their teachers, negotiations were fair and predictable.

In Leslie's narrative, she believed that effective communication was lacking in her school. She believed that certain teachers were in the know and others were left out. Leslie described her school as divided. In Holly's narrative, she stated that she felt like she was "left in the dark" (Holly, veteran teacher, 55 years old) when communication from the administration was lacking. Holly discussed her experiences working with

various administrators and noted that her experiences were more positive when she was working with a principal that successfully communicated with the teachers. In Julia's interview, she shared her experience of working with administrators that did not communicate with the teachers. When communication was minimal, morale was low. According to Julia, when she was not communicated to about her performance as a teacher, she felt unappreciated.

***Mentorship:***

Mentorship was a common theme in all seven participants' interviews. During their careers as a teacher, all seven participants were mentor teachers to student teachers or new teachers in the school. The experience of mentorship impacted each of the participants' perspectives on leadership. According to David (2000) Mentorship greatly improves teacher success and retention. However, it is not just the novice teacher that benefits from mentorship, the veteran teacher that acts as the mentor, also benefits from the experience. The mentor teacher receives personal satisfaction, prestige, and a sense of professional fulfillment. Moreover, participants also mentioned increased confidence levels through mentorship (David, 2000).

Katherine attributed her work as a mentor helped her to develop as a leader in the school. For Janice, her experiences as a mentor extended further than just mentoring novice teachers. Janice acted as a mentor to any teacher that needed support and guidance. Janice described herself as the "go to" person in her school. Being the "go to" person gave Janice a sense of self-worth and made her feel like a valuable asset at the school. Joan believed that her experiences as a mentor helped her to become a better teacher. Joan felt that she needed to be at her best when mentoring her student teachers

and this helped her to grow her skills as a teacher. In Linda's narrative, she stated that her time spent as a mentor teacher, helped her to gain self-confidence and improve upon her own teaching. She also mentioned that when mentoring new teachers, she was able to self-reflect upon her own teaching methods and felt encouraged to try new strategies in the classroom.

Leslie stated that working as a mentor teacher, helped her to overcome her shyness and gain self-confidence in her teaching abilities. For Holly, participating as a mentor helped her to feel knowledgeable and respected as a professional. Holly also stated that when the student teachers she was mentoring experienced success, Holly felt successful as well. Julia believed that by mentoring novice teachers, she was contributing competent teachers to the teaching profession. Julia felt that she was obligated to encourage others to pursue teaching as a profession.

***Morale:***

For all seven participants, their perceptions of their various experiences impacted their morale. During different points in their careers, each of the seven participants experienced periods of high and low morale within the schools they taught at. According to Evans (2001) leadership impacts perceived morale, motivation, and job satisfaction. Periods of high morale were often directly connected to the participants' perceptions of their self-worth, how the administration communicated with the teaching staff, and the participants' sense of being appreciated and valued as a teacher. According to White (1992) teacher empowerment has a direct impact on teacher morale in the schools. Those that feel empowered by their administrators, often have higher morale. Furthermore,

morale has also been attributed to the administration's ability to effectively communicate with the teaching staff (White, 1992).

It is important to note, that all seven participants said morale at their school suffered at the onset and continuation of the COVID 19 pandemic. According to the participants, this was mostly due to ineffective communication from their administration. In Katherine's story, she attributed to having high morale when she felt trusted by her administrator. In addition, Katherine also felt the overall morale at her school was higher when her principal effectively communicated with the teachers. For Janice, she experienced periods of high morale when she was empowered. Janice perceived morale to be high for her when she had the ability to develop and run the committee she created. Janice also perceived morale to be high when she knew and her colleagues knew what to expect from the administration.

Joan believed that morale in the school was directly impacted by the administration's ability to communicate effectively. Throughout Joan's teaching career, she experienced working during times of high and low morale. Linda mentioned that the type of leadership style demonstrated by the administration impacted the overall morale of the teaching staff. When the administration worked to build trust and was able to successfully communicate with the teaching staff, Linda felt that morale was high. When working with autocratic leaders, Linda perceived the overall morale of the teaching staff as low. Additionally, Leslie attributed low morale was due to ineffective communication from the administration. In Holly's interview, she stated that morale can always be higher, but believed communication from the administration determined if morale was high or low amongst the teaching staff. For Julia, when she felt unappreciated by the

administration, she felt morale was extremely low. Julia emphasized the importance of the administration communicating with the teaching staff regarding their appreciation for them and acknowledging their accomplishments. Julia believed that when the administration individually recognized teachers' abilities and successes, the morale was high.

### **Summary and Findings**

This chapter presented the categorized themes derived from the individual participant interviews regarding the research question: *In what ways does teacher empowerment impact veteran teachers' experiences within the teaching profession?* The purpose of this study was to answer the posed research question and to explore the perceptions of empowerment experienced by currently practicing veteran teachers. The interview questions asked by the researcher to the participants during the interview process, focused on the participants' narratives and experiences with leadership and empowerment as a teacher. Each individual interview was unique as each participant had different experiences with leadership and empowerment throughout their teaching career. However, reoccurring themes were present amongst all seven participants' interviews. The reoccurring themes discovered by the researcher were autonomy, leadership style, trust, communication, mentorship, and morale.

This is a narrative inquiry, which required the researcher to retell each of the participants' stories and experiences. The researcher used questions to lead the narrative process, but allowed each participant to guide the narrative during the interview process. All seven participants were veteran teachers with twenty or more years teaching experience. In addition, all seven participants were still currently teaching. Furthermore,

all seven participants had experience with empowerment and leadership roles at some point during their teaching career. The narratives that were shared, offered insight into each of the participants' varying experiences with leadership and empowerment during their careers.

The findings of this study demonstrate that empowerment does have an impact on veteran teacher's experiences within the teaching profession. All seven participants discussed their desire to become a teacher was present early on in their life. In addition, each of the seven participants continued teaching despite various set backs and discouragements. Ultimately, the participants' passion for teaching kept them in the field of teaching.

In Katherine's narrative, she stated that she always knew she wanted to work with children, so becoming a teacher was the natural choice for her. Katherine experienced various degrees of empowerment throughout her teaching career. Katherine felt most empowered, when she felt trusted by her administrator to address behavioral issues in her classroom using her knowledge, experience, and expertise. When Katherine was successful and her principal acknowledged that success, Katherine felt pride in her abilities as a teacher.

For Janice, she felt most empowered when she was encouraged by her administration to establish a new committee, which focused on trauma informed instruction. Janice's passion for looking beyond students' academic abilities and focusing on the whole child, led Janice to discover the importance of learning about how childhood trauma impacted students' abilities to learn. This knowledge empowered Janice to make changes within her school.

Joan stated that she felt most empowered when she was able to work with an administrator that wanted to collaborate with her. Joan enjoyed being able to work with administrators that were able to openly communicate with the teaching staff. When Joan was able to communicate her ideas with her administrator, she felt empowered to bring her passion for the outdoors into her daily teaching. Joan most enjoyed teaching when she felt trusted to teach her students in her own unique way.

Linda shared that she felt empowered within the leadership role of union president. According to Linda understanding her contract made her feel empowered as a teacher. She knew what she was contractually obligated to do and she understood exactly what her job requirements were. In addition, as union president, Linda also believed she had the ability to negotiate to make her job better. Having this power, led Linda to become more satisfied with her choice to remain in the teaching profession.

Leslie described becoming empowered when she ventured out of her comfort zone and became the technology department head. In her leadership roles as technology department head, Leslie had to effectively communicate her ideas for improving technology to the administration and her fellow teachers. Although, Leslie felt comfortable and confident teaching her students, Leslie described herself as extremely shy and lacking self-confidence when addressing adults. Leslie's role as technology department head helped her to overcome her shyness of speaking to her peers and administration. Through her participation as technology department head, Leslie gained the self-confidence she felt she was lacking.

In Holly's story, she discussed the importance of the administration trusting her abilities. Holly felt valued as leader of the math committee. This feeling of being a valued

and respected teacher, allowed Holly to feel empowered to choose the math curriculum that would be implemented throughout the school. When Noelle's administrator trusted her expertise regarding mathematics instruction, she felt empowered as a teacher. For Julia, the feeling of empowerment came when her administration acknowledged her success as a teacher. When Julia felt valued and competent, she felt empowered to teach her students in her own way. Additionally, Julia also believed that her time spent as a mentor teacher, enabled her to grow her self-confidence and improve her teaching skills.

Each of the seven participants were impacted from their experiences participating in leadership roles within the school. These feelings of empowerment benefitted the participants in many ways and positively impacted their teaching careers. All seven participants had a strong desire to pursue teaching as a career. Moreover, all participants experienced set-backs and felt discouraged at varying times during their career. However, all participants were able to continue through difficult times and points of low morale. This ability to persevere, was in part, because of their participation in leadership roles, that produced feelings of empowerment.

## **Chapter 5: Overview, Limitations, Recommendations For Future Research, And Concluding Remarks**

This narrative inquiry was conducted to explore if empowerment impacts veteran teachers' experiences in the school. This study is significant, because while there is research involving teacher empowerment, little research has been conducted about the impacts of empowerment in the teaching profession. The research question that was examined was: *In what ways does teacher empowerment impact veteran teachers' experiences within the teaching profession?* This chapter is intended to provide an

overview of the study, research findings, conclusions, and to present recommendations for future research.

### **Overview of the Study**

This study was a qualitative, narrative inquiry. According to Creswell (2012) a narrative study involves the gathering of stories from individuals, the researcher retelling the stories that have been collected, identifying themes, and determining conclusions from the data that has been collected. The researcher employed a purposeful sampling method when selecting research participants for this study. The researcher initially contacted eight potential participants via email. Of the eight potential participants that were contacted, seven chose to participate in the study. The researcher was able to conduct one-on-one interviews via Zoom with seven veteran teachers, that were still currently teaching. Each Zoom interview lasted approximately sixty minutes.

The researcher provided a review of existing literature. The literature review enabled the researcher to develop interview questions and protocols for this study. The literature review categories that were explored in this study, were: Empowerment Through Distributed Leadership Within the School, Potential Benefits of Teacher Empowerment, Teacher Empowerment Through Effective Leadership, Teacher Empowerment in Connection to Morale, Mentorship, and Factors Affecting Job Satisfaction for Veteran Teachers.

Through the interview process, the researcher was able to acquire answers to the research question: *In what ways does teacher empowerment impact veteran teachers' experiences within the teaching profession?* The researcher used an inductive approach to analyze the data acquired from the individual interviews that had been conducted via

Zoom. The researcher examined the data, looked for reoccurring themes, connections, and related categories throughout the individual interviews that had been transcribed. Creswell (2012) emphasized the importance of discovering themes within narratives during a qualitative narrative study. A cross-case analysis method was used to code the data. The data was coded by the researcher. According to Khan and VanWynsberghe (2008) the cross-case analysis method requires the researcher to intently explore similarities and differences across cases, while supporting predetermined theoretical predictions previously made by the researcher (Khan & VanWynsberghe, 2008).

### **Limitations**

This inquiry did experience certain limitations. COVID 19 imposed restrictions on this study. The researcher was not able to interview participants in person and instead had to utilize Zoom to interview participants for this study. In addition, the COVID 19 pandemic did impact the participants' experiences and perceptions at the time this study was conducted. The scope of this study was also limited to veteran teachers within the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. The veteran teachers that were selected for this study all taught at schools that are considered rural. In addition, all veteran teachers that were interviewed for this study were female. Participants for this study were all considered veteran elementary teachers with a minimum of twenty years teaching experience. In addition, each participant was currently teaching at the time this study was conducted.

### **Recommendations For Future Research**

Veldman, et, al., (2016) explained that in the last few decades, teachers have been given more responsibilities outside the classroom. These additional responsibilities often include the participation in various leadership roles and opportunities. Empowerment

within the field of teaching is a relatively new concept. In this study, the researcher sought to determine if empowerment impacts veteran teachers' experiences within the teaching profession. Understanding why empowerment impacts teachers' experiences in the teaching field is vital, as teacher retention has been linked with higher student achievement. Moreover, understanding what factors affect job satisfaction amongst teachers, would contribute to strategies employed by school leaders to retain high quality teachers, as well as recruit new teachers (Veldman, et, al., 2016).

Recommendations for future research regarding this subject would include using a larger number of participants and schools, conducting ongoing research regarding leadership and empowerment within the school, and comparing results of elementary, middle school, and high school veteran teachers. Studying possible relationships among teacher empowerment, school climate, and teacher retention could be utilized in future studies about this subject.

### **Concluding Remarks**

This study enabled the researcher to provide insight into how teacher empowerment impacts teachers' experiences in the school. According to the results of this study, the researcher found that teacher empowerment does positively impact teachers' experiences in the school. However, this study did have limitations, therefore the researcher cannot definitively state that teacher empowerment will always positively impacts teachers' experiences in the school. In addition, the results of this study are not generalizable, because of the small number of participants. However, the narratives that were explored for this study, did indicate that teacher empowerment within the school impacts veteran teachers' experiences.

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of veteran teachers, through the lens of Transformational Leadership theory. This study examined the perceptions and experiences of veteran teachers, currently teaching at rural schools in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. These veteran teachers acted as transformational leaders within the school. Each of the seven participants had varying experiences of empowerment through participation in leadership roles within the school. Results from this study, suggest that Transformational Leadership and empowerment continues to be intertwined in research exploring perceptions of empowerment in the workplace, especially in the teaching field. This study has shown that empowerment is a result of Transformational Leadership (Stewart, 2006).

Data collection was accomplished through a one-on-one interview process. The narratives that were shared in this study elucidate how empowerment and engagement with leadership roles in the school impact teachers' overall experiences and careers. Although each participant had unique experiences and engaged in various leadership roles within the school; these leadership roles led to feelings of empowerment, which according to the data collected and analyzed in this study, did positively impact each of the participants' experiences in the teaching field. According to Barth (1990) teacher leadership is a subject worth deeply exploring. Teachers are the backbone of our educational institutions. Teachers serve our schools and communities and are especially essential in rural communities, where this study took place. The COVID 19 pandemic has shed light on just how valued and necessary teachers are. School leaders should explore ways in which they can empower teachers within their schools, as empowerment may encourage high quality teachers to remain in the teaching field. The data gathered for this

study could be used by school leaders to better understand how teacher empowerment might be utilized to retain teachers and increase job satisfaction among teachers.

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## **APPENDIX A: Informed Consent Form for Research Involving Human Subjects**

Northern Michigan University

School of Education, Leadership, and Public Service: Study Title: VETERAN  
TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES IN CONNECTION TO TEACHER EMPOWERMENT  
WITHIN THE SCHOOL

IRB Approval Number: HS20-1155

Please read this consent document carefully before you decide to participate in  
this study. Purpose of the research study:

The purpose of this study is to learn about veteran teacher's experiences in  
connection to teacher empowerment within the school. For the purposes of  
this study, you will be asked to participate in one-to-one interviews via  
Zoom with the researcher.

What you will be asked to do in the study:

For the purposes of this study, you will be asked to participate in one-to-  
one interviews via Zoom with the researcher. During the interview  
process, you will be asked to share your stories about your experiences  
with leadership roles within the school and how those experiences have  
impacted your teaching career.

Time required:

Approximately 60 minutes

Risks and Benefits:

The risks of the study are minimal. Your participation in this study may help you and

others to understand the impact leadership roles within the school have on the teaching profession and overall teacher morale.

Incentive or Compensation:

There is no other incentive for participating; other than providing the researcher with narratives that could be beneficial for others in the educational field.

Voluntary participation:

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence or penalty.

Whom to contact if you have questions about the study:

If you have any further questions regarding your rights as a participant in a research project you may contact Dr. Lisa Schade Eckert of the Human Subjects Research Review Committee of Northern Michigan University (906-227-2300) [leckert@nmu.edu](mailto:leckert@nmu.edu). Any questions you have regarding the nature of this research project will be answered by the principal researcher who can be contacted as follows: Jessica Aho (906)-362-5377 [jessjohn@nmu.edu](mailto:jessjohn@nmu.edu)

Agreement:

I have read the above information and I am aware of the purposes of this study and my role as a participant. I fully understand that I may withdraw from this research project at any time without consequence. I also understand that I am allowed to ask questions about the study and the procedures of the study

If you wish to participate in this study, please sign the form below. A signature will indicate agreement to participate.

Participant's Name: (Print) \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ (Date) \_\_\_\_\_

I understand that I will be [*audio or video recorded digitally*] by the researcher(s). These files will be kept by the researcher(s) on a password-protected computer. I understand that only the researcher(s) will have access to these file

## APPENDIX B: Interview Questions

- *What/ who inspired you to become an educator?*
- *What has been your most positive experience as a teacher thus far in your career?*
- *Why have you stayed in the teaching profession?*

“We are going to discuss your experiences regarding leadership roles within the school”

- What leadership roles are available in your school for teachers?
- Have you participated in any leadership roles within the school now or in the past?
- How are leadership roles obtained in your school district?
- Do teachers have a voice in the decision-making process? What is the procedure?
- How does the administration promote teacher leadership roles within the school district?
- What is the current teacher morale like in your school?
- What could be done to improve teacher morale?
- If you are currently in a leadership role, please describe your role. How does having this leadership role make you feel as an educator?
- What leadership roles have you had throughout your career? Have these leadership roles impacted your career?
- In your opinion, how should teachers be supported in leadership roles within the school?
- What factors have impacted your choice to remain in the teaching profession?

## APPENDIX C: IRB Approval



Graduate Studies and Research  
Marquette, MI 49855-5301  
906-227-2300  
[www.nmu.edu/graduatestudies/](http://www.nmu.edu/graduatestudies/)

### Memorandum

**TO:** Bethney Bergh  
School of Education, Leadership, & Public Service

**CC:** Jessica Aho  
School of Education, Leadership, & Public Service

**DATE:** November 24, 2020

**FROM:** Lisa Schade Eckert  
Dean of Graduate Studies and Research

**SUBJECT: IRB Proposal HS20-1155**  
**IRB Approval Date: 11/24/2020**  
Proposed Project Dates: 11/6/2020 – 11/6/2021  
“VETERAN TEACHERS’ EXPERIENCES IN CONNECTION TO  
TEACHER EMPOWERMENT WITHIN THE SCHOOL”

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Your proposal “VETERAN TEACHERS’ EXPERIENCES IN CONNECTION TO TEACHER EMPOWERMENT WITHIN THE SCHOOL” has been approved by the NMU Institutional Review Board. Include your proposal number (HS20-1155) on all research materials and on any correspondence regarding this project.

- A. If a subject suffers an injury during research, or if there is an incident of non-compliance with IRB policies and procedures, you must take immediate action to assist the subject and notify the IRB chair ([dereande@nmu.edu](mailto:dereande@nmu.edu)) and NMU’s IRB administrator ([leckert@nmu.edu](mailto:leckert@nmu.edu)) within 48 hours. Additionally, you must complete an Unanticipated Problem or Adverse Event Form for Research Involving Human Subjects.
- B. Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a

description of the project and insurance of participant understanding. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant.

- C. If you find that modifications of investigators, methods, or procedures are necessary, you must submit a Project Modification Form for Research Involving Human Subjects before collecting data. Any changes or revisions to your approved research plan must be approved by the IRB prior to implementation.

Until further guidance, per CDC guidelines, the PI is responsible for obtaining signatures on the COVID-19 Researcher Agreement and Release and COVID-19 Research Participant Agreement and Release forms for any in person research.

All forms can be found at the NMU Grants and Research website:

<http://www.nmu.edu/grantsandresearch/node/102>

## **APPENDIX D: Recruitment Email to Participants**

Dear (name of possible participant),

I am a graduate student at Northern Michigan University. I will be working on my thesis that involves collecting the narratives of veteran elementary teachers. For my study, I am seeking the participation of veteran elementary teachers with a minimum of twenty years' experience teaching.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary and if you choose to participate, you may discontinue your participation at any time without consequence. If you agree to participate, your participation would involve a 60-minute interview via Zoom, in which you will be asked questions about your teaching career, your experience with leadership roles within the school, and about your overall experience as a teacher. I have also provided some sample questions in this email.

There is no compensation for your participation in this study, however there are possible benefits of participating in this study. Your participation in this study may help you and others understand if teacher empowerment impacts veteran teachers' experiences within the teaching profession.

If you would like to participate in this study, please respond to this email and I will set up a date and time for a Zoom interview with you.

### **Sample Interview Questions**

- *What has been your most positive experience as a teacher thus far in your career?*
- *Why have you stayed in the teaching profession?*
- *What leadership roles are available in your school for teachers?*
- *Have you participated in any leadership roles within the school now or in the past?*

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Sincerely,

Jessica Aho

Email: [jessjohn@nmu.edu](mailto:jessjohn@nmu.edu)