Beyond "Supervising" Paraeducators:

A Community of Practice about Team Leadership in Special Education

by

Jessanne P. Ledbetter

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

Approved April 2016 by the
Graduate Supervisory Committee:

Melanie Bertrand, Chair
Teresa Foulger
Taryl Hansen

ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

May 2016

ABSTRACT

This mixed methods action research study describes the benefits of a Team Leadership Community of Practice group for six early career special education teachers who supervised paraeducators. Problem-posing conversations with peers were a catalyst for professional learning and leadership transformation. The theoretical framework included Experiential Learning Theory, Transformational Leadership, and Communities of Practice—combined as a tri-theory lens. Data collection instruments included individual interviews, a focus group, content logs from audio recordings, a researcher journal, and two researcher-created instruments—the *Intentional Leadership Actions and Paraeducator Outcomes Survey* and the *Teacher Group Reflection Survey*.

Findings indicated that team leaders favored collaborative partnerships with paraeducators rather than supervisory roles. Given perceived communication barriers as team leaders, participants spent time preparing for conversations with paraeducators. Together, they co-constructed understandings and stretched one another as a learning Community of Practice (CoP), as defined by Wenger (1998). The CoP was a framework for Experiential Learning when team leaders gathered together to share their concrete leadership experiences, reflect, conceptualize abstract meaning, and discuss possible strategies for future experimentation. Additionally, team leaders experienced individual reflection following CoP gatherings as they considered peer suggestions, fine-tuned ideas, and planned leadership actions. As team leaders implemented new leadership ideas and experienced positive outcomes, they reported increased efficacy and desire for additional leadership opportunities in their classrooms and beyond. A trilogy of poems complements the discussion of findings.

DEDICATION

For all of the special education team leaders out there, fearlessly changing the lives of kids one day at a time. Be bold. Be courageous. But most importantly, dare to go far beyond "supervising" your own paraeducator teams.

And

For my own team, Tonya and Tania, without whom I could not do the work that I do. You are loved and appreciated.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am deeply grateful for the many individuals who provided support during this work. Your cumulative efforts gave me endurance, perspective, and a sense of humor through it all. I'm so thankful that God gave me you.

Deepest gratitude to my darling husband, Scott. You loved me in all the right ways, gave wonderful advice at the most challenging times, and celebrated every new discovery with such enthusiasm. Your support gave me incredible strength. I love you deeply. Team Ledbetter! We can't be shaken.

To my sweet baby girl, Gia. You were a great source of joy and a delightful distraction during this research process. Life has been infinitely better since we welcomed you into the world. I think my happiness shines through in the writing.

Endless appreciation to my mom. You raised me to believe I could do anything with hard work, and you taught me to keep my chin up and persist through every kind of struggle. I'm so grateful for the ways you have encouraged me over the years.

I am overwhelmed with gratitude for my committee. Mel, you were the perfect coach for me every step of the way. Your reflective questions, detailed notes, and steadfast enthusiasm for the research facilitated my thinking and gave me courage. I am so proud of our "magical beast." Teresa, you brought Wenger to life so I could see the importance of his work in my own context. Your wise suggestions about CoPs guided my research actions and greatly contributed to the authentic CoP in this study. Taryl, your teaching about Cognitive Coaching forever changed the way I interact in the world and value the thinking of others. The mentality of "getting in the stagecoach" helped me relax during the research and enjoy the meandering conversations without an agenda.

To the wonderful friends who stick by me every time I do something crazy like get a doctorate. I love you. Special thanks to Kristy, Amanda, and Cara for the ways you kept reaching out to ask how things were coming along. And thanks go to Abby, Angy, Jenn, and Julie for always being there for a leg wrap hug when I needed it most.

To Breck. Seven years ago, we met "online" working for ASU. You recruited me to come and work in your school district, encouraged me to apply for the induction coach position two years later, and invited me to your dissertation defense the following year. Seeing your defense stretched my imagination to believe I could follow in your footsteps. Three years later, it's hard to believe that I'm the one presenting the dissertation defense. You have been a tremendous mentor to me over the years, and I am deeply grateful.

To my team at school: Tonya, Tania, Cindy, MacKenzie, and Mona. I love the work we do, and I'm so grateful to teach alongside such passionate educators! You have inspired me on days I needed to smile and picked up my slack on days I needed help. Thank you. And to Pat for being a stellar guest teacher on days when I was away from the classroom to research or write. You kept our team in motion with marvelous finesse!

I've been powerfully changed by the talented individuals in Cohort 8. What a blessing to study theory and research among such impeccable people! Special thanks to my LSC: Carla, Steph, Jan, Matt, and Raquel. You each contributed to my success as we negotiated the challenges of action research together. Now we stand together victorious!

And finally, most importantly, to the team leaders in this study who were willing to contribute their own personal time so we could grow together as a CoP. I am profoundly grateful for the journey we shared co-constructing ideas about team leadership beyond simply "supervising" paraeducators.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

Special education teachers manage numerous responsibilities as they design student instruction, maintain special education paperwork, build relationships with families, and collaborate with staff. A great amount of literature focuses on the act of "supervising" paraeducators in special education settings (Chopra, Sandoval-Lucero, & French, 2011; French, 1997, 2001, 2003; Gerlach & Lee, 1997; Pickett & Gerlach, 1997; Steckelberg et al., 2007; Trautman, 2004; Wallace, Shin, Batholomay, & Stahl, 2001). Supervising paraeducators is important to ensure appropriate educational practices; however, there is limited literature that portrays special education teachers as leaders who go beyond supervising paraeducators to establish collaborative team[1] partnerships. This study introduces the terms *team leader* and *team leadership* to emphasize the leadership responsibilities of special education teachers working with paraeducators. As the team leader for paraeducators in my special education classroom, leadership is more important than supervision because I strategically nurture a team characterized by mutual respect, shared vision, joint problem solving, ongoing professional learning, and celebration of student progress. Team leadership is a complex challenge, especially for early career special education teachers (French & Chopra, 2006; McGrath, Johns, & Mathur, 2010). As an afterschool induction coach in my district, I support early career special education teachers on their team leadership journey beyond simply "supervising" paraeducators.

Districts have various terms for paraeducators including paraprofessionals, educational assistants, teaching assistants, Title I assistants, or teacher aides. In general

---

[1] In this study, the term "team" will refer only to the special education teacher and paraeducators that work directly with the teacher in the classroom or with a particular caseload of students in the school. Additional

1

terms, paraeducators are non-certified personnel who are supervised by certified teachers. Historically, paraeducators supported teachers with simple tasks like clerical work (French & Pickett, 1997). But in 2002, the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act established guidelines for highly qualified paraeducators and specified that paraeducators "may not provide any instructional service to a student unless … working under the direct supervision of a teacher" (NCLB, 2002, p. 83). Two years later, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA 2004) specified that paraeducators should be "appropriately trained and supervised" (p. 102) when working with special education students. However, there is no clear description for the term *appropriate* in IDEA 2004, so this term is open to interpretation (Ashbaker & Morgan, 2012). Therefore, many paraeducators do not receive appropriate training and supervision to perform their jobs (Breton, 2010). Some states have taken steps to further define standards and guidelines for paraeducators. According to the National Resource Center for Paraeducators (NRCP), 28 states have paraprofessional standards (NRCP, 2013a) and 10 states have paraeducator handbooks (NRCP, 2013b). Arizona does not have paraeducator standards or a paraeducator handbook to clarify the expectations for instructional assistants to be appropriately trained or supervised by special education teachers.

Special Education Teacher: A Very Complex Role

Special education teachers have complex leadership responsibilities in their classrooms that extend beyond student instruction. In my work, I refer to these extra responsibilities as *team leadership.* Special education teachers demonstrate team leadership by establishing instructional goals for students and guiding paraeducators collaboratively toward those goals. As the team leader, special educators should equip

paraeducators with appropriate instructional strategies, monitor implementation, provide feedback, and foster communication about student progress. The term *team leadership* is not well established in scholarly literature, but I will use this term to present a new concept that synthesizes literature about "supervising" paraeducators with literature about cultivating collaborative teams. I believe the term *team leadership* provides an important shift in the literature, acknowledging that special education teachers must do more than supervise staff. Further, this term clarifies the importance of intentional leadership actions to navigate the complex role of cultivating an effective team.

To shed light on this topic according to current scholarly literature, I will discuss the complex role of special education teachers, training deficits for special education teachers, and paraeducator outcomes when team leadership is lacking. The terms *team leadership* and *team leader* are rare in the following discussion because they are rare in existing literature. However, this literature review will paint a picture of team leadership responsibilities and outcomes in special education using concepts that currently prevail.

According to French (1997), special education teachers perform executive functions in the classroom that include planning, managing schedules, delegating tasks, providing orientation, on-the-job training, evaluation, and managing the work environment. Given these responsibilities, Chopra et al. (2011) state that special education teachers need competencies in supervision, teaming, collaboration, and leadership. Many special education teachers are responsible for training and supervising their own paraeducators (Council For Exceptional Children, 2010; French & Chopra, 2006). Chopra et al. (2011) found that teacher leadership in special education classrooms was the most important factor related to effective paraeducators. Yet special education

teachers report they do not receive enough training for their complex role of managing paraeducators (French, 2001).

Paraeducators need regular training about instructional strategies and behavior management (Trautman, 2004). Yet many early career special education teachers feel unprepared to train paraeducators about important topics (French, 2001). Paraeducators report that lack of training is one factor that influences their attrition from the job (Tillery, Werts, Roark, & Harris, 2003). Therefore, training is important because adults retain knowledge by actively hearing, saying, doing, and seeing the skill they are practicing (Carlson et al., 2003). As the instructional leader, a special education teacher is responsible for choosing appropriate instructional strategies and training the paraeducator to implement the strategies with students.

Following training, the special education teacher should create lesson plans for paraeducators that describe appropriate strategies to use with students (French & Chopra, 2006). However, many special education teachers do not provide adequate lesson plans for paraeducators (French, 2001). According to Chopra et al. (2011), teachers should include paraeducators in the lesson planning process. French (1997) suggests that lesson plan content should reflect the needs of the student, the skills of the paraeducator, and a simple format so plans are meaningful to both the teacher and the paraeducator. Additionally, teachers should write lesson plans based on the paraeducators' learning style so directions are easily understood (Trautman, 2004). It is not sufficient to verbally communicate lesson plans to paraeducators without additional support (French, 2001). Following lesson plan design, effective teachers should observe pareducators working with students to ensure lesson plan strategies are correctly implemented (Ashbaker &

Morgan, 2012; French & Chopra, 2006). Paraeducators report feeling frustrated when teachers do not clearly explain expectations for working with students (Riggs, 2004).

In addition to training, paraeducators need regular feedback from their supervising teacher to implement instructional strategies effectively (PAR2A Center, 2013). Yet pareducators report challenges with limited supervision and feedback (Breton, 2010). Feedback helps paraeducators learn new skills (Devlin, 2008; Pickett & Gerlach, 1997) so they can use effective strategies with students. A special education teacher should assume the role of a coach who offers suggestions instead of an evaluator who offers criticism (Trautman, 2004; French, 1997). When provided coaching, paraeducators increase instructional strategies and self-efficacy about teaching students (Chopra et al., 2011). When criticized instead of coached, paraeducators may experience workplace stress that decreases efficacy and contributes to attrition (Shyman, 2010).

The special education teacher is responsible for establishing the roles and responsibilities of team members (Capizzi & Da Fonte, 2012). Yet French (2001) found that some teachers do not establish clear and appropriate boundaries for paraeducators. The role of the paraeducator is to support student instruction and classroom environment, as specifically directed and supervised by the special education teacher. The special education teacher is responsible for all decision-making about students and communication with their families. Paraeducators benefit from guidance about roles and responsibilities to promote appropriate interactions with students, families, and school personnel. Trautman (2004) suggests that special education teachers should determine, document, and discuss roles and responsibilities with paraeducators. Clear roles and responsibilities improve team functioning. A lack of clear roles and responsibilities

5

increases workplace stress and conflict. According to Shyman (2010), role conflict is a primary factor in workplace stress that contributes to paraeducator attrition. Clear roles and responsibilities are important so that paraeducators do not step into the role of "teacher" to communicate with families, report student assessment results, or evaluate learning needs. Special education teachers must retain those responsibilities (Chopra et al., 2011) and clearly understand the important boundaries between classroom roles.

The special education teacher is responsible for promoting collaboration and team communication. Paraeducators report higher job satisfaction and feelings of respect in collaborative environments (Riggs, 2004). Therefore, collaboration and delegation are essential for effective teams (Capizzi & Da Fonte, 2012) in all types of special education settings. Trautman (2004) recommends regular team meetings for communication, discussion, and team cohesiveness. Team meetings provide opportunities for shared dialogue about student progress, teaching strategies, behavior management, and the functioning of the team. Additionally, collaborative problem solving improves student outcomes (Gerlach & Lee, 1997). Paraeducators report high levels of job satisfaction when their contributions are acknowledged, creating a culture of respect and appreciation (Giangreco, Edelman, & Broer, 2001). Special educators are most effective when they seek input from paraeducators, coach paraeducators with meaningful suggestions, develop a sense of purpose on their team, and lead by example (Gerlach & Lee, 1997). Despite the benefits of collaboration, teachers report lack of time for collaborative opportunities (French, 2001).

Given the many responsibilities discussed, it is clear special education teachers have a complex role that extends beyond "supervising" paraeducators and requires team

leadership to: provide training for paraeducators, develop descriptive lesson plans, offer regular feedback, establish roles and responsibilities, and arrange time for collaboration. Leadership in these tasks is important to provide paraeducators with clear direction and training about appropriate instructional strategies. The term *supervisor* is limiting because it implies that teachers simply oversee paraeducators who have already been trained in their roles. The term *team leader* clarifies that special education teachers are responsible for guiding all instructional decisions in the classroom, providing adequate training for paraeducators, and promoting team collaboration regarding student progress. Despite the importance of team leadership, special education teachers report inadequate preparation for supervising, evaluating, and collaborating with paraeducators (Capizzi & Da Fonte, 2012; Drecktrah, 2000; French, 2001). According to Ashbaker & Morgan (2012), "we still have a generation of teachers in classrooms around the world who have received little if any training in how to work effectively with paraeducators" (p. 326). Without training and guidance in developing collaborative relationships, team leaders cannot effectively utilize paraeducators in their classrooms (Capizzi & Da Fonte, 2012).

To offer solutions, scholarly literature suggests that special education teachers need more training, preparation, and support to supervise paraeducators in the workplace (Ashbaker & Morgan, 2012; Chopra et al., 2011; French, 2001; Shyman, 2010; Trautman, 2004). Ashbaker and Morgan (2012) suggest colleges should better prepare special education teachers to work effectively with paraeducators. Drecktrah (2000) suggests local school districts should establish standards for supervision and create evaluation protocols of paraeducators. Breton (2010) recommends that state and local agencies provide ongoing professional development for special education personnel.

Thinking beyond these practical solutions, I suggest that more training for special education team leaders is not the simple answer; instead, I suggest that team leaders need *different* training that reflects 21st century leadership. A great portion of scholarly literature focuses on special education teachers as "supervisors" who oversee paraeducators like managers who make plans and monitor progress of their "supervisees." This business mindset represents an antiquated belief that paraeducators are trainable and replaceable, neglecting each person's individual value to the organization and personal goals. According to Crowley (2011), 21st century employees desire respect, recognition, and fulfillment in the workplace that exceeds their desire for a simple pay check and five-day work week. Crowley argues that the workplace has evolved so that "managers" are no longer needed, but "leaders" flourish. He suggests that transformational leadership strategies are most effective in organizations today. Chopra et al. (2011) provide a glimpse of an updated model for paraeducator supervision that includes coaching, encouraging professional growth, and being an intentional role model to paraeducators. Aside from this one article, there is little scholarly literature that paints a picture of special education teachers as team leaders who step beyond the role of "supervisor" in their classrooms.

This study addresses a gap in the literature by articulating and exploring effective team leadership strategies for special education teachers in 21st century classrooms. New teachers may lack confidence and self-efficacy at the early stage of their careers (Hoy & Spero, 2005), making team leadership difficult. Effective mentoring of first-year teachers is one strategy to increase self-efficacy (Yost, 2002) and retention (Algozzine, Gretes, Queen, & Cowan-Hathcock, 2011). This study investigated the outcomes of a Team

Leadership Community of Practice (CoP) for early career special education teachers who sought to go beyond "supervising" paraeducators in their classrooms.

Situated Context

During the study period, I served dual roles in a Title I, metropolitan district called Southwestern Elementary School District (SESD)[2]. In my primary role, I was a special education teacher working with two experienced paraeducators in a preschool classroom for students with developmental delays. As the team leader in my own classroom, I utilized collaborative team leadership approaches for communication and problem solving that promoted student progress. In my secondary role, I was a special education coach for new teacher induction in SESD. New teacher induction in SESD was a mandatory afterschool, mentoring program for first- and second-year teachers. Third-year teachers were also included if they transferred to SESD from another district. This study related to my role as an induction coach supporting early career special education teachers; however, my experiences as a special education team leader influenced my work with early career teachers and my perspectives throughout this study.

Supporting Early Career Special Education Teachers in SESD

Special education induction in SESD was a specialized, multi-level support system developed by Imel (2012) to counteract high attrition in our special education department. In the three years leading up to this study, attrition of special education teachers at the end of each school year included: 30% loss in 2012-13, 24% loss in 2013-14, and 31% loss in 2014-15. There was limited data about attrition factors because

---

[2] An acronym.

SESD did not conduct formal exit interviews or surveys. Vacant positions were often replenished with recently certified, early career teachers. When this study began in school year 2015-16, SESD had 88 special education teachers, including 55 returning teachers and 1 experienced teacher who was new to SESD. Of the remaining 32 teachers, 19 teachers were classified as first-year special education teachers, 6 were classified as second-year special education teachers, 4 were non-certified, long-term substitute teachers, and 3 positions were vacant.

As a special education induction coach (SEIC), I was one level of support available to early career special education teachers district-wide. Additional levels of support for new teachers included two special education achievement advisors (AAs) for the district and one site-based induction coach (IC) at every school. AAs were special education experts who assisted teachers district-wide with significant special education issues. ICs were non-special education teachers who answered simple questions for new teachers at their school site. As an SEIC, my role was different than AAs or ICs because I designed content-specific, special education training for special education induction meetings. Though part of my role included mentoring teachers in early career development, I refer to my role as a *coach* because coaching principles guided my interactions with teachers. As a coach, I sought to promote the goals of each individual, nurture each individual's own thinking, cultivate reflective practices, and encourage the individual to take ownership of his or her own career path. These principles reflected my training in Cognitive Coaching[SM] and belief in supporting teachers as self-directed, capable individuals.

At the time of this study, I had served as an SEIC for four years. I was one of three SEICs in our district. As a team of coaches, we collaborated to support 25 early career special education teachers at various schools. Primarily, I supported first-year special education teachers by designing content-specific, professional development regarding special education responsibilities. My main SEIC responsibilities included planning monthly trainings, scheduling office hours for mentoring, answering questions by phone or email, collaborating to develop strategies for students or staff, and recommending resources. Occasionally, early career special education teachers visited my classroom, or I observed teachers in their classrooms. Throughout the year, I supported early career special education teachers with a variety of special education topics, including questions about paraeducators.

Given the many responsibilities of early career special education teachers, developing team leadership was a responsibility that some teachers in my district disregarded. Some special educators inherited an experienced, harmonious paraeducator team that functioned with limited leadership. Other teachers inherited a team that experienced conflict for various reasons, but the teachers did not yet possess appropriate leadership strategies to address the problems. For many teachers, the responsibilities of teaching outweighed the importance of team leadership in the first few years. When early career teachers in my district ranked the important skills they needed to learn, team leadership ranked low compared to other topics like writing compliant Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) and learning instructional strategies. Given the low-priority teacher ranking of team leadership compared to the high importance of team leadership

for successful classroom teams, unpredictable team leadership problems would arise for new teachers in their early career years.

Eleven years ago in another school district, I experienced this dilemma firsthand. I was a first-year teacher with an overwhelming caseload, a challenging paraeducator, and limited team leadership skills. One of my paraeducators frequently rolled her eyes, sighed loudly, and whispered critical comments while I was teaching. Like most new teachers, I had no previous experiences managing adults, and team leadership was not discussed in college. Further, there was no induction program to support new special education teachers in my school district. I felt embarrassed about asking administrators for help because I thought the difficulties were my fault. Daily challenges depleted my energy, decreased my self-efficacy, created anxiety, and affected my teaching because I felt insecure in my classroom. I now realize that I did not know how to be the team leader, establish roles and expectations, or employ assertive strategies to address professional behavior. I did not possess team leadership skills to cultivate communication and collaboration. At the end of that school year, I resigned feeling defeated and powerless.

As an induction coach, my past experiences have been helpful to understand and support new teachers who have faced team leadership challenges. Often, early career special education teachers in my district have become team leaders in classrooms with experienced paraeducators who have preconceived ideas about teaching. This created challenges for the early career teachers I served because they desired to establish their own instructional practices and train paraeducators to implement strategies consistently. According to Fullan (2007), implementing effective change is challenging because "no matter how honorable the motives, each and every individual who is necessary for

12

effective implementation will experience some concerns about the meaning of new practices, goals, beliefs, and means of implementation" (p. 39). Resolving problems was challenging for new teachers because most had not received specific training about team leadership. Leading change takes intentional team leadership strategies.

Exploring Team Leadership Challenges

To better understand team leadership in my district, I conducted surveys and interviews with key stakeholders in Fall 2013. Fullan (2008) suggests that effective change leaders must understand the change process, have moral purpose, develop relationships with stakeholders, foster knowledge building, and take risks that disrupt the status quo. Stakeholders included early career special education teachers, experienced special education teachers, special education induction coaches, and special education academic advisors. I selected these groups because they had awareness of team leadership challenges through personal experiences working directly with paraeducators or supporting teachers who worked directly with paraeducators.

Early career special education teachers agreed that team leadership is challenging. One teacher commented that it is "difficult to step into a classroom that the [paraeducator] has already been in because they have a way of doing things and do not want to adapt to new ways." Another teacher said it is difficult "addressing things without burning bridges or creating any type of tension." Special education induction coaches commented that supporting early career teachers with team leadership strategies is challenging because "we don't know the individuals, we don't know the personalities, we may not even be getting the whole story…the ideas we can suggest may not work for someone else." Another coach commented that new teachers may not know how to

document inappropriate adult behavior or ask for help from Human Resources in dealing with a paraeducator. She added, "The only ones that come to us are in crisis."

Overwhelmingly, stakeholders in my district agreed that team leadership was challenging for early career special education teachers. Interestingly, early career and veteran special education teachers reported less personal challenge with this topic even though they strongly agreed that this topic is challenging for others. This subtle difference reveals complexity, possibly indicating that there is stigma in admitting personal struggles with team leadership. Additionally, stakeholders indicated that there were few campus resources to assist teachers with team leadership strategies.

Purpose of the Study

As a coach of early career special education teachers, I found it challenging to support teachers with team leadership because each teacher had unique needs and our district lacked resources. While investigating potential solutions within my realm of influence, special education teachers indicated a desire to discuss team leadership with their peers, share strategies, and gain feedback. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore the outcomes for teachers who attended a bi-weekly Community of Practice about team leadership in special education. A CoP is a group of people who "share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis" (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002, p. 4).

In Fall 2015, I recruited six early career special education teachers to participate in a Team Leadership CoP. The CoP members gathered six times to discuss team leadership challenges, celebrate success, gain peer feedback, and support one another as

developing leaders. The Team Leadership CoP innovation represented a shift away from traditional professional development training for teachers and validated early career teachers as knowledgeable, self-directed learners with valuable ideas. I attended the CoP as a co-member and also served as the CoP coordinator who arranged the meeting space, brought snacks, and reminded participants of upcoming CoP gatherings. This study extends scholarly literature by examining leadership outcomes for early career special education teachers who attended the Team Leadership CoP.

Research Questions

Four research questions guided this mixed methods, action research study. The questions were as follows:

- RQ1: To what extent did the CoP influence early career special education teachers' perceptions of their ability to lead paraeducators in their classrooms?

- RQ2: How and to what extent did the CoP engage in problem-solving dialogues about team leadership in special education?

- RQ3: How and to what extent did CoP members identify beneficial team leadership resources and co-create resources together?

- RQ4: How did I negotiate the duality of being both a CoP coordinator and member?

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In this chapter, I will discuss three theoretical perspectives that guided this study: Experiential Learning (Kolb, 1984), as a theory for learning and mentoring, Transformational Leadership Theory (Bass, 1986), as a theory for leadership, and Communities of Practice (Wenger, 1998), as a theory for shared problem solving. The first three chapter sections are organized according to individual theoretical perspectives. For each, I will provide an overview of the theory, connect it to related literature that deepens understanding, and discuss empirical studies that apply the theory in meaningful ways that informed this study. After discussing each theoretical perspective individually, I will discuss the relationship between these theoretical perspectives as a complex lens to view this study as a whole. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of additional empirical literature related to this research.

Experiential Learning Theory

Experiential learning theory provides a lens to understand meaning making of concrete experiences in early career teaching. Meaning making can be influenced by a skilled mentor during conversations with mentees (LoCasale-Crouch, Davis, Wiens, & Pianta, 2012). In this section, I will discuss experiential learning theory, connect it with related mentoring literature, and discuss an empirical study that applies experiential learning to mentoring in a meaningful way that informed this study.

As a theory of learning, Experiential Learning Theory (Kolb, 1984) views the learner as an active participant in the learning process instead of a passive observer. Participants learn from having experiences in the world. Kolb describes the cognitive process of learning as a sequential, four-stage cycle. The four cycles include: concrete

experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation, as illustrated in Figure 1.
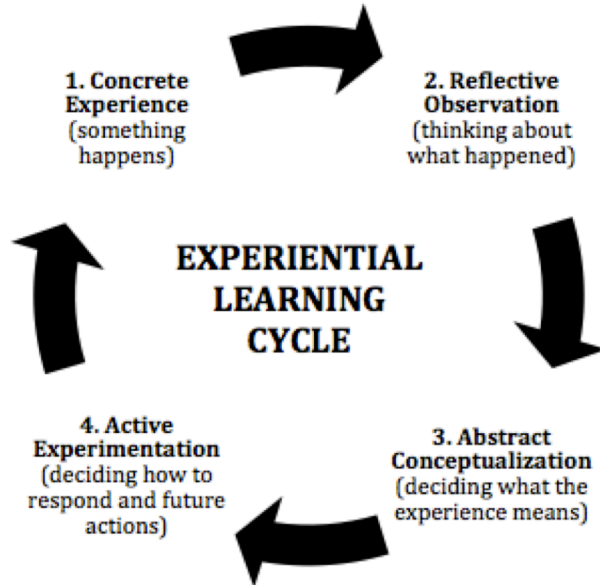
Figure 1. Experiential Learning Theory four-stage cycle (adapted from Kolb, 1984).

In the first stage of the cycle, the learner has a first-hand, concrete experience. In the second stage, reflective observation, the learner considers the experience and makes reflections or observations. In the third stage, the learner assigns meaning to the experience in a mental process called abstract conceptualization. During abstract conceptualization, the learner decides whether the experience was positive, negative, or neutral and determines whether it should be repeated, modified, or avoided. Learning from past cycles influences the learner during the abstract conceptualization phase, affecting the meaning assigned to the new experience. In the last stage, active experimentation, the learner puts the new learning into practice. This results in new concrete experiences, beginning another cycle.

The experiential learning cycle repeats indefinitely for continual development. Each concrete experience begins a new cycle of reflection and learning that determines future actions. One of the main tenets of experiential learning is that learning is a process instead of an outcome. Kolb (1984) states that "ideas are not fixed and immutable elements of thought but are formed and reformed through experience" (p. 26). According to Kolb, learning is an ongoing process based on experience. In the following section, I will discuss the influence of a mentor in that ongoing process as early career teachers make meaning from their workplace experiences.

Making Connections: Experiential Learning Theory and Mentoring

Mentoring is a research-based intervention to support, retain, and enrich the experiences of early career teachers (Eaton & Sisson, 2008; Hanuscin & Lee, 2008). Mentors can increase the self-efficacy and leadership capacity of their mentees through reflective discussion (LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2012). In addition to supporting a new teacher, the mentor has the important role of stretching mentees to extend their thinking. According to Carlson et al. (2003), the mentor challenges the learner by introducing new ideas, questioning the learner's assumptions, and guiding the learner with reflective coaching techniques instead of direct answers. Reflection is key to solving problems of practice in teaching (Brookfield, 1995). Mentors assist mentees to reflect on experiences and form meaning (Lee, 2007). Through mentoring conversations, the most effective mentors "consciously move their protégés from dependent, novice problem solvers to autonomous, expert problem solvers" (Barnett, 1995). Respect and trust are key in the mentoring relationship (Abell, Dillon, Hopkins, McInerney, & O'Brien, 1995). Through mentoring interactions, both the mentor and mentee can experience personal

18

transformation of identity and knowledge as they develop shared meaning about experiences and professional practice (Harrison, Lawson, & Wortley, 2005b; Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Within the framework of experiential learning, mentors can influence the meaning making of colleagues by promoting reflection during mentoring conversations (Harrison et al., 2005b). When mentors use strategic questions that extend thinking, the mentor creates tension within the learner that causes need for greater understanding and resolution (Carlson et al., 2003, p. 35). Given these ideas, I propose that mentors have the ability to influence the process of experiential learning. As the mentee reflects on a concrete experience, the mentor has opportunities to guide abstract conceptualization about the experience, influence decision-making, and shape future active experimentation. Though experiential learning is not a theory commonly referenced in mentoring literature, the following section discusses the influence of mentoring to guide experiential learning and meaning making for mentees.

Application: Experiential Learning in Related Studies about Mentoring

In a study about mentoring, an action research team used the framework of experiential learning to analyze mentor-mentee interactions (Harrison, Lawson, & Wortley, 2005a; Harrison et al., 2005b). The researchers investigated whether mentoring could promote critical thinking and reflection for mentees. Harrison et al. (2005b) trained thirty induction coach mentors to use questioning techniques that encouraged reflective practice during meetings with new teachers. Mentors participated in three trainings about reflective practice and chose strategies to implement in mentoring sessions. Eight mentors submitted audio or video recordings of subsequent mentor-mentee meetings.

19

Thirty-eight transcripts were qualitatively analyzed and coded based on mentoring styles and types of mentor questioning strategies.

Findings indicated benefits for mentors who participated in the training. Harrison et al. (2005b) found that training in reflective strategies improved mentor skills to facilitate learning for beginning teachers. Mentors influenced the meaning-making of mentees in this process because "an experienced/expert colleague acting as mentor to the more junior teacher therefore supports, confirms, recognizes, and even challenges the interpretations and/or explanations of the other" (Harrison et al., 2005a, p. 271). As beginning teachers reflected on experiences, the mentors guided the meaning making with reflective questions. Given the improved mentor strategies, Harrison et al. (2005a) suggest that mentor training is essential to promote reflective practice in mentor-mentee conversations.

Additionally, Harrison et al. (2005b) found that mentees benefitted from trained mentors. Findings indicated that strategic mentoring actions developed critical reflective practice for new teachers and increased their professional autonomy because reflection "is a process of making *what we learn* make *sense*, so we better understand it" (Harrison et al., 2005b, p. 423). Reflective interactions with mentors promoted self-directed, independent mentees. Harrison et al. suggest that reflection builds autonomy as the teacher takes control of learning and develops the ability to make interpretations based on experiences. Reflective mentoring strategies promoted opportunities for new teachers to consider concrete experiences and draw deeper interpretations with guidance of a trained mentor (Harrison et al., 2005a). Reflective interactions decreased dependence on the mentor for problem solving as mentees developed confidence and autonomy.

In summary, Harrison et al. (2005b) determined that strategic coaches increase critical thinking, reflection, and teacher autonomy under the framework of experiential learning. Beginning teachers benefit from conversations to support their thinking. Given time for reflective conversation, "beginning teachers develop into expert teachers by acquiring skills incrementally that depend on accruing experiences and being able to reflect meaningfully on them" (Harrison et al., 2005b, p. 423). Mentors shape meaning making by intervening during reflection and abstract conceptualization, stretching mentee thinking to influence the active experimentation and concrete experiences that follow.

In conclusion, experiential learning provides a lens to explain the process of meaning making from concrete experiences. Special education teachers have many concrete experiences that influence professional skills and knowledge in early years. This study will focus on the set of experiences related to being the team leader for paraeducators. Next, I will discuss transformational leadership theory as a leadership style for team leadership in special education.

Transformational Leadership Theory

Transformational Leadership Theory (TFL) provides a lens to understand qualities for effective leadership in special education classrooms. In this section, I will discuss transformational leadership theory, connect it with related literature about TFL in small organizations, and discuss empirical studies about educational leadership that align with TFL in meaningful ways that informed this study.

Historically, the concept of transformational leadership theory began with the work of James MacGregor Burns (1978). Burns used the term *transforming leadership*, suggesting that leadership was less based on characteristics of the leader and, instead

21

based on actions and behaviors of the leader. Burns' ideas represented a monumental shift from earlier literature and scholarship about leadership (Bass, 1993). Bernard M. Bass further developed these ideas into Transformational Leadership Theory, exploring TFL in numerous writings and studies (Avolio & Bass, 1995; Bass & Avolio, 1993; Bass & Riggio, 2006; Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999; Bass, 1995, 2010). According to Bass & Riggio (2006), transformational leadership is the most effective leadership style, surpassing styles including contingent-reward transactional leadership, active and passive management-by-exception, and laissez-faire leadership.

Transformational Leadership Theory describes the actions and behaviors of leaders who transform followers through authentic interactions that increase the success of the organization. Bass (1993) writes, "transformational leaders move their followers to transcend their self-interest for the sake of their group, organization, or society" (p. 376). This style of leadership is meaningful in contemporary society where individuals strive to reach self-actualization in their workplace (Crowley, 2011), shifting away from simpler times when individuals worked to meet their basic needs. Further, Bass & Riggio (2006) assert that TFL style creates committed, loyal, and satisfied followers. Authentic transformational leaders have well-meaning motives to nurture individuals in the organization; in contrast, selfish, harmful, and exploitive individuals are referred to as *pseudotransformational leaders* (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

Bass & Riggio (2006) propose four specific components of TFL: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. These components relate to the interactions between the transformational

leader and his or her followers. The behaviors that relate to each of these TFL

components are shown in Figure 2 and explained below.
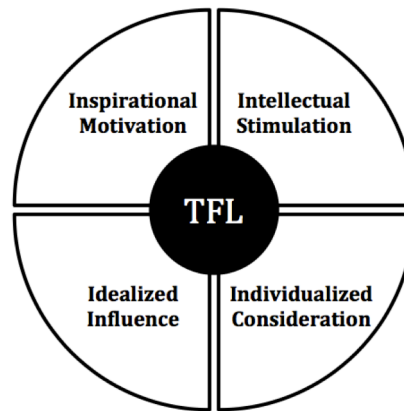
Figure 2. Four components of Transformational Leadership (adapted from Bass &

Riggio, 2006).

The first component of TFL is idealized influence. According to Bass & Riggio

(2006), transformational leaders behave in ways that influence others positively. They

model ideal behaviors and lead by example. Idealized influence includes both the leader's

behaviors and the attributes of the leader, as perceived by his/her followers. This

component contributes to leadership because the followers identify with the goals and

values of the leader, seeking to emulate the model set forth. Idealized influence increases

followers' commitment to the organization, its core values, and its standards (Bass &

Riggio, 2006).

The second component of TFL is inspirational motivation. Transformational

leaders behave in ways that "motivate and inspire those around them by providing

meaning and challenge to their followers' work" (Bass & Riggio, 2006, p. 6).

Transformational leaders articulate a vision, encourage enthusiasm, and foster optimism

in followers. They set clear expectations and develop steps to reach goals.

Transformational leaders are committed to their vision, inspiring followers to contribute toward shared goals. Inspirational motivation builds a follower's emotional commitment to the organization's goals (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

The third component of TFL is intellectual stimulation. According to Bass & Riggio (2006), transformational leaders behave in ways that demonstrate and nurture creativity, innovation, and imagination. These qualities stimulate followers intellectually. Transformational leaders encourage followers to utilize their own diverse experiences to enrich the joint knowledge of the group. Diversity of opinion is appreciated and encouraged, even when it differs from the opinions of the leader. Transformational leaders encourage feedback and shared problem solving to meet organizational goals. They encourage a culture that questions assumptions, reframes problems from different viewpoints, and strives for constant improvement. Mistakes are not publicly criticized, and followers are encouraged to take risks. As a result, followers have the freedom to be innovative, increasing the likelihood of organizational breakthroughs (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

The fourth component of TFL is individualized consideration. Transformational leaders behave in ways that acknowledge the individual needs of each person in the organization (Bass & Riggio, 2006). They ask questions and seek understanding about each person's goals, strengths, and weaknesses. Transformational leaders listen carefully during conversations and remember important details about individuals. They delegate tasks, encourage followers in a supportive environment, differentiate for each individual, and mentor followers like a coach. These interactions develop the leadership potential in the followers as they advance in their own personal goals. Further, as followers

experience individualized consideration of their own goals, it influences the way that colleagues interact to positively encourage the growth of one another in the organization (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

In conclusion, idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration are important behaviors of transformational leaders. TFL is a leadership style for any size organization. However, this study was specifically concerned with leadership in special education classrooms. In the following section, I will make connections between TFL and related literature about leadership in small organizations and teams.

Making Connections: TFL for Leaders of Small Organizations and Teams

TFL is an effective leadership framework for small organizations and teams (Atwater & Bass, 1994). TFL components of inspirational motivation, idealized influence, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration benefit team members and promote team effectiveness. In this section, I will discuss the important responsibilities of team leaders, the stages of developing a team, the application of TFL to prevent and resolve team conflicts, and the importance of leadership in a time of educational change.

A team leader is responsible for implementing leadership strategies that promote the effectiveness of the team (Atwater & Bass, 1994). Teams are most successful when they have a clearly defined mission or purpose, as guided by a team leader. Transformational leaders have an important role in developing and maintaining team norms that facilitate team functioning. Leadership behaviors affect the cohesiveness of the group depending on whether team members feel there is a culture of teamwork or

competition. A transformational leader unifies the group by encouraging individual strengths and developing positive team culture. Considering the diverse qualities of team members, the leader should "establish a team culture in which differences are understood and respected whenever possible and capitalized on for team development" (Atwater & Bass, 1994, p. 57). A culture of respect and tolerance increases willingness to take moderate risks and consider innovative solutions. Most importantly, the team leader should encourage a culture of communication. According to Atwater & Bass (1994), "a transformational team leader who has fostered trust and an open, accepting climate within the team should experience fewer conflicts based on lack of communication" (p. 78).

Team leaders are responsible for developing an effective team, regardless of whether the team is effective when the leader arrives. Atwater & Bass (1994) propose that highly effective teams evolve through four stages to reach maturity: forming, storming, norming, and performing. These stages occur when a group is initially formed and reoccur when new members are added. In the first stage, the group comes together, learns to accept individual members, and develops mutual respect. The first stage is a time of politeness. In the second stage, the group explores differences among members as they solve problems together. This is often a time of conflict. In the third stage, the group begins setting standards and norms for operating as a team. Cooperation increases during the third stage. In the fourth stage, the team reaches maturity and operates as an effective, productive group of people. Without leadership, a group of people might coexist without evolving into a highly effective team. New leaders should be aware that team members have leadership expectations that are influenced by individual beliefs, past experiences, and perceptions. According to Atwater & Bass (1994), "the team leader who is unaware

or insensitive to member and team expectations may unknowingly impede his or her abilities to develop an effective team" (p. 66).

In times of conflict, TFL behaviors are important for effective leadership (Atwater & Bass, 1994). Team conflict can be constructive, leading to improved procedures or relationships. Team conflict can also be destructive, creating dissatisfaction and distrust among team members. External conflicts tend to unify the group around common purpose, but intragroup conflicts are more likely to be destructive to the team. Transformational leaders are attuned to all types of conflict and implement practices to avoid common intragroup conflicts such as poor communication, unfair reward systems, competition, personality conflicts, and disagreements about procedures, jobs, rules, or policies. Transformational leaders strategically guide their team through problem solving, utilizing three components of TFL: intellectual stimulation to encourage team members to approach the problem creatively, individualized consideration to determine the strengths and needs of team members, and inspirational motivation to maintain morale that the problem can be solved.

TFL behaviors are important for leaders of change in small organizations, such as schools and classrooms. In a time of ongoing school reforms, change is common in today's educational climate (Fullan, 2007). New teachers are responsible for leading change in their classrooms as directed or desired. Implementing effective change in education is challenging because "no matter how honorable the motives, each and every individual who is necessary for effective implementation will experience some concerns about the meaning of new practices, goals, beliefs, and means of implementation" (Fullan, 2007, p. 39). According to Fullan (2001), change cannot be controlled, but

change can be facilitated by leaders who understand the change process, have moral purpose, develop relationships with stakeholders, foster knowledge building, and take risks that disrupt the status quo for the greater good of the organization.

In conclusion, this discussion connected Transformational Leadership Theory with related literature about leading small teams. I propose that TFL is a valuable leadership style for special education teachers to develop an effective classroom team in a changing educational climate. There is no literature directly linking special education team leadership with TFL, but I will validate this argument by connecting empirical studies in the following section.

Application: Related Studies about Transformational Leadership in Education

Though there are not studies that directly discuss the use of TFL in special education classrooms, I propose that related studies illustrate connections between components of TFL and special education team leadership. In this section, I will discuss empirical studies that include elements of TFL or similar leadership traits. For studies that do not directly speak in TFL terminology, I will apply the TFL lens and make connections at the end of each study. Together, the studies in this discussion will frame a new possibility that TFL could be applied to special education team leadership. First, I will discuss leadership studies in non-special education classrooms. Then, I will discuss studies about important leadership traits of special education teachers.

TFL in general education classrooms. As a style of leadership in general education classrooms, Pounder (2006) proposes that TFL is an effective style for teachers leading students. Pounder calls transformational leadership the 'fourth wave of teacher leadership,' suggesting that TFL is a new movement in teaching. He asserts that

transformational leadership is a natural leadership style for teachers because "teacher leaders are open to new ways of doing things and are modelers of learning with a view to improving students' educational experience" (Pounder, 2006, p. 534). Further, transformational leaders are active leaders who influence and inspire others. Drawing on his review of recent studies, Pounder asserts that teacher leadership influences student attitude and achievement because students work harder in classrooms with transformational leaders. Considering Pounder's assertions about teacher leadership through the lens of TFL, he advocates for qualities that include inspirational motivation, idealized influence, and intellectual stimulation.

According to Cheng (1994), a classroom is a small organization, and teacher leadership styles affect student outcomes. Cheng examined different student outcomes in general education classrooms based on teacher behaviors to initiate structures, such as routines and communication, and teacher behaviors to initiate consideration, such as mutual trust and respect, with students. Cheng was interested in how teacher leadership strategies promoted effective classroom procedures, student learning, and teacher-student interactions. Cheng found teacher leadership styles that were high in both initiating structures and consideration were most effective to promote student progress. He concluded that task-oriented teachers who neglect relationships with students do not promote the same degree of student success. Considering these findings through the lens of TFL, teacher leadership behaviors best contribute to student achievement in classrooms when the teacher exhibits qualities of individualized consideration, inspirational motivation, and intellectual stimulation.

29

Leadership traits for special education teachers. Literature about supervising paraeducators discusses important leadership qualities for special education teachers who lead teams. Gerlach & Lee (1997) suggest that special educators are most effective when they seek input from paraeducators, coach paraeducators with meaningful suggestions, develop a sense of purpose on their team, establish norms, and lead by example. Considering these leadership recommendations through the lens of TFL, special education teachers should exhibit qualities of individualized consideration, idealized influence, intellectual stimulation, and inspirational motivation. The following empirical studies do not explicitly discuss TFL, but I will make connections following each study.

Chopra, Sandoval-Lucero, & French (2011) examined two related studies based on paraeducators and team leadership. Reviewing these studies, Chopra et. al reported that teacher leadership in special education classrooms was the most important factor for team collaboration, paraeducator effectiveness, and student success. Further, they reported that paraeducators were more likely to pursue teacher certification when a teacher-supervisor acted as a role model, providing opportunities for the paraeducator to learn aspects of the teacher role in the work environment. In their review of the two studies, Chopra et. al found the following themes to promote paraeducator success: a) the teacher leads the team, b) the teacher treats the paraeducator as an important team member, c) the teacher sets boundaries for paraeducators' roles and relationships with students and parents, d) the teacher plans with paraeducators, e) the teacher coaches and guides the paraeducator, f) the teacher encourages the paraeducators' professional development, and g) the teacher is a role model for paraeducators (p. 19-22). Chopra et. al connect these leadership qualities with increased paraeducator success, job satisfaction,

and retention. Considering these findings through the lens of TFL, teacher-supervisors are most successful leading paraeducators with a style that includes individualized consideration and idealized influence.

In a study about paraeducators in the workplace, Giangreco, Edelman, & Broer (2001) explored issues of respect, appreciation, and acknowledgment. They examined the working relationships of 103 school professionals in four schools in one district in Vermont using observations and semi-structured interviews. Professionals included special education teachers, general education teachers, paraeducators, and administrators. Findings indicated that paraeducators felt appreciated in specific circumstances: (a) when knowledgeable professionals verbally acknowledged their hard work, (b) when entrusted with important responsibilities, (c) when given opportunities to provide their input about student and classroom matters, and (d) when given appropriate amounts of training for their job responsibilities. Considering these findings through the lens of TFL, paraeducators felt supported and appreciated when school leaders demonstrated qualities of intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration. Further, paraeducator training could also be approached through idealized influence if leaders model behaviors paraeducators should emulate.

In conclusion, Transformational Leadership Theory provides a guide for leadership behaviors that develop autonomous individuals and dedicated team members. TFL is an effective leadership strategy for small organizations and teams. Further, empirical studies describe leadership behaviors for regular education classrooms and special education teachers that highly resemble components of idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. I have

constructed an argument that TFL is an effective leadership strategy for team leadership in special education. Yet, new special education teachers may lack confidence and self-efficacy at the early stage of their careers (Hoy & Spero, 2005) that influence their leadership behaviors. In the next section, I will discuss Communities of Practice (Wenger, 1998) as a framework for colleagues to collaboratively improve an area of their work, such as team leadership in special education.

Situated Learning and Communities of Practice

As a theory for learning, collaboration, and problem solving, Wenger's (1998) social framework for Communities of Practice (CoPs) provides theoretical understanding about groups working together. Johnson (2010) suggests the best ideas often come from collaborative communities rather than from individuals in isolation. Further, Cuddapah & Clayton (2011) suggest that early career teachers benefit from collaborative problem solving with peers. Communities of Practice are social formations where individuals develop, negotiate, and share theories to understand the world. CoPs are not groups of people, forced together for a purpose. Instead, CoPs develop naturally when individuals are drawn together in mutual need for collaboration. Most importantly, Wenger describes how a CoP can evolve into a learning community that transforms knowledge and identity. In this section, I will discuss important CoP terminology, explain how a CoP evolves into a learning community, connect Wenger's work to related literature about early career teachers, and provide an overview of empirical studies that support the application of CoPs in early career teacher development.

Communities of Practice consist of members who willingly negotiate meaning in a social context through mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and shared repertoire.

32

Mutual engagement is the time spent together interacting. CoPs exist when all members jointly invest in working together and sharing knowledge. Joint enterprise is the shared goals and vision of the group. CoPs naturally form when members seek common outcomes, benefitting from collaborative efforts to seek those outcomes in community. According to Wenger (1998) "Communities of practice have life cycles…they come together, they develop, they evolve, they disperse, according to the timing, the logic, the rhythms, and the social energy of their learning" (p. 96). Joint enterprise binds the group together with a common goal. Shared repertoire is the common language of the group, such as terms that relate to their similar jobs. This includes common vocabulary, experiences, stories, problems, and other commonalities. Shared repertoire draws the group together, establishing boundaries of understanding that increase productivity because members quickly understand the commonalities of other members.

When a group possesses mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and shared repertoire, it meets the definition of a CoP according to Wenger (1998). CoPs constantly negotiate meaning and identity through shared experiences within their group. Essentially, negotiating meaning and identity are the primary 'work' of a CoP, in which knowledge is discussed, defined, used, reused, reshaped, and extended. Negotiation of meaning leads to reification of knowledge that can be mutually understood by CoP members (Wenger, 1998). According to Wenger's expansive definition, a *reification* is any concrete or abstract representation of meaning, including tools, symbols, stories, terms, concepts, manuals, procedures, sayings, and more. Further, individuals constantly negotiate and re-negotiate identity by participating in a Community of Practice. According to Wenger (1998), "Each participant in a Community of Practice finds a

unique place and gains unique identity, which is both further integrated and further

defined in the course of engagement in practice" (p. 76). When individuals are

newcomers to a practice, Lave & Wenger (1991) call them *peripheral participants,*

similar to apprentices, who learn from experienced members. Members of CoPs develop

greater capacity to negotiate meaning and participate in the CoP as they evolve from

peripheral participants to full members (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

While negotiating meaning and identity, some CoPs further evolve into learning

communities through three modes of belonging: engagement, imagination, and

alignment. In a learning community, group members learn together as they share

knowledge. Wenger uses the term "brokering" to describe the way that people share

resources with one another, bringing ideas to the group that alter thinking and nurture

learning. Wenger (1998) writes, "The transformative practice of a learning community

offers an ideal context for developing new understandings because the community

sustains change as part of an identity of participation" (p. 215). In Chapter 5, I will share

how teachers who participated in this study experienced identity transformation when the

CoP evolved into a learning community that shared ideas with one another.

Engagement is the first mode of belonging in a learning community. Engagement

relates to collaboration, discussions, and the production of artifacts. In a learning

community, engagement describes the process of working together for the purpose of

learning, solving a problem, or changing one's thinking. The contributions of group

members influence other members of the group, creating change. According to Wenger

(1998), "Learning depends on our ability to contribute to the collective production of

meaning because it is by this process that experience and competence pull each other" (p.

203). Engagement allows group members to transcend their own knowledge as collective members of a shared body of knowledge. As CoPs work together, members collaborate and delegate tasks to benefit the overall goals of the group.

Imagination is the second mode of belonging in a learning community. Imagination relates to viewing one's self and organization objectively in its current state and envisioning other possibilities. To be a learning community, the group must possess and desire the "ability to explore, take risks, and create unlikely connections" (Wenger, 1998, p. 185). Imagination enables people and organizations to reinvent themselves and their practices by taking an objective point of view, stretching themselves to new possibilities. Imagination is important for a learning community to grow and change based on new ideas or knowledge.

Alignment is the third mode of belonging in a learning community. Alignment refers to mutual understandings of the group as each person seeks to understand his own relationship within the organization or seeks to advance the mutual ideas of the group. Alignment is important in a learning community as members consider their own ideas and knowledge, seeking to align their thinking with other group members. Alignment advances the learning of the CoP as they work together to develop shared understanding about topics, issues, problems, or new information. Alignment is also helpful when one member has a unique opinion and the group works together to arrive at common understanding.

In conclusion, this action research study was supported by Wenger's (1998) framework for Communities of Practice. Rather than offering teachers additional professional development opportunities, I cultivated a CoP that functioned as a learning

community to collaboratively explore team leadership strategies. In the following section, I will connect the concept of CoPs with scholarly literature about early career teachers and the importance of peer collaboration.

Making Connections: Early Career Teachers Benefit from Collegial Relationships

In their early careers, new teachers benefit from opportunities to develop collegial relationships with colleagues who teach in similar settings. Gehrke & McCoy (2012) conducted a literature review related to special education induction programs and the needs of beginning teachers. They concluded that beginning special education teachers had different needs than beginning general education teachers. One of those needs related to developing collegial relationships with others. Therefore, Gehrke & McCoy (2012) recommended teachers need time to "reflect on their personal beliefs through discussion with peers, to consider alternative practices, to observe and discuss the impact these practices have on students, and to implement new techniques" (p. 155). To develop collegial relationships, beginning teachers need collaborative opportunities integrated in professional development experiences. I propose that the Team Leadership CoP offered teachers an opportunity to develop collegial relationships, as described by Gerhke & McCoy. In the following section, I will discuss an empirical study about early career teachers in a CoP.

Application: A Related Study about Early Career Teachers in a CoP

Cuddapah & Clayton (2011) conducted a qualitative study in an urban setting to examine the Beginning Teacher Program (BTP), a mentoring program created to improve the retention and quality of new teachers who were called "novices" in this study. Cuddapah & Clayton intentionally grouped novice teachers together to create "a forum

36

that encourages novices to reveal vulnerabilities, critiques, questions, and successes as they make meaning of their practice and their emerging professional identities" (p. 73). BTP used a cohort model, consisting of 15 novices and 2 teacher co-facilitators in each learning community. Cohorts met for two-hours biweekly over a 15-week period. According to Cuddapah & Clayton (2011), the sessions modeled quality instruction by "encouraging community building, exploring content grounded in participants' lives, skill-building for reflecting and listening, connecting to classroom strategies, and incorporating formative feedback" (p. 63).

Cuddapah & Clayton (2011) analyzed the cohort structure using Wenger's (1998) Communities of Practice framework. Researchers collected field notes and coded transcripts using the categories *meaning, practice, identity*, and *community*. Results indicated teacher conversation topics related to resource sharing, encouragement, and problem solving, aligning with CoP frameworks: practice, meaning, identity, and community. In the conversations about problem solving, Cuddapah & Clayton reported that peers talked about concerns, asked for feedback, and offered suggestions to one another. During discussions, teachers shared vulnerabilities, encouraged one another, and "in helping each other make meaning of their experiences, they validated one another's practices and mentored each other" (Cuddapah & Clayton, 2011, p. 70).

Findings indicated the cohort model was valuable because it reframed the work of novice teachers, shifting away from the view that new teachers lack knowledge. Instead, this model affirmed new teachers as knowledgeable professionals with resources to share. Further, the authors concluded that grouping novice teachers together gave them immediate status as full members of the CoP, eliminating the legitimate peripheral

participation trajectory (Lave & Wenger, 1991) that typically occurs when novices

participate in CoPs alongside veterans. Cuddupah & Clayton (2011) suggest that the

cohort enabled teachers to construct meaning about their experiences and discuss

understandings about themselves in relation to their identity as a teacher. Therefore,

Cuddupah & Clayon suggest that new teachers should have opportunities to collaborate

with peers in CoPs to develop and reflect on their practice.

      In conclusion, this section provided a thorough discussion of CoPs, made

connections to related literature, and discussed the application of CoPs as a lens for an

empirical study about early career teachers. Wenger's (1998) CoP framework provides a

clear definition of collaboration through mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and shared

repertoire. Through this work, CoP members negotiate identity and meaning. Most

importantly, I discussed how a CoP can evolve into a learning community with

characteristics of engagement, imagination, and alignment. Collaboration in a learning

community is a vehicle for professional growth of CoP members. Early career teachers

benefit from opportunities to develop collegial relationships with similar colleagues

(Gehrke & McCoy, 2012). Cuddapah & Clayton (2011) found the CoP framework was a

meaningful lens to study a group of beginning teachers collaborating on problems of

professional practice. Therefore, I conclude that the CoP framework provides a valuable

lens for this study about early career special education teachers gathering together to

discuss their own team leadership skills in their individual special education classrooms.

Three Theories as a Framework for Understanding

      This chapter has presented three individual theories influencing the theoretical

perspective of this study: Experiential Learning Theory (ELT), Transformational

Leadership Theory (TFL), and Communities of Practice (CoP). Each theory provides a

unique lens. ELT is a lens to look at learning, TFL is a lens to look at leadership, and CoP

is a lens to look at collaborative group interactions. Standing alone, each theory

represents a way that teachers learn, lead, or interact in their workplace. Together, these

theories provide overlapping lenses for the current study, as shown Figure 3.
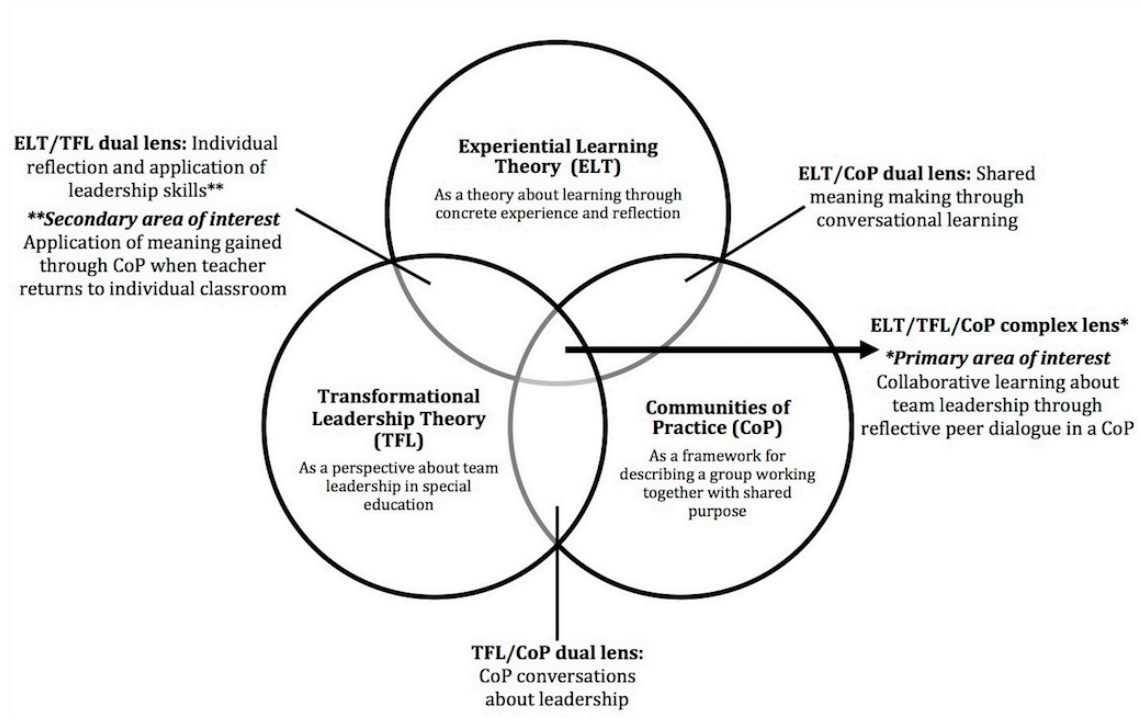
Figure 3. Overlapping lenses: A unified framework for investigation and understanding.

Figure 3 shows individual lenses, labeled as ELT, TFL, and CoP. Additionally, it

shows dual lenses where theories overlap, including areas labeled ELT/TFL, TFL/CoP,

and CoP/ELT. Finally, Figure 3 shows the complex lens where all three lenses overlap—

the area labeled ELT/TFL/CoP. To provide a glimpse through each of these overlapping

lenses, I will discuss individual lenses, dual lenses, and the complex lens. This discussion

will offer different views of teacher learning across environments to explain the interplay

between these three theories as a unified framework for investigation and understanding.

The first individual lens, Experiential Learning Theory, provides a framework to think about the way teachers learn from concrete experiences in their classrooms. Each concrete experience initiates a new cycle of reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. Teachers have many concrete experiences in their day, and some of those experiences relate to team leadership.

The second individual lens, Transformational Leadership Theory, provides terminology to describe the concrete leadership experiences of individuals based on the four TFL components: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Concrete leadership experiences arise from teacher behaviors, team responses, and classroom outcomes. Looking through the TFL lens provides an opportunity to evaluate leadership behaviors, set leadership goals, or determine appropriate leadership strategies from the TFL perspective.

The overlapping area between Experiential Learning Theory and Transformational Leadership provides the first dual lens, ELT/TFL. As teachers engage in leadership behaviors and reflect on their outcomes, ELT/TFL illustrates the reflective leadership journey. The ELT/TFL lens offers deeper understanding about the learning process as teachers implement leadership actions in their classrooms and evaluate the outcomes. Each teacher has a unique leadership situation based on individual leadership strengths and the dynamics of each paraeducator team. Given the teacher's leadership situation, she or he will have an individual leadership journey based on concrete experiences, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. Therefore, ELT/TFL is a lens to explain a teacher's individual learning process of team leadership in special education.

In addition to individual learning, teachers will also learn through group participation. The third individual lens is Communities of Practice. The CoP framework provides terminology to describe the collaborative group process as teachers work together in a learning community. Looking through the CoP lens examines evidence of mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and shared repertoire. Further, this lens provides a glimpse into the functioning of a learning community with engagement, imagination, and alignment. As an individual lens, CoP looks at how individuals collaboratively negotiate meaning and identity as team leaders from different classrooms, gathered together.

Combining CoP and TFL provides the second dual lens, TFL/CoP, as shown in the overlapping section between these two theories in Figure 3. This dual lens provides a look at the leadership content during a CoP discussion as teachers discuss challenges and consider possible actions. According to Bass & Riggio (2006), Transformational Leadership behaviors are not inherent traits, but intentional actions by leaders. Therefore, individuals can enhance understanding and develop leadership behaviors by sharing strategies with one another or co-creating new ideas that contribute to shared repertoire.

As teachers discuss problems of practice in the CoP, they reflect on past experiences to determine future actions. ELT/CoP is the third dual lens, found between Experiential Learning Theory and Communities of Practice in Figure 3. As a dual lens, ELT/CoP illustrates the meaning making process of a group working together toward alignment through collaborative group discussion. Wenger (1998) writes that a CoP learning community seeks aligned understanding, constructed through conversation and togetherness. Kolb, Baker, & Jensen (2002) created the term *conversational learning* to describe reflective group conversations from the perspective of ELT. Kolb et al. write

41

that conversational learning is a process of experiential learning through dialogue with others. From this perspective, "conversation is a meaning-making process whereby understanding is achieved through interplay of opposites and contradictions" (Kolb et al., 2002, p. 53). Conversational learning occurs when individuals examine multiple perspectives to seek consensual agreement, similar to the idea of a CoP learning community seeking alignment. Mutual respect is necessary to create an environment where conversational learning is possible. Group members must feel at ease to share openly and take risks among others.

The primary area of interest in this study was the area of tri-overlapping theories, labeled ELT/TFL/CoP in Figure 3. The tri-overlapping lens provides a framework for learning that occurs when teachers have leadership experiences in their classrooms that they discuss within the CoP. In contrast to traditional professional development learning experiences for early career teachers, ELT/TFL/CoP represents a new way for early career teachers to learn professional skills through collaborative peer discussion.

At the outset of this study, I proposed that Experiential Learning would occur over two spaces[3]—half occurring during CoP gathering and half occurring in each teacher's individual classroom. I anticipated the following: Prior to CoP gatherings, teachers would have concrete experiences individually in their classrooms and bring that knowledge to the CoP. Within the CoP, teachers would undergo a shared meaning making process of reflective observation and abstract conceptualization about the concrete leadership experience through discussions and problem-solving conversations.

---

[3] In Chapter 4, I will discuss the emergence of a third space when team leaders engaged in individual reflection between attending CoP groups and returning to their classrooms to implement actions.

Further, CoP members would negotiate meaning and identity as a learning community with engagement, imagination, and alignment. Following the CoP gathering, individual teachers would return to their own classrooms with new understanding to actively experiment with new leadership ideas. I anticipated the CoP would serve two stages of the Experiential Learning cycle—reflective observation and abstract conceptualization—because CoP gatherings provided opportunities for reflective conversations and shared meaning making about team leadership. I further anticipated that individual teacher classrooms would be places for concrete experiences and active experimentation, as represented by the ELT/TFL dual lens in Figure 3 and shown in Figure 4.
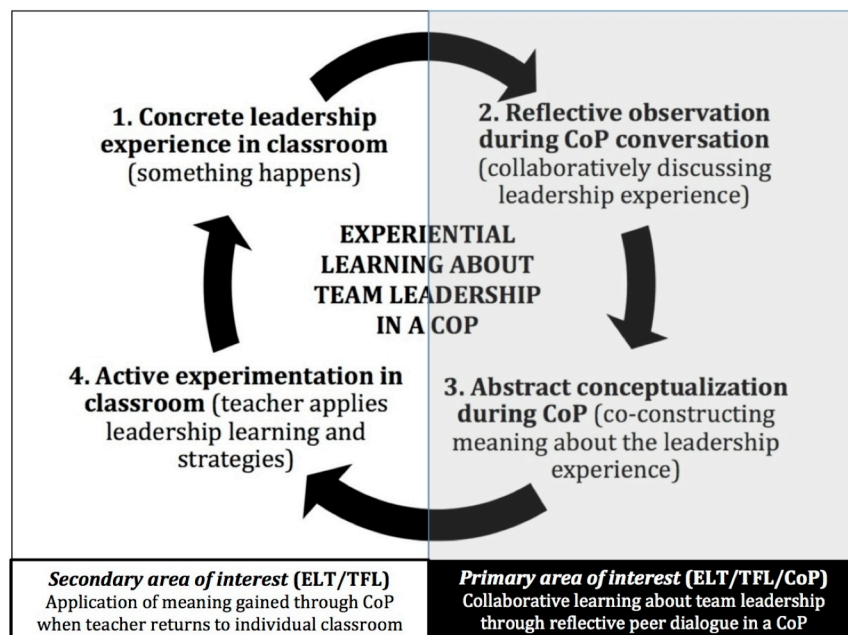
Figure 4. ELT/TFL/CoP: Experiential learning about team leadership in a CoP.

Meaning making about team leadership during CoP gatherings was the primary focus. This study explored how teachers discussed their individual leadership experiences and created meaning together. Ideally, the CoP potentially changed both their understanding of past concrete experiences as well as their independent interpretations of

concrete experiences occurring in their classrooms going forward. The leadership outcomes in classrooms were the secondary interest in this study. This study explored how teachers applied their new thinking when they returned to their own classrooms.

As a comprehensive framework for understanding, this tri-theory lens provided a glimpse into the learning process as teachers collaborated to implement and reflect on team leadership in their individual classrooms. As I will discuss in Chapters 4 and 5, the CoP provided space for transformation of practice, identity, and meaning through co-construction of knowledge. The tri-theory lens provided a way to look at how the CoP functioned as a learning community engaged in reflection and abstract conceptualization about team leadership in special education. Gazing through this lens provided a picture of collaborative learning about team leadership through peer dialogue in a CoP.

Related Studies

Empirical studies provided additional information to guide this study. First, I will explore scholarly literature about mentoring early career teachers. Then, I will discuss professional development recommendations that supported this innovation.

Mentoring and Coaching of Early Career Teachers

New teachers often experience many failures in their first years teaching, decreasing levels of self-efficacy (Hoy & Spero, 2005) as teachers develop professional identity (Day, Kington, & Stobart, 2006). According to Hoy & Spero, self-efficacy affects the effort teachers invest in teaching as well as their goals and aspirations. Further, self-efficacy influences resilience, an important quality for new teachers who face many challenges in their first years teaching (Hoy & Spero, 2005).

To counteract these challenges, mentoring is an important support for early career teachers (Abell et al., 1995; Barnett, 1995; Carlson et al., 2003; Yost, 2002). On a broader level, the term *mentoring* typically describes a phase of support when an experienced professional assists a new colleague during a career transition (Jones, 2014). Scholarly literature suggests a mentoring period spanning approximately one year for new teachers. As explained in Chapter 1, I have considered myself a coach rather than a mentor. *Coaching* is a newer term in education that extends the concepts of mentoring, suggesting that professional development should be continuous and ongoing for teachers (Jones, 2014). As a coach, I have sought to develop long-term relationships with self-directed, early career teachers who desire to continuously enhance their practice through reflective dialogue. Scholarly research about new teachers often uses the terminology *mentoring* rather than *coaching,* but research about mentoring still informs my understanding as a coach working with early career special educators. There is limited literature that uses the term *coaching* since this is a newer idea in education. Therefore, a review of mentoring literature is appropriate to explore concepts about supporting early career teachers.

In a study about mentoring, Smith & Ingersoll (2004) found that new teacher induction programs were most likely to improve teacher retention when there were multiple levels of support, including both group meetings and individual or small group mentoring support. Mentoring provides teachers with specialized support from experienced colleagues, often from similar grade levels or content areas. Mentors facilitate a process that Chao (2008) calls *organizational socialization,* a term related to developing understanding about the role within the organization, including the social

45

knowledge, expectations, and values associated with the role. Further, mentors assist teachers with acquiring skills to meet their job responsibilities (Carlson et al., 2003). Mentoring in special education has been shown to increase teacher quality, teacher retention, and job satisfaction (Griffin, Winn, Otis-wilborn, & Kilgore, 2003). The following empirical studies illustrate the benefits of mentoring early career teachers.

First, mentoring improves efficacy and reflective practices. In a study of 11 mentors and 77 novice teachers in their first or second year teaching, LoCasale-Crouch et al. (2012) examined the influence of mentoring programs using questionnaires and the CLASS teacher observation tool. Researchers were most interested in the varied types of mentoring activities and the influence of these activities on new teachers. LoCasale-Crouch et al. reported mentoring supported new teachers in their career development. Quality time with mentors influenced teacher self-efficacy, reflective teaching practices, and the quality of teacher-student interactions. Mentees who reported the highest levels of reflection also reported high levels of perceived support from their mentor.

Additionally, mentoring challenges and transforms mentees. According to Barnett (1995), effective mentors consciously move their mentees from dependent, novice problem solvers to autonomous, expert problems solvers by promoting reflection as the catalyst to improve practice. In a case study of 30 subject induction tutors (SITs), Harrison, Dymoke, & Pell (2006) applied Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory framework for mentoring that includes reflection, learning, and experimentation. Findings suggested mentoring is most transformative when the mentor challenges the mentee and encourages risk-taking while providing support in a clearly defined environment. According to Harrison, Dymoke, & Pell, the most important traits of a

mentor include being a good listener, being flexible, discussing and reflecting on practice, offering opportunities to mentees, broadening the mentees experiences, and anticipating challenges to prepare the mentee for success.

In summary, mentoring influences efficacy in new teachers (Yost, 2002) as they develop skills related to teaching and classroom leadership. Mentoring early career teachers requires intentional actions that nurture reflective thinking (Harrison et al., 2005a). Effective mentoring decreases attrition of early career teachers (Algozzine et al., 2011) when skilled mentors support their professional development. Therefore, empirical research supported the Team Leadership CoP as an additional level of support for early career special education teachers. Though I served as a co-member in the CoP rather than a mentor or coach, the act of arranging time and space for the CoP was a supportive gesture based on the team leadership needs of early career special education teachers.

Professional Development Recommendations for Early Career Teachers

Professional development experiences are important catalysts for professional growth in teachers. Early career teachers have needs that differ from experienced teachers. This section will explore professional development recommendations for early career teachers, with a specific focus on teachers in special education positions. Discussion will include the importance of content-specific induction meetings, opportunities for informal peer collaboration, and peer dialogue for problem solving.

First, early career teachers benefit from content-specific induction meetings because they have specific needs that differ from the needs of veteran teachers. Algozzine et al. (2011) conducted a study of third-year teachers who participated in a new teacher induction program in North Carolina during their first two years teaching. They

47

distributed a survey to 1318 third-year teachers, receiving 451 responses indicating teachers benefited from induction support. Further, teachers reported that content-specific induction training designed for their needs was more meaningful during their first two years than were district-wide trainings for all teachers. Therefore, new teachers benefit from content designed specifically for their specific professional responsibilities.

In addition to content-specific mentoring meetings, new teachers benefit from opportunities for peer collaboration. McCormack, Gore, & Thomas (2006) monitored 16 early career teachers in their first year of teaching. The researchers asked participants to complete semi-structured journal entries that culminated with an individual interview about their journal entries. Findings suggested that professional identity and teaching pedagogy were the most difficult challenges for teachers in their first year. Journal entries suggested teachers struggled to form identity, often writing about conflicting or unclear perceptions about their role as the teacher. Further, participants reported that formal induction meetings and mentoring programs were not as helpful as were informal collaboration opportunities with peer colleagues. According to McCormack et al. (2006), "participants highlighted the value of informal discussion and sharing of concerns in a collaborative setting as an integral part of their early professional learning" (p. 108). In conclusion, McCormack et al. suggest that new teachers would benefit from decreased focus on professional development trainings conducted by expert colleagues, shifting the focus toward new teachers as active learners who shape their own knowledge through informal discussions.

As an extension of peer collaboration, early career teachers benefit from peer dialogue for problem solving. Miller (2008) explored outcomes when problems of new

teachers were used as a "mechanism for their professional development" (p. 78). According to Miller, peer dialogue provided an opportunity for teachers to express ideas and gain feedback that supported or challenged their ideas. Further, "conversation provided a means for teachers to modify their practices over time by reflecting on the exchanges they had with their colleagues" (Miller, 2008, p. 80). Findings indicated teachers valued opportunities for peer dialogue without involvement of 'supervisory figures.' Additionally, participants reported that problem-based conversations improved their understanding of teaching and student learning.

In conclusion, empirical studies suggest early career teachers benefit from professional development including content-specific induction meetings, opportunities for informal peer collaboration, and peer dialogue for problem solving. These recommendations support the innovation in this study because I recruited participants for a Team Leadership CoP with content-specific information about team leadership, opportunities for peer collaboration, and problem-solving discussions. According to Meyer (2002), "many novice teachers feel isolated and eager to find a safe place to examine their early teaching experiences" (p. 38). To extend this idea, I cultivated a CoP to offer a designated space for early career special education teachers to examine their early experiences with team leadership. In Chapter 3, I will describe the methodology for this mixed methods, action research study.

CHAPTER 3: METHODS

This mixed methods action research study investigated the outcomes for six early career special education teachers who participated in a Community of Practice about team leadership in special education. As discussed in Chapter 2, a CoP is a group of people that chooses to be together for a common purpose (Wenger, 1998). The following chapter describes the design of the study, including the methodological approach, innovation, participants, timelines, data collection, and data analysis.

Methodological Research Design and Rationale

As an induction coach supporting early career special education teachers, I was challenged by the fact that our special education department did not yet have systematic methods, department resources, or strategies to enhance team leadership skills for new special education teachers who work with paraeducators. Each year, teachers expressed challenges with this topic and sought help. After conducting preliminary action research cycles and seeking guidance from teachers about potential solutions, I arrived at the idea of cultivating a CoP for discussion and reflection about team leadership in special education. I held multiple roles in this study, including researcher, CoP coordinator, and CoP member. I will discuss these roles later in this chapter. The purpose of this study was to explore the outcomes for teachers who attended a bi-weekly CoP about team leadership in special education. This chapter describes the methods that were used to answer each of the following research questions:

- RQ1: To what extent did the CoP influence early career special education teachers' perceptions of their ability to lead paraeducators in their classrooms?

- RQ2: How and to what extent did the CoP engage in problem-solving dialogues about team leadership in special education?

- RQ3: How and to what extent did CoP members identify beneficial team leadership resources and co-create resources together?

- RQ4: How did I negotiate the duality of being both a CoP coordinator and member?

Action Research Rationale

Action research principles guided this mixed methods dissertation study and preliminary research cycles. This section describes the benefits of action research, including three key points: action research cycles inform actions, involve participants, and provide opportunities to evaluate change. Then, it examines related studies with an action research approach. Finally, this section describes two limitations of action research, my actions to decrease these limitations, and my rationale for selecting action research as my approach for this study.

According to McNiff (2013), action research is a common-sense approach to real-life dilemmas because each cycle informs future actions and next steps. Dick (2007) suggests action research is an extension of natural problem solving, enhanced by stakeholder involvement, critical reflection, flexible mindfulness, and the ability to incorporate other processes and literature as needed by the researcher. Second, action research involves stakeholders (McNiff, 2013) by providing opportunities that give voice to both researchers and participants. This approach acknowledges that all stakeholders have valuable expertise and perspectives to share. Action research is a social framework for conducting research when a problem motivates stakeholders to seek greater

51

understanding through a systematic process of reflection. A third benefit is that action research cycles provide opportunities to evaluate change over time (Riel, 2010) as each cycle provides new information.

According to Zambo & Isai (2012), action research is a means of personal and professional growth. Cycles of action research develop teacher leadership (Furtado & Anderson, 2012) because teachers have opportunities to "work together, learn together, make sense of their work together, and pursue goals that they have set for themselves" (Smeets & Ponte, 2009, p. 176). Collaboration provides opportunities for participants to develop relationships that are fundamental to change (van Kraayenoord, Honan, & Moni, 2011). In a study about new teacher induction programs, Athanases et al. (2008) reported that action research was a valuable tool, enabling mentor teachers to be responsive, reflective, and supportive to mentees. According to Cohen (2010), action research participants develop autonomy and self-efficacy through reflective experiences that increase their future capacity for problem solving.

I considered these benefits and also considered two limitations: bias and generalizability. First, researchers and participants have biases (Mills, 2014) that might influence findings as they interact, reflect, and interpret evidence. To minimize this limitation, I kept a researcher journal to remain aware of my own preconceptions and I involved multiple stakeholders, as suggested by Huang (2010) to decrease my individual biases and improve the authenticity of my research findings. Second, action research findings can be deeply situated in their local context. However, Fine (2008) asserts that action research has theoretical generalizability when stakeholders from other contexts read the work and find details that personally resonate with their own understanding.

Lincoln & Guba (1985) suggest that researchers provide thick, detailed description of the context, processes, experiences, and outcomes from the study to increase the likelihood of transferability to other contexts. Therefore, I took steps to clearly explain my actions, outcomes, and understandings in this study so others can draw their own conclusions about how this work applies to their individual situations in other contexts.

Given the benefits and limitations of action research, I determined that action research was the most valuable approach for this mixed methods study. Action research cycles informed subsequent cycles, provided opportunities to involve stakeholders, and created opportunities to evaluate change. As a special education induction coach, action research cycles also provided opportunities for self-reflection about my own skills as a leader, researcher, and colleague participating in a CoP.

Mixed Methods and Points of Interface Rationale

This study was a mixed methods study with a points of interface design that integrated quantitative and qualitative methods along dimensions suggested by Yin (2006), including: (a) research questions, (b) units of analysis, (c) samples for study, (d) instrumentation and data collection methods, and (e) analytic strategies. In this study, mixed methods enhanced data collection, instrumentation, and analysis. By strategically mixing methods along these paradigms, there were opportunities to combine statistics with the stories to give a "more complete understanding of the research problem than just one by itself" (Creswell, n.d.). Mixed methods in this study provided complementarity because I used data from both quantitative and qualitative measures to evaluate similarities in the findings, improving validity and reliability of interpretation.

As suggested by Plano Clark & Creswell (2010), I had clear rationale for choosing a mixed methods approach: participant enrichment and significance enhancement. According to Collins et al. (2006), participant enrichment refers to mixing the methods to optimize and enrich information from a small participant group, such as the six teachers in this study. According to Collins et al. (2006), mixed methods also enhance the researchers' interpretation of the data. Given the small participant group with diverse personal and professional experiences, a mixed methods approach offered deeper interpretation about the significance of findings. Given the need for participant enrichment and significance enhancement, mixed methods was the appropriate research design for this study.

Mixed methods research has popular typologies, such as convergent design, exploratory design, and explanatory design. However, a specific typology of mixed methods research design was not appropriate for this study because the timing and mixing of methods throughout the study was more important. As described by Guest (2012), I utilized a points of interface design, mixing methods in meaningful ways to design the study, determine data sources, collect data, reflect on outcomes, and analyze data. In later sections, I will describe the points of interface in more detail.

Setting

Southwestern Elementary School District (SESD) is a suburban elementary school district in a southwestern metropolitan area. By federal guidelines, SESD is considered a Title I district due to the low socio-economic status of families living in the district. Of the 13,348 students in SESD, 87% qualify for free and reduced lunch. SESD is language-diverse, with over 2300 students classified as English Language Learners and

31 different languages spoken by families residing in SESD boundaries. There are 17 schools in SESD that span the grade levels preschool through 8th grade.

New special education teachers hired to the district are classified as First-Year Induction (FYI) or Second-Year Induction (SYI) based on their teaching experience at the time of hiring. By district definition, FYI teachers are brand new special education teachers. This includes recently certificated college graduates or teachers who are placed in teaching positions through alternate certification paths, including Teach for America core members. SYI teachers consist mostly of teachers who are returning to SESD for their second year in special education. Additionally, some teachers are classified as SYI if they are experienced special education teachers who transfer to SESD mid-career with less than three years of experience teaching special education. FYI and SYI teachers receive support through monthly programming to develop professional skills necessary in special education.

The special education department in SESD experiences high annual turnover. Vacant positions are often filled by early career teachers. In 2013-14, there were 85 total special education teachers in SESD, and 38 teachers (45%) participated in the FYI Induction or SYI Induction programs. In 2014-15, there were 86 total special education teachers in SESD, and 30 teachers (34%) participated in the FYI Induction or SYI induction programs. In the year of this study, 2015-16, there were 88 total special education teachers in SESD, and 31 teachers (35%) were participating in the FYI or SYI programs at the time of recruitment. I developed the following innovation, with input from stakeholders, to support early career special education teachers in SESD with team leadership responsibilities.

<center>**Innovation: A Team Leadership CoP**</center>

A Community of Practice (CoP) is a group of people who "share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis" (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002, p. 4). This study describes the leadership outcomes for six early career special education teachers who gathered together with a mutual desire to enhance their team leadership skills. Later in this chapter, I will discuss how I participated in the CoP as a co-member and coordinator. As discussed in Chapter 1, special education teachers have a team leadership responsibility to guide and equip paraeducators in a collaborative partnership that promotes student progress. In my district, there was little time for special education teachers to discuss their problems of practice during the workday. Therefore, I cultivated an afterschool Team Leadership CoP for special education teachers to discuss leadership challenges and solutions with peers. This section provides details about the Team Leadership CoP, beginning with information about pilot studies that guided these details.

Developing the Team Leadership CoP Innovation: Pilot Studies

The Team Leadership CoP arose from the needs of early career special education teachers and their opinions about solutions to enhance their team leadership skills. During an informal action research cycle in Fall 2013, SYI teachers indicated that "staff management" was among their top three training needs. I conducted a survey asking SYI teachers to indicate their interest in different types of solutions to meet this need. One high scoring option was *Time to discuss the situation aloud with peers, share my ideas, and get feedback that helps me decide what to do.* This option was rated higher than a similar option that included both "peers" and "veteran teachers" in the CoP. I realized

<center>56</center>

that teachers were not looking for veteran teachers to offer advice; instead, they desired opportunities to develop their own solutions and receive feedback from peers.

Therefore, I cultivated a pilot Team Leadership CoP including five special education teachers in Spring 2014. The pilot group represented a fundamental change, shifting away from the idea of induction coaches or veteran teachers as the "knowledgeable experts" toward the joint creation of knowledge among peers. Participants attended four afterschool pilot CoP gatherings over four weeks. Additionally, participants corresponded and shared ideas between meetings using a private Facebook group. To embrace the survey results, I assumed the intentional role of "peer" instead of "coach" during the pilot group. I was cautious about offering advice and strategies. Instead, I participated in shared problem-solving dialogues that reflected my role as a peer rather than a "veteran teacher." Group conversations were unstructured and organic. There was no agenda. I collected pilot data using quantitative and qualitative methods, including surveys, interviews, a focus group, field notes, CoP recordings and transcripts, a researcher journal, and artifacts. Analysis showed the pilot CoP evolved into a learning Community of Practice, as described in Chapter 2, because CoP members demonstrated engagement, imagination, and alignment (Wenger, 1998). Further, themes showed that CoP members sought mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and shared repertoire with their own paraeducators in their individual classrooms.

During problem-solving dialogues, members of the pilot CoP engaged in four problem-solving paths during the pilot study: a) problem-solving monologues in which teachers did not solicit feedback from others, b) problem-solving with encouragement, justification, and support in which team members encouraged one another or shared

personal experiences with the problem, c) problem-solving with meaning-making in which participants explored why the issue might be happening, and d) problem-solving with solutions posed and discussed. In the pilot post-innovation focus group, teachers appreciated the unstructured nature but reported desire for more solutions from the group. From this feedback, I realized that future Team Leadership CoP gatherings needed a tool to guide reflective thinking and individual goal setting to promote more focused conversations. Therefore, I developed the Teacher Group Reflection Survey (TGRS) for this dissertation study. The TGRS will be described later in Data Collection tools.

Given the feedback and benefits of the pilot Team Leadership CoP in Spring 2014, I coordinated another pilot Team Leadership CoP during the 2014-15 school year with six members that met seven times. I did not collect data on that pilot group because I was studying and developing other aspects of this dissertation study. However, the 2014-15 pilot Team Leadership CoP contributed to my understanding of how early career special education teachers interact and collaborate to develop team leadership skills through shared problem-solving dialogues. Next, I will describe recruitment and participant selection for the Team Leadership CoP in this study.

Participants

Special education teachers in SESD with 0-2 years teaching experience were eligible to volunteer for this study. I pre-determined a maximum group of eight CoP participants, including myself in the dual role of researcher/CoP member. I recruited participants in person at induction meetings and by email (See Appendix A) starting in August 2015. I corresponded with 47 eligible participants, accepting participants in order of response. Nine teachers responded with interest, resulting in a waitlist. After three

dropped out due to schedule conflicts, the final participant group included six special education teachers and myself. First, I will provide a composite description of the six special education teachers to protect their identities. Then, I will describe myself as a participant and share information that affected my positionality in the research.

CoP Teacher-Participants. Of the six special education team leaders in this study, two were first-year special education teachers, three were second-year special education teachers, and one was a third-year special education teacher. All team leaders held self-contained positions, serving the majority of their students within their classroom for the majority of the day. None of the participants were in resource positions or inclusion positions. Two teachers served students in the grade range PK-3, two teachers served students in the grade range 3-5, and two teachers served students in the grade range 6-8. They taught in cross-categorical classrooms for students with various special education eligibilities, including: Specific Learning Disability, Emotional Disability, Autism, Speech and Language Impairment, Mild Intellectual Disability, Other Health Impairment, Preschool Severe Delay, Hearing Impairment, and Developmental Disability. Three team leaders had two paraeducators in their classroom, and three team leaders had one paraeducator in their classroom. Two of the team leaders in the Team Leadership CoP had participated in the 2014-15 pilot Team Leadership CoP.

Myself as a CoP Participant. As the researcher, I was also a participant in this study. I negotiated these roles carefully and made this decision intentionally. I predicted that I might spoil the organic nature of a CoP if I watched it from the outside as a "researcher," eavesdropping on their private conversations. Instead, I realized the most natural way to study a CoP was to participate in one. Therefore, I will clearly describe my

own work experiences and positionality in the research so that I might set it aside and study the outcomes more clearly (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Later, I will share how I took steps to clarify my dual role as both the CoP coordinator and CoP co-member so I had opportunities to participate in authentic ways that did not negatively influence the organic nature of the Team Leadership CoP. Self-reflection was an essential component of my role in this study.

I have taught in the field of special education for eleven years, working in my district for six of those years. I currently serve preschool self-contained special education students with autism and severe communication delays. Overall, I have had a stable team over the past six years, including two paraeducators at a time and three paraeducators altogether. One of these paraeducators stayed on my team for two years before accepting another position that offered benefits. My current team includes one paraeducator who has been on my team for six years. The other paraeducator has been on my team for four years. As the team leader, I nurture my team with intentional leadership actions. Retaining them is highly important to me because I have invested a great deal of time training them to effectively work with my students and collaborate as a team. I advocate for working conditions that make them feel professional and valuable. This last year, our district was fortunate to obtain a grant that offered my paraeducators benefits and full-time hours for the very first time. This was very meaningful to my team.

My past teaching experiences also contribute to my positionality because they inform my leadership beliefs and collaboration techniques. In my first teaching position, I taught self-contained students with mild to moderate intellectual disabilities ranging from kindergarten to second-grade. I worked with four paraeducators, including one

60

paraeducator who traveled to different classes throughout the day with a visually

impaired student. In this first teaching position, I experienced great challenges

supervising paraeducators. You may recall that I explained these challenges in Chapter 1.

In my second teaching position, I traveled to various classroom and school sites as an

adaptive music teacher for students ranging from preschool to eighth grade with various

disabilities. I had the opportunity to work with a variety of paraeducators in each

classroom, providing them instructions to improve student success during music. None of

these paraeducators were part of my staff, and I was not their supervisor. In my third

position, I worked as a preschool inclusion specialist, assisting regular education teachers

and their paraeducators with modifications and accommodations for special education

students in their classrooms. I worked with eight teachers and their eight paraeducators in

that setting, but I did not directly supervise any of these individuals.

My mentoring experience and training also contribute to my positionality as a

researcher. I have served as a special education induction coach for four years. I mentor

first-year and second-year special education teachers during our monthly after school

induction meetings. Additionally, I provide support as needed when teachers contact me

with questions. My relationships with teachers through induction may have improved my

opportunities to recruit teacher-participants for the Team Leadership CoP. Additionally,

CoP members interacted with one another outside of the Team Leadership CoP

gatherings during induction events.

Timeline and Innovation Details

Prior to the innovation period, all participants received some team leadership

training during induction meetings. Those trainings may have contributed to some shared

61

knowledge, terminology, and perspectives during the Team Leadership CoP gatherings.

However, the influence of those trainings is beyond the scope of this study. Further, team

leaders had access to an online resource wiki[4] about Special Education Team Leadership.

I began recruiting CoP members in August 2015 and the first group meeting was

in September. The CoP met six times between September and December. Table 1 shows

the timeline including recruitment, innovation details, and data collection. Table 1

provides an overview, but I will be discussing all aspects in later sections of this chapter.

Table 1

Timeline for Team Leadership CoP and Data Collection—Fall 2015

Date(s)	Action
July 29	Mentioned a Team Leadership CoP was forming and distributed a "Save the Dates" flier during New Teacher Orientation.
Aug 17	Shared details about CoP and dates with FYI teachers during induction meeting.
Aug 18-25	Sent recruitment emails to all eligible participants and corresponded with potential participants to answer questions or provide details.
Aug 27	Introduction email to all participants that also clarified my role as CoP coordinator. Random draw to select four focal participants for interviews.
Aug 27-30	Email correspondence with all participants to schedule intro meetings.
Aug 30	Sent Outlook calendar reminders for all Team Leadership CoP gatherings.
Sept 2-10	Intro meetings with all participants for consent forms and *Intentional Leadership Actions and Paraeducator Outcomes* (ILA-PO) pre-survey. Pre-innovation interviews for focal participants.
Sept 10	Second email to participants: Reminder of upcoming CoP gathering, additional role clarification, proposed agenda items, brief demographic survey.
Sept 14	CoP 1 with team-building activity, group norms, and co-determined agenda. *Teacher Group Reflection Survey* (TGRS), Researcher journal.
Sept 22	Created CoP private Facebook page and invited participants.
Sept 28	CoP 2, TGRS, Researcher journal
Oct 5	CoP 3, TGRS, Researcher journal
Oct 26	CoP 4, TGRS, Researcher journal
Nov 2	CoP 5, TGRS, Researcher journal
Nov 23	CoP 6, TGRS, Researcher journal, distributed ILA-PO post-survey
Nov 30	Focus group, collected ILA-PO post-survey from participants
Dec 7-16	Post-innovation meetings to return binders, provide ILA-PO Summary and conduct post-innovation interviews (for focal participants)

---

[4] I started the wiki in 2013 with resources I created or located about team leadership. I referenced materials on the wiki during induction trainings. However, participants did not report using the wiki during the study; therefore, it was not important to the findings and will not be mentioned further.

Cultivating a Team Leadership CoP: My Role as CoP Coordinator

Though a CoP cannot be designed or mandated, Wenger et al. (2002) assert that a CoP can be cultivated through intentional circumstances that allow a group to develop identity, mutual engagement, shared meaning, and joint enterprise. To cultivate these circumstances, I served as the Team Leadership CoP coordinator. My goal was to create the conditions in which a CoP could arise, following the principles suggested by Wenger et al. (2002), such as "valuing the learning they do, making time and other resources available for their work, encouraging participation, and removing barriers" (p. 13). Overall, the direction of the group was not up to me because our Team Leadership CoP was a shared, co-constructed experience for CoP members. As the coordinator, I was very intentional, aware, and reflective about any actions that set me apart from other CoP members. I will describe my actions and their necessity in this section.

Bringing CoP members together. Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder (2002) suggest that a CoP can be cultivated by making time for group meetings and removing barriers. Potential CoP members were busy early career special education teachers working at various schools across the district. By recruiting teachers interested in discussing team leadership, suggesting the meeting dates, and arranging a place to meet, I removed barriers that created an opportunity for the CoP to form. At the first CoP gathering, I released all control of dates and length of meetings to CoP members for mutual discussion. Members decided to maintain the suggested dates and meet from 4:15-5:30 at the same location I arranged for our first gathering.

63

Setting the tone before the first CoP gathering. I was very aware that my role

of CoP coordinator would set me apart from other members at the beginning of the Team

Leadership CoP, especially since CoP members also knew me in a leadership role of

"induction coach" in other settings. My goal was to step away from this leadership role as

quickly as possible, so I took intentional actions to clarify my role responsibilities and

limitations. I sent two emails prior to the first CoP gathering. The first email welcomed

CoP members, clarified my role, provided information about the CoP, and mentioned that

I would be scheduling intro meetings in person with each participant. See Appendix B for

the full introduction email to CoP members. Here is an excerpt clarifying my role:

> I wanted to share a little bit about my role in the group: I see myself as the 'group
> coordinator,' spreading the word about the group to bring people who are
> interested in team leadership together at the same time and place. I don't see
> myself as the 'group leader' because we are all leaders in our own classrooms and
> experts about our own teams. I think we are all resourceful, and we can work
> together to talk about ideas, identify resources we already have, and create the
> resources we need. We will all be equally contributing CoP members to determine
> topics, group norms, and how we spend our time together. As the coordinator, I
> will do things like arranging times/locations, sending out the Outlook invites,
> bringing snacks, helping the group connect, and bringing tools to help us reflect
> and grow as leaders. At the beginning of the group, I'll also share some
> information about past groups and their reflections—so we can figure out how to
> be the most productive with our time together.

The second email (See Appendix C) provided additional information about the nature of

a CoP, clarified my role again, and proposed some potential agenda items for participants

to consider before our first meeting. I did not want to propose an exact agenda for the

meeting because I wanted the time to be co-constructed, and I did not want to set myself

apart as the 'leader.' However, I wanted the group to benefit from my experiences in past

CoPs because I believe authentic CoP members share their knowledge to benefit the

group. Therefore, I proposed potential agenda items in advance, phrased as questions, to

provide time for consideration and clarity that the agenda was not predetermined. Here is

an excerpt clarifying our open agenda at the upcoming first CoP gathering:

> As the group "coordinator," my role is getting us all together in the same location with snacks, but there is no pre-planned agenda. A true Community of Practice decides together what their "work" will be and collaborates to develop new understandings. As you are thinking ahead about what that might look like, here are some preliminary ideas our group might want to talk about on Monday to get us started:
> - Should we do a team-building/ice-breaker activity? I will bring one just in case. If you have one you like, bring that along, too!
> - Should we establish group norms?
> - Should we talk about the length and dates of our meetings?
> - How should we determine our group's "work" as a Community of Practice? Should we do something like create a list of challenges we face as team leaders? Should we talk about what our ideal perfect paraeducator team would be like? Do we need something like a mission statement?
> - Should we use tools for group problem-solving conversations? I've seen some cool protocols called "Critical Friends Groups." I will bring them for us to glance over.
> - How can we keep in touch between meetings? Should we share ideas through a private Facebook group, Edmodo, Samepage, or another tool?
> - Are there other steps we should take as our group moves forward?

I was continually aware of my interactions through email and conversations so that I

could nurture the conditions of a CoP without trying to control one. I continued to clarify

my role and shared group ownership at the first CoP gathering.

Creating a culture of shared ownership at first CoP gathering. To nurture

shared ownership of the agenda, I wrote potential agenda items on notecards and

scattered the cards in the middle of the table. Additionally, I provided blank note cards

and reminded the team leaders they could suggest agenda topics as well. As we finished

agenda items, I asked CoP members what we should talk about next. In that way, team

leaders co-determined the order of the agenda by looking at the notecards and suggesting

topics. We covered all of the topics suggested in the excerpt above. No additional agenda

items were suggested, but I think the blank notecards were significant in setting the tone about shared group leadership and co-ownership.

For the icebreaker activity, team leaders chose a team-building activity called *Lost at Sea,* a scenario that we were lost at sea with 14 items. Participants chose to do this activity immediately after introductions at the first CoP gathering. The task involved sorting the items in order of usefulness for survival during the shipwreck. I brought Lost at Sea as a possible icebreaker to promote conversation and shared problem solving about an uncommon topic so that collaboration would be likely. I provided picture cards for the items, the scenario, and an answer key that was stapled so I could not review it in advance. No CoP members brought an alternate activity, so they discussed and ranked the Lost at Sea items. As I anticipated, the icebreaker activity served its purpose to nurture shared problem-solving conversations, interactions, and laughter as team leaders worked together to rank the *Lost at Sea* items. A few CoP members even stepped into leadership roles to ask reflective questions about the group's progress and next steps.

Nurturing connectedness. Jabr (2011) found that social networking tools facilitate relationships and highly appeal to 21st century adults as a form of community. At the first CoP gathering, I asked members if we should use social networking to collaborate and stay connected between CoP gatherings. One team leader expressed concern about the confidentiality of online spaces. CoP members collectively discussed social networking options and decided to use a private Facebook group. To protect confidentiality, team leaders mutually agreed not to post any information that seemed risky. I set up the Facebook group, invited members, and changed the settings to private once it was established. I posted messages such as reminders about upcoming meetings,

66

but I was cautious about posting messages that jeopardized my equal status as a CoP member.

There was limited Facebook activity from CoP members during the study, and it did not evolve into a collaborative online space as I expected. It could be possible that confidentiality concerns stifled interest or created confusion about how team leaders desired to use the online collaborative space. However, the sheer existence of this connectedness may have contributed to group dynamics in person. Further, Facebook improved my ability to remind CoP members about upcoming gatherings and gain feedback about emerging ideas during the data analysis phase. Therefore, Facebook was an important part of the methodology, but was not important to the findings of the study.

Subsequent CoP gatherings. I remained mindful of my actions at each CoP gathering. I minimized my role as "leader" but continued actions that reduced barriers for group members. For example, I arranged our meeting space, sent reminders about upcoming meetings, brought snacks, and transported our CoP binders to every meeting. There were a few times when a CoP member asked me a direct question about group proceedings. In these cases, I rephrased the question to the group so we could co-determine the answer together. Over the subsequent Team Leadership CoP gatherings, team leaders jointly determined the topics, resources, and activities. In the remaining portions of this chapter, I will talk about data collection, points of interface, and analysis.
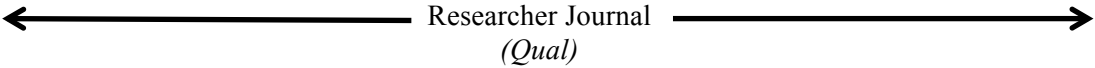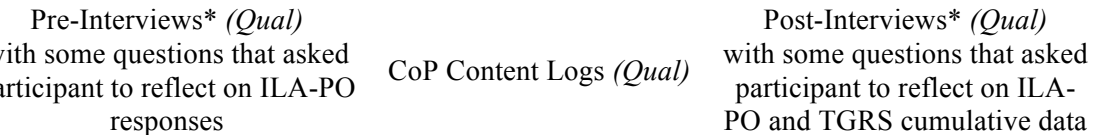
Data Collection

In this study, I mixed methods concurrently as appropriate based on meaningful points of interface (Guest, 2012). There were three phases in the data collection timeline: before, during, and after the innovation. I selected data collection tools from both

quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a more complete understanding of the Team Leadership CoP and complementarity for findings. Table 2 shows the data collection tools and points of interface at the three phases.

Table 2

Three Phases of Data Collection and Points of Interface

Before Innovation (late July-mid Sept)	During Innovation (mid Sept-early Dec)	After Innovation (early-mid Dec)
ILA-PO Survey* *(Quant)* including 2 open-ended items	TGRS* *(Quant/Qual)*	ILA-PO Survey* *(Quant)* including 2 open-ended items
←	Researcher Journal *(Qual)*	→
		Focus Group *(Qual)*
Pre-Interviews* *(Qual)* with some questions that asked participant to reflect on ILA-PO responses	CoP Content Logs *(Qual)*	Post-Interviews* *(Qual)* with some questions that asked participant to reflect on ILA-PO and TGRS cumulative data

Mixed methods points of interface in data collection tools

In the following sections, I will explain the data collection tools for this mixed methods study. Table 3 provides an overview of data collection tools and an inventory of the data collected during the study. Following Table 3, I will provide detailed descriptions of each tool, organized into two subsections: quantitative measures and qualitative measures.

Table 3

Data Collection Tools Inventory

Instruments	Description	Inventory
Intentional Leadership Actions and Paraeducator Outcomes Survey (ILA-PO) Appendix D *Quantitative & Qualitative*	This survey included three parts. In Part I, participants marked on a line to indicate their level of agreement with statements about paraeducator(s) outcomes. In Part II and Part III, participants responded to rating scales about leadership efficacy and team success. There were two open-ended questions.	2 times per team leader Total: 14
Pre-Innovation Individual Interviews–Appendix G *Qualitative*	I conducted pre-innovation interviews with four focal participants, drawn at random. Some interview questions asked participants to reflect on their leadership perspectives, as they indicated in their ILA-PO.	1 per focal participant Total: 4
Teacher Group Reflection Survey (TGRS)–Appendix E *Qualitative & Quantitative*	Participants completed closed-ended and open-ended items about their leadership progress between CoPs and reflection about CoP gatherings.	1 per team leader bi-weekly for 6 CoPs Total: 28
Post-Innovation Individual Interviews–Appendix H *Qualitative*	Post-innovation individual interviews were conducted using the compiled ILA-PO Survey data. Participants examined their progress, reflected on their learning, and provided insight about changes in their ILA-PO ratings.	1 per focal participant Total: 4
Content Logs of CoPs audio recordings *Qualitative*	All CoP gatherings were audio recorded, logged, and selectively transcribed as necessary to answer research questions.	1 per CoP gathering Total: 6
Post-intervention focus group Appendix F *Qualitative*	A focus group was conducted to gather input and perspectives about leadership outcomes related to the Team Leadership CoP	1 focus group
Researcher journals, including guided questions Appendix I *Qualitative*	I kept a researcher journal over the course of the innovation, including guided entries after each group meeting.	Total entries: 44

Quantitative Measures

Two quantitative measures were used during this study: The Intentional Leadership Actions and Paraeducator Outcomes Survey and the Teacher Group Reflection Survey. These data collection tools are discussed below.

Intentional Leadership Actions & Paraeducator Outcomes (ILA-PO) Survey. The ILA-PO Survey is a researcher-made instrument that included three distinct sections, identified as Part I, Part II, and Part III. The entire ILA-PO Survey can be found in

Appendix D. Team leaders completed the ILA-PO Survey twice during the study, once before the Team Leadership CoP gatherings started and once after the CoP gatherings were finished. First, I will explain why the ILA-PO Survey was needed in this study. Then, I will describe each section, provide examples of survey items, and explain measures taken to increase validity for each section.

I designed the ILA-PO Survey because there was no similar instrument for special education teachers to reflect on their team leadership actions and paraeducator outcomes. There were leadership surveys in which both the 'leader' and the 'follower' complete surveys to provide leadership feedback (Avolio, Garnder, & Walumbwa, 2007; Bass & Avolio, 2004). However, these types of leader/follower surveys were not appropriate for a variety of reasons. First, existing surveys did not reflect the role of the team leader in special education. Second, I wanted team leaders to be able to participate in the Team Leadership CoP confidentially without having to ask for paraeducator feedback. Third, paraeducators might not provide honest feedback on leader/follower surveys because there would be little anonymity, yielding leadership data that might not be meaningful to participants. Fourth, a leader/follower survey might have caused negative outcomes, such as revealing feedback the team was not yet ready to talk about. Given many potential negative outcomes and limitations, I determined that existing leadership surveys were not appropriate for this study. Therefore, I created the ILA-PO Survey by reviewing the literature, considering my own professional knowledge, and reflecting on information gained from stakeholders in my local context about this topic. Next, I will briefly discuss the three sections and provide example items from each section. Additionally, I will share information about designing each section and taking measures to improve validity.

70

Part I: Paraeducator Outcomes. Part I of the ILA-PO Survey was called

Paraeducator Outcomes. In Part I, question items related to teacher observations of

paraeducator behaviors and professional skills. There were 18 items in Part I. Participants

rated their level of agreement with statements like: *My paraeducator uses behavior*

strategies that are similar to my behavior strategies, My paraeducator contributes ideas

for the classroom, and *My paraeducator stays focused on tasks that benefit our*

classroom/students. Team leaders responded to each statement by marking a level of

agreement on a continuum between disagree and agree, utilizing a semantic differential

scale. A semantic differential is a long line, like a continuum, where participants could

mark anywhere on the line from disagree to agree. The place where they marked on the

line indicated their level of agreement with each statement. A semantic differential was

purposefully selected over a Likert Scale to detect the nuances in participant perspectives

and allow team leaders the freedom to mark on a continuum instead of choosing from a

pre-determined range of Likert statements or integer numbers.

I designed ILA-PO Part I in Fall 2014 and conducted cognitive interviews with

eight participants to gain feedback and improve the validity and reliability. According to

Presser et al. (2004), the cognitive interview process provides an opportunity "to reveal

the thought processes involved in interpreting a question and arriving at an answer" (p.

4). Fowler (1995) writes that survey questions can be determined 'good' when they are

understood in a consistent way by all participants and interpreted the way the researcher

intended the question to be interpreted. The cognitive interview process resulted in 16

changes to improve the ILA-PO Survey, including changes to: question item wording,

directions wording, reordering of two survey questions, adding one survey question,

eliminating one survey question, renaming the survey instrument, and changing

terminology from the term 'Educational Assistant' in the survey to the term

'paraeducator' to align the survey more closely with this dissertation research. Many

changes were co-constructed during the interview process with interview participants,

and other changes emerged as I analyzed interview transcripts. During the cognitive

interview process, teachers highly approved of the semantic differential. One participant

shared, "It gives people a lot of freedom to mark exactly how they feel, wherever that is"

(Participant 5, personal communication, November 6, 2014).

Part II: Influence of Leadership Behaviors. Part II of the ILA-PO Survey was

called *Influence of Leadership Behaviors*. In Part II, team leaders rated their leadership

efficacy by indicating their ability to influence a given situation. Items mimicked

Bandura's teacher efficacy scale (Bandura, 2006), beginning with the sentence stem:

How much can I do to…(influence desired outcome). Desired outcomes were arranged in

three constructs: Influencing Professional Behavior of Paraeducators, Influencing

Instructional Practices of Paraeducators, and Influencing the Team of Paraeducators. For

example, desired outcomes for influencing professional behavior included items such as:

How much can I do so that my paraeducator clocks in/out on time, including lunch

break? There were seven items in this construct. Desired outcomes for influencing

instructional practices included items such as: *How much can I do to alter the strategies*

my paraeducator uses with students? There were five items in this construct. Desired

outcomes for influencing the team included items such as: *How much can I do to have a*

common team vision (why we do the work we do with students)? There were six items in

this construct. Overall, there were 18 items in Part II. To answer these items, participants

read each desired outcome and indicated their ability to influence this outcome, choosing an integer ranging from 1 to 10. The continuum is shown in Figure 5. Descriptors were modeled after Bandura's (2006) teacher self-efficacy survey, ranging from the ability to do "nothing" (1) to the ability to do "a great deal" (10).

Nothing		Very little		Some influence		Quite a bit		A great deal	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Figure 5. Continuum for ILA-PO Part II responses.

I conducted a pilot of ILA-PO Part II to determine if constructs were reliable. I sent the pilot survey to 48 special education colleagues in my district and received responses from 23 participants with the following demographics: 2-33 years of special education teaching experience, 2-38 years of experience working with paraeducators, 1-3 paraeducators working in their classrooms at the time of the survey, and experience working with 2-50 paraeducators in their career. Averages were as follows: 7.5 years special education teaching experience, 8.2 years experience working with paraeducators, 1.7 paraeducators in their classroom at the time of the survey, and experience working with 10.6 paraeducators in their career.

Using SPSS, I conducted a Cronbach alpha analysis with the pilot data to measure internal consistency reliability for ILA-PO Part II, examining each of the survey constructs as well as the overall survey section. The Cronbach alpha correlates the score for each item with the total score for each individual, comparing that score to the variability present for all individual items scores (Cronbach, 1951; Salkind, 2011). This measure indicates whether test items are consistent with one another and represent only one dimension of interest. The general rule is that a set of questions can be considered

internally reliable when α is greater than 0.70. Table 4 shows the coefficient-alpha

estimates of internal consistency reliability for Part II of the ILA-PO Survey.

Table 4

Part II ILA-PO Coefficient-Alpha Estimates of Internal Consistency Reliability (n=23)

Factor	Within Factor Items	Coefficient Alpha Estimate of Reliability
Influencing Professional Behavior of Paraeducators	Items 1-7	0.91
Influencing Instructional Practices of Paraeducators	Items 8-12	0.94
Influencing the Team of Paraeducators	Items 13-18	0.91
Overall Alpha	Item 1-18	0.95

For Part II, the scores overall indicated the survey tool was reliable (α=0.95). Of

these three constructs, *Influencing Instructional Practices of Paraeducators* had the

highest internal reliability (α=0.94). The other two constructs also had high internal

reliability scores (α=0.91). Results indicated these constructs consisted of question sets

that produced internally consistent reliability. Participants tended to respond to question

items within each set of questions in ILA-PO Part II with similar responses in the pilot

survey. Therefore, ILA-PO Part II was a reliable survey for use in this dissertation study.

Part III: Opinions About Beneficial Strategies for Team Leadership. ILA-PO

Part III was called *Opinions About Beneficial Strategies for Team Leadership.* I created

Part III to explore participant beliefs about leadership practices that contribute to their

team's success. Overall, there were 20 items that revolved around four constructs related

to qualities of Transformational Leadership Theory. As described in Chapter 2,

Transformational Leadership Theory is a leadership style with actions and behaviors that

transform followers through authentic interactions that increase the success of the

organization (Bass & Riggio, 2006). There was no specific instrument that measured

qualities of Transformational Leadership for special education teachers who supervise

paraeducators. Therefore, I created these items by integrating the work of Bass & Riggio

(2006) with recommended strategies for supervising paraeducators according to Chopra,

Sandoval-Lucero, & French (2011), Trautman (2004), French & Chopra (2006), Devlin

(2008), Pickett & Gerlach (1997), Capizzi & Da Fonte (2012), and Gerlach & Lee

(1997). The items were further influenced by my own experiences teaching and

researching the topic of team leadership strategies in special education.

In Part III, team leaders rated their opinions about the influence of certain

leadership strategies to create a successful paraeducator team. Statements began with the

sentence stem: *My paraeducator(s) and I are a successful team because I…*(leadership

behavior). Participants marked on a continuum of integers from 1 to 10 whether the

leadership behavior influenced paraeducator success. Lower integers indicated the

leadership behavior did not influence paraeducator success. Higher integers indicated the

leadership behavior greatly influenced paraeducator success.

The four constructs in Part III reflected the application of Transformational

Leadership in Special Education settings. Each construct had five items. The first

construct related to idealized influence. Example leadership behaviors in this construct

included: *…lead by example, being a model for paraeducators* and *…show

paraeducators how to work with our students.* The second construct related to

inspirational motivation. Example leadership behaviors in this construct included:

…celebrate student progress as a team and *…express appreciation for paraeducators.*

The third construct related to intellectual stimulation. Example leadership behaviors in this construct included: …*plan collaboratively as a team for student and classroom activities* and …*ask paraeducators to contribute ideas for our classroom/students.* The fourth construct related to individualized consideration. Example leadership behaviors in this construct included: …*coach paraeducators to improve areas of weakness* and …*talk to my paraeducator immediately when there is a problem/concern.* In Part III, I avoided directly asking participants to indicate if they were using leadership strategies. This was done to decrease social desirability bias. Instead, ILA-PO Part III items asked team leaders to indicate their opinions about the usefulness of leadership strategies to create a successful paraeducator team.

As described in ILA-PO Part II, I piloted Part III of the survey in Spring 2015. I sent the pilot survey to 48 special education colleagues in my district and received responses from 23 teacher-participants. Demographic information was explained above. I conducted a Cronbach alpha analysis to measure internal consistency reliability for ILA-PO Part III, examining each of the survey constructs as well as the overall survey section. Overall scores indicated the survey tool was reliable (α=0.96). Of these three constructs, *Idealized Influence* had the highest internal reliability (α=0.91). The construct with the lowest reliability was *Intellectual Stimulation* (α=0.84). All constructs had high internal consistency reliability, ranging from α=0.84 to α=0.91. Results indicated these constructs consist of question sets that produce internally consistent reliability. Participants tended to respond to question items within each set of questions in ILA-PO Part III with similar responses in the pilot survey. Therefore, ILA-PO Part III was a reliable survey for use in

this dissertation study. Table 5 shows the coefficient-alpha estimates of internal

consistency reliability for Part III of the ILA-PO Survey pilot study.

Table 5

Part III ILA-PO Coefficient-Alpha Estimates of Internal Consistency Reliability (n=23)

Factor	Within Factor Items	Coefficient Alpha Estimate of Reliability
Idealized Influence	Items 3, 7, 9, 11, 17	0.91
Inspirational Motivation	Items 10, 13, 16, 18, 19	0.88
Intellectual Stimulation	Items 1, 2, 8, 15, 20	0.84
Individualized Consideration	Items 4, 5, 6, 12, 14	0.89
Overall Alpha	Item 1-20	0.96

As stated above, Team Leadership CoP members took the ILA-PO once before

the group started meeting and once after the group was finished meeting. The ILA-PO

Survey provided team leaders an opportunity to see how their leadership perspectives and

outcomes changed over time.

Teacher Group Reflection Survey (TGRS). The Teacher Group Reflection

Survey (TGRS) was a researcher-created tool for individual team leaders to reflect on

CoP gatherings and leadership progress in their own classrooms. Further, the TGRS

provided structure to guide CoP discussions about successes and challenges with team

leadership. All CoP members, including myself, completed one TGRS at each CoP

meeting. The entire TGRS can be found in Appendix E.

The TGRS included both open-ended and close-ended items. The close-ended

items involved a 4-point, Likert scale including the choices: Strongly Disagree, Disagree,

Agree, and Strongly Agree. Team leaders rated eight statements that began with the sentence stem: *Since our CoP group last met…*(observation/action). Some example statements include: *…I feel like I am changing as a leader, …I have been trying some new strategies with my paraeducator(s),* and *…I feel like our team is more effective working with students.* I will discuss open-ended items in the next section about qualitative methods.

Qualitative Measures

Five qualitative data collection tools were used, including: content logs from audio recordings of CoP gatherings, a focus group, individual pre- and post-innovation interviews, a researcher journal, and TGRS data. These qualitative tools provided information about the participants and researcher, including thoughts, feelings, experiences, meaning-making, and the ways that people made sense of things. Next, I will provide details about each qualitative data collection tool.

Content logs from audio recordings of CoP gatherings. I recorded CoP gatherings and created content logs about group conversation topics (Derry et al., 2010) by listening to audio in 5-minute increments, writing descriptive notes about the CoP conversations and documenting my reflections about the recording. This method allowed me to "develop a quick sense of the corpus of data and to facilitate the selection of episodes for further detailed analysis" (Derry et al., 2010, p. 18). I created the content logs in a series of listenings (Gilligan, Spencer, Weinberg, & Bertsch, 2003). First, I listened in 5-minute increments, typed a summary, and noted whether I thought the section seemed important to analyze further. Second, I returned to transcribe participant quotes or conversations in the sections that stood out after listening. As time passed, I

continued listening to audio recordings of CoP gatherings and new things seemed important. In my third step, I returned to CoP logs to make additional notes or transcribe new sections. This process continued throughout the innovation and data analysis. My CoP logs were a living document that changed as my understandings emerged. Re-listening to CoP audio recordings was essential to understand important interactions and capture those interactions on the CoP logs.

Focus group. Following the last CoP gathering, I conducted a focus group the following week to gain participant perspectives about the benefits of the CoP. According to Mills (2014), focus groups are "a particularly useful technique when the interaction among individuals will lead to shared understanding of the questions being posed by the researchers" (p. 92). Therefore, the purpose of the focus group was to generate shared meaning about the CoP process and outcomes. Since I was both the researcher and a CoP member, I developed an unconventional method for conducting the focus group: I printed each focus group question on letter sized paper and displayed them in flip chart format at the end of the table so that all CoP members, including myself, could read and consider each question at the appropriate time. This provided an opportunity for me to participate authentically in the focus group with other CoP members while also gathering focus group data. The focus protocol and a photo of the focus group flip chart can be found in Appendix F.

Individual, semi-structured interviews. Individual interviews were conducted with four focal participants to gain perspectives in a confidential setting where participants could share their stories, viewpoints, and perspectives. To select the focal participants, I wrote down the names of all CoP members who joined the group, put the

names in a bowl, and randomly selected four names. I contacted the four focal participants and asked if they were willing to commit extra time to share their perspectives. All four focal participants agreed. I conducted pre-interviews before the CoP period began and post-interviews after the CoP period finished, resulting in eight total interviews.

According to Jacob & Furgerson (2012), "skilled interviewers can gain insight into lived experiences, learn the perspectives of individuals participating in the study, and discover nuances in stories" (p. 1). Interview experiences were structured to provide opportunities for team leaders to reflect on their experiences, draw conclusions, and provide deeper understanding about their perspectives. Additionally, private interviews were a valuable opportunity for participants to openly discuss paraeducator outcomes and personal perspectives without social pressure from a group setting (Seidman, 2013). Interview conversations allowed me to peek into participant classrooms and glimpse the relationships they had with their paraeducators since classroom observations were beyond the scope of this study.

Pre-innovation interviews. Pre-innovation interviews (See Appendix G) occurred over a two-week period before the first Team Leadership CoP gathering. I visited the four focal participants in their classrooms or school sites to conduct semi-structured, narrative interviews about their leadership experiences and personal leadership goals. I utilized open-ended questions so the participants could "best voice their experiences unconstrained by any perspectives of the researcher or past research findings" (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2010, p. 257). Participants completed their first ILA-PO Survey at the beginning of the interview. I used their ILA-PO Survey responses to guide interview

questions and seek deeper understanding. I asked participants two questions during the interview that specifically referenced their ILA-PO Survey responses: (a) Looking at your responses to Part I ILA-PO, what are some things that stand out to you? (b) Looking at your ILA-PO Survey…if you could wave a magic wand and make your team even better, what types of things would you improve? The use of the ILA-PO responses to guide pre-innovation interviews was one example of points of interface in data collection.

Post-innovation interviews. I conducted post-innovation interviews one week after the last Team Leadership CoP gathering. I met with the same four focal participants in a confidential space on each of their campuses. I began the interview by sharing a printed report of their cumulative ILA-PO Survey data and portions of their TGRS data. This data was organized in report titled *Teacher Summary Sheet* (See Appendix J), which I will explain later in this chapter. I let participants look through the report at their own pace to provide time for personal reflection. As I presented the report to each participant, I explained that I had not yet analyzed data and was interested in their perspectives about what the changes meant. I intended to situate myself more in the role of "peer" having a conversation rather than a "researcher" with higher status. I wanted participants to feel very comfortable sharing their own interpretations about the meaning of their ILA-PO Survey responses. This is another example of points of interface in this mixed methods research design because participants assisted with interpreting their own quantitative findings during qualitative interviews. Their ideas and interpretations contributed to the findings, which I will present in Chapter 4.

After team leaders had sufficient time to review their personal Teacher Summary Sheet, I began the interview process using the semi-structured interview protocol (see

Appendix H). The first construct of the interview asked participants to reflect on data found in their Teacher Summary Sheet to answer questions about personal leadership changes and changes in their paraeducator team. Specifically, one question asked them to reflect on the self-reported team leadership changes they recorded on their TGRS forms at each Team Leadership CoP meeting. Additionally, I asked participants to reflect on the CoP's influence on their recent team leadership decisions and perspectives going forward.

Researcher journal. To capture my thinking over time, I kept a researcher journal comprised of both unstructured reflections and responses to guided questions. According to Mills (2014), the researcher journal provides researchers a way to "systematically reflect on their practice by constructing a narrative that honors the unique and powerful voice" (p. 95). The researcher journal was an important tool for reflecting about the experiences I had as a CoP co-participant, the CoP coordinator, and the researcher. I often voice-recorded reflections aloud as I drove home from CoP gatherings or interviews to capture my thinking in the moment. Later, I transcribed these recordings into my electronic researcher journal. Additionally, I completed guided questions (See Appendix I) after every Team Leadership CoP gathering to ensure that I considered my role intentionally after every group. The researcher journal provided space to write and reflect about the decisions I made throughout the innovation so I could reflect on these decisions during data analysis and interpretation.

**Teacher Group Reflection Survey (TGRS*).* As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the TGRS was a tool for participant reflection before and after CoP gatherings. The TGRS provided guidance for CoP conversations and also captured information about

teacher experiences and leadership decisions in their classrooms. According to Harrison, Lawson, & Wortley (2005), "beginning teachers develop into expert teachers by acquiring skills incrementally that depend on accruing experiences and being able to reflect meaningfully on them" (p. 423). The TGRS provided team leaders an opportunity to reflect on their own application of strategies to build autonomy, give teachers control of their learning, and nurture the ability to make interpretations based on experiences (Harrison, 2005). As a co-participant, I completed the TGRS at every meeting as well.

The TGRS had four open-ended questions. The first open-ended item asked team leaders to describe any leadership changes since the last CoP gathering. Participant responses to this question indicated how they had applied leadership strategies in their classrooms between CoP gatherings. The second item asked team leaders to write down their next leadership goal(s) or focus. This item promoted reflection to guide discussions during CoP gatherings as team leaders co-determined next steps to achieve their individual team leadership goals. The third item asked team leaders to list any challenges that might arise to hinder goal accomplishment. This item also promoted reflection to guide conversations during CoP gatherings as team leaders co-determined strategies together. The fourth open-ended item was completed at the end of the CoP gathering. It asked team leaders to summarize their new thoughts and plans to apply ideas when they returned to their individual classrooms. The entire TGRS can be found in Appendix E.

Data Collection to Answer the Research Questions

I utilized points of interface (Guest, 2012) in data collection to gather both quantitative and qualitative information over the three-phase data collection cycle shown in Table 2. To conclude this discussion of data collection methods, Table 6 shows the

points of interface and alignment between quantitative and qualitative sources to answer

the four research questions posed in this study. Additionally, Table 6 provides a preview

of the upcoming discussion about data analysis.

Table 6

Alignment of Research Questions with Data Collection Methods

Research Question	Data Collection Method and Use of Data to Answer Question
RQ1: To what extent did the CoP influence early career special education teachers' perceptions of their ability to lead paraeducators in their classrooms?	• **ILA-PO Survey:** Compared pre- and post-data. Referred to ILA-PO data in post-innovation interviews. • **TGRS:** Examined participant responses to the 8 quantitative items on their TGRS at each CoP gathering to see change over time. • **Pre-/Post-Innovation Interviews:** Questions explored leadership perspectives. Responses transcribed and analyzed in qualitative data corpus. • **Focus group:** Questions asked how the CoP conversations affected leadership perspectives when team leaders returned to their classrooms. Responses transcribed and analyzed in the corpus of qualitative data.
RQ2: How and to what extent did the CoP engage in problem-solving dialogues about team leadership in special education?	• **Content logs of audio recordings of CoP gatherings:** Audio recordings of CoP gatherings logged. Essential conversations transcribed. Matrices created for conversational topics. Logs and matrices analyzed in the corpus of qualitative data. • **Focus Group:** Questions explored how the CoP provided a place for discussions and problem solving. Responses transcribed and analyzed in the corpus of qualitative data.
RQ3: How and to what extent did CoP members identify beneficial team leadership resources and co-create resources together?	• **TGRS:** Examined open-ended question responses. Referred to data during post-innovation interviews. Created matrices for analysis. Analyzed TGRS responses in the corpus of qualitative data. • **Content logs of audio recordings of CoP gatherings:** Audio recordings logged. Essential conversations transcribed. Examined logs for evidence of sharing and co-creating ideas. Created matrices. Analyzed interactions in the corpus of qualitative data. • **Post-Innovation Interview:** Questions explored how CoP resources and conversations influenced leadership decisions. Responses transcribed and analyzed in the corpus of qualitative data. • **Focus group:** Questions explored how the CoP provided a place for sharing and co-creating strategies and ideas. Responses transcribed and analyzed in the corpus of qualitative data.
RQ4: How did I negotiate the duality of being both a CoP coordinator and member?	• **Content logs of audio recordings of CoP gatherings:** Audio recordings logged. Essential interactions transcribed. Analyzed my contributions and actions in the corpus of qualitative data. • **Researcher journal**: Ongoing reflection over innovation, including guided questions. Journal analyzed in the corpus of qualitative data.

Data Analysis

Quantitative and qualitative data were collected as described above and analyzed according to concurrent mixed methods procedures described by Plano Clark & Creswell (2010). First, I will provide an overview of the points of interface (Guest, 2012) in three phases of mixed methods data analysis. This overview shows how my understanding developed over time as I examined and re-examined the various data sources. Then, I will discuss how I prepared, organized, and analyzed quantitative and qualitative data sources individually while developing understanding of the data as a whole (Greene, 2007). Findings will be presented in Chapter 4.

Overview: Points of Interface in Three Phases of Mixed Methods Data Analysis

As an action researcher, the process of informal data analysis began immediately after pre-innovation data collection and continued until I arrived at the findings. There were three phases of data analysis, as shown in Figure 6: informal reflection as an action researcher, preliminary data analysis, and formal analysis of the data corpus.
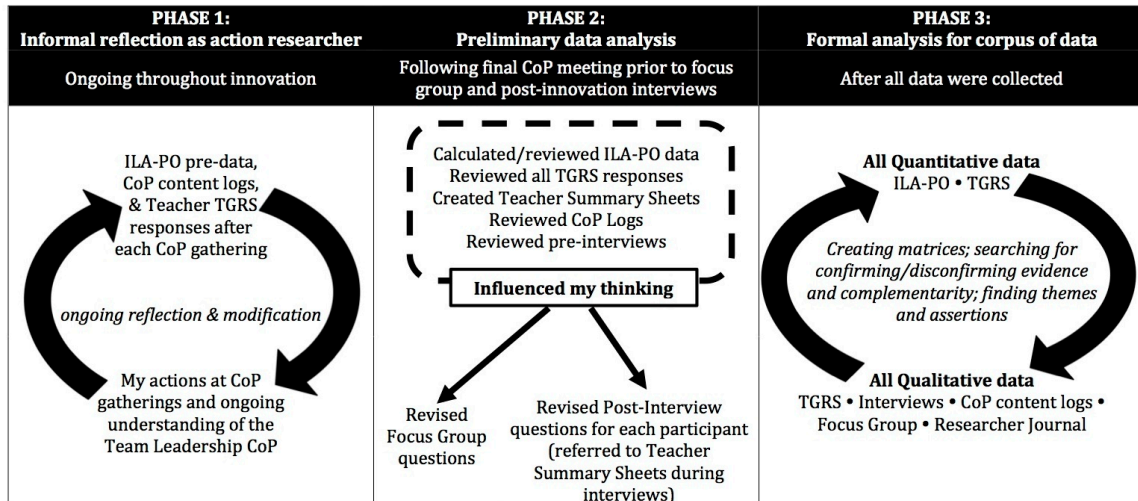
Figure 6. Points of interface in three phases of data analysis.

The first phase involved informal reflection after each Team Leadership CoP gathering as I considered my own experiences, listened to audio recordings, created content logs, and reviewed TGRS forms. Reflection yielded ideas, understandings, and questions that I recorded in my researcher journal. As shown in Figure 6, this process was recursive. Ideas and understandings built on one another as the innovation unfolded.

The second phase of data analysis occurred between the last Team Leadership CoP gathering and beginning post-innovation data collection. As shown in Figure 6, I conducted preliminary data analysis by reviewing the data corpus (Ivankova, 2014). This included ILA-PO pre-surveys, pre-innovation interviews, CoP content logs, TGRS data from each CoP, and my researcher journal. Additionally, I collected participants' ILA-PO post-surveys and created Teacher Summary Sheets (See Appendix J) to show changes in ILA-PO responses and TGRS data. I considered my current understandings and wrote down new questions. This process influenced my thinking and provided an opportunity to consider what questions remained. In the focus group and post-innovation interviews, I sought answers to my remaining questions during conversations with participants as we co-constructed new understandings about the Team Leadership CoP experience. I shared a Teacher Summary Sheet with each focal participant during post-innovation interviews to gain their perspectives about data interpretation. Additionally, I delivered Teacher Summary Sheets to non-focal participants[5] so all CoP members had an opportunity to reflect on their own team leadership changes. These conversations contributed to my thinking before I began my final phase of data analysis.

---

[5] I did not collect any data during the short conversations with non-focal participants when I dropped off their Teacher Summary Sheets. The purpose of the meetings was simply to deliver their data so they could reflect at a later time.

The third phase of data analysis occurred after all data were collected. At that time, I reviewed the entire data corpus in a recursive process, as shown in Figure 6. According to Greene (2007), "interactive mixed methods analyses are highly iterative and are best undertaken with a spirit of adventure" (p. 144). I moved between qualitative and quantitative data to develop understanding of the bigger story. As ideas began to emerge, I considered ways in which emerging qualitative themes could be supported by quantitative data (Greene, 2007). When I noticed something in the quantitative data, I went back to the qualitative data to see if there were stories to support the numerical data. As understandings developed in one source, I searched for complementarity in other sources (Collins et al., 2006). I created analysis matrices (Huberman, Miles, & Saldana, 1994), searched for confirming and disconfirming evidence (Erickson, 1986), and explored codes that became themes that led to assertions (Saldaña, 2013). Understandings in each data source informed new understandings in other data sources in a recursive cycle that evolved into the findings of this study.

Next, I will explain how I organized and analyzed individual data sources to prepare for mixed methods analysis of the data corpus. According to Greene (2007), data analysis stages involve: (a) data cleaning, (b) data reduction, (c) data transformation, (d) data correlation and comparison, and (e) analyses for inquiry conclusions and inferences. Quantitative and qualitative data sources were equally important for data interpretation in this study because my understandings emerged as I moved between various data sources. I will begin by discussing aspects of the quantitative data analysis and then continue onto qualitative data analysis. This is not meant to imply that I went through these sources and

steps in the same sequential order as this narrative. The following discussion simply

explains steps taken with each data source.

Quantitative Data Analysis

This section describes how I moved through the stages of data analysis, according

to Greene (2007) with the Intentional Leadership Actions and Paraeducator Outcomes

Survey and Teacher Group Reflection Survey. These are the different steps taken with

individual quantitative data sources.

Intentional Leadership Actions & Paraeducator Outcomes (ILA-PO) Survey.

Team leaders completed the ILA-PO Survey once before the innovation period began and

again after the innovation period ended. The ILA-PO Survey was a pre/post measure to

examine change over time. All six team leaders responded to the ILA-PO Survey twice. I

also completed the ILA-PO survey as an authentic co-participant in the CoP.[6] Therefore,

this yielded a total of 14 completed ILA-PO Surveys. As described earlier in this chapter,

the ILA-PO Survey included semantic differential items for Part I and rating scale items

for Part II and Part III. The entire ILA-PO Survey can be found in Appendix D. To

analyze the ILA-PO, I began with preliminary analysis and organization of the data, as

described in this section. I stored all ILA-PO data in an Excel sheet with information

disaggregated by participant, disaggregated by paraeducator, disaggregated by survey

date, and also compiled as a summary that showed all participant data change over time.

This organization allowed me to calculate descriptive statistics during the final stages of

data analysis to arrive at the findings described in Chapter 4.

---

[6] However, I later determined that including my responses in the data interpretations was not appropriate
based on my research question focus on early career special education teachers.

Preliminary analysis of ILA-PO data. I conducted preliminary analysis with ILA-PO Parts I, II, and III. Part I included 18 items related to teacher observations of paraeducator outcomes. Team leaders completed one Part I for each paraeducator. Three participants had one paraeducator, and four participants had two paraeducators, for a total of 11 paraeducators. Therefore, there were 11 sets of data for ILA-PO Part I data. Part I directions instructed team leaders to read the survey statements and mark anywhere on the line between *disagree* and *agree* to indicate their agreement with the survey statements. The length of the line was a 4 inch continuum, and participants could mark anywhere on the line for each question item. The level of agreement was based on the location of the mark placed on the line. To determine the level of agreement, I measured the length from the beginning of the line to the participant mark for each survey question. Shorter lines indicated less agreement. Longer lines indicated more agreement. Measurements were made in inches to the closest 1/16 in. The length of each participant line was called the *agreement measurement.* Figure 7 shows an example of calculating the agreement measurement for a 3.0 in response.

Disagree--●-----------------------------*Agree*

3.0 in = agreement measurement
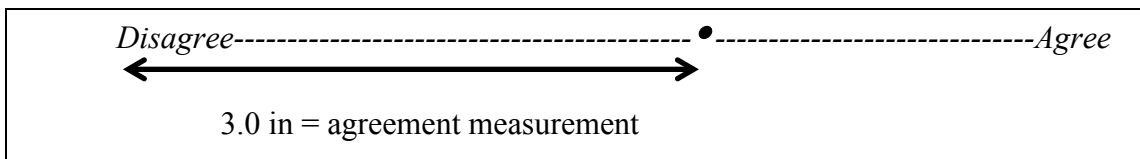
Figure 7. Determining the agreement measurement.

Additionally, I determined the intensity of agreement by dividing each agreement measurement by the total length of line available to be marked. This value was called the *agreement percentage.* For example, if the participant marked at the beginning of the line, this yielded a score of 0% agreement percentage. If the participant marked at half the line, this yielded a score of 50% agreement percentage. And if the participant marked

at the furthest right of the line, this yielded a score of 100% agreement percentage. Figure 8 shows the calculation of an agreement percentage for a 3.0 agreement measurement, divided by the total line length of 4 in.

Disagree--- ●--------------*Agree*

⟵——————————————————————————⟶

3.0 in = agreement measurement

⟵————————————————————————————————⟶

4.0 inches = total length of line available

agreement percentage = <u>agreement measurement</u>   EXAMPLE   <u>3.0</u> = 75%
                                           total length of line   4.0
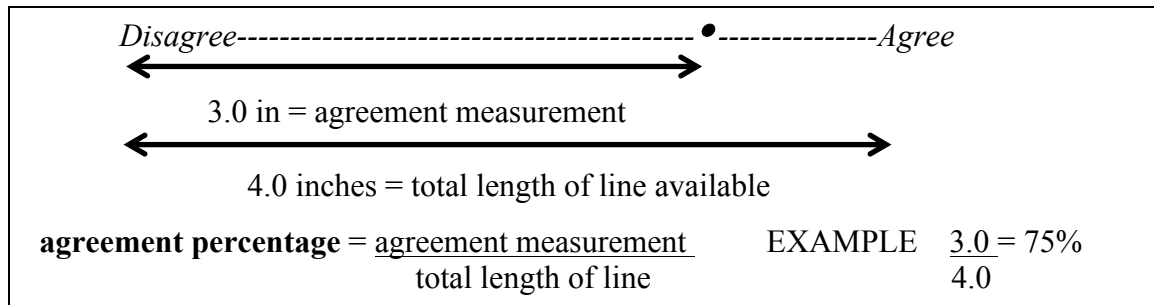
Figure 8. Calculating the agreement percentage.

As mentioned, the ILA-PO Survey was conducted two times during the study. To determine how participant responses changed between pre- and post-survey, I calculated the change in agreement using subtraction. The difference was called the *agreement change.* Agreement change was calculated by subtracting the pre-agreement percentage for a question item from the post-agreement percentage. If the participant's agreement with the question increased between pre- and post-survey, the agreement change was a positive number. If the participant's agreement with the question item decreased between pre- and post-survey, the agreement change was a negative number. If there was no change in the participant's agreement—meaning the participant marked in exactly the same place on the line—the agreement change was zero. All ILA-PO Part I data, including agreement measurements, agreement percentages, and agreement changes were recorded in the Excel spreadsheet.

For Part II and Part III of the ILA-PO Survey, participants circled a number in the range 1-10 to indicate their response. Numerical responses for each question were stored in the Excel spreadsheet. This occurred twice during the study, so I calculated the change

in responses for each Part II and Part III item in the pre- and post-survey. Additionally, Part II included three constructs, and Part III included four constructs. I calculated means for the constructs and stored these numbers in the Excel spreadsheet.

   ILA-PO data included on Teacher Summary Sheet. After calculating participant responses for the ILA-PO Survey, I prepared a Teacher Summary Sheet (See Appendix J) for each team leader. It described the ILA-PO Survey sections and gave a simple explanation of how I analyzed each section, as I described above. I included all of the questions for Parts I, II, and III, their responses for each item in the pre-survey, their responses for each item in the post-survey, and the change in their responses. For Part II, *Influence of Leadership Behaviors,* I also provided the pre-survey mean for each construct, the post-survey mean for each construct, and a calculation of the change in the mean. For Part III, the *Opinions about Beneficial Strategies for Team Leadership* section, I used their pre- and post-survey responses to create a list of strategies ranking from 10 (most important strategies) to 1 (least important strategies) based on a participant's individual responses. This organization allowed participants to see how their opinions about the importance of certain leadership strategies changed over time for their team.

   Analyzing the ILA-PO Survey results for valid responses. As I described above, I calculated pre- and post-survey response changes for all parts of the ILA-PO Survey during preliminary data analysis. I calculated descriptive statistics based on the group responses to find the means and standard deviations for items and constructs. While reviewing the ILA-PO data set for valid responses, as recommended by Greene (2007), I considered two things: attendance of CoP members and the inclusion of my own data as part of the data set.

There was one member who attended only two CoP gatherings. I wondered if this might have influenced her responses, so I color-coded her data and considered whether to set it aside at a later time. As I analyzed ILA-PO data, I ran analyses with and without her data to determine if her responses skewed the data set. After careful consideration, I decided to eliminate her data because it skewed the post-data from other CoP members, and she did not attend CoP gatherings regularly. Since the ILA-PO Survey was meant to show how participants changed after attending the Team Leadership CoP, it did not make sense to include ILA-PO results from a participant who infrequently attended the group.

Additionally, I considered my own data set and whether it was appropriate to include my data in the analysis and findings. As a CoP member participating in the innovation, I completed the ILA-PO Survey. I found it personally interesting to see how my own responses changed over the course of the CoP time period. However, ultimately I eliminated my data during analysis and interpretation because the research questions related to the influence of the CoP on early career teachers, which I was not.

Finding complementarity in ILA-PO data. As I underwent the process of mixed methods concurrent data analysis, I sought deeper understanding of the ILA-PO data and searched for complementarity (Greene, 2007) in emerging themes to find the "stories" in the data, as discussed in Chapter 4. Emerging qualitative themes created new ideas for quantitative analysis of ILA-PO Parts I and III. First, I will explain how this influenced my analysis of ILA-PO Part I.

I analyzed ILA-PO Part I concurrently alongside qualitative data. When a theme emerged that the CoP influenced collaborative team partnerships, it piqued my curiosity about complementarity (Greene, 2007) in ILA-PO Part I quantitative data. To explore this

possibility, I calculated a series of group means from the agreement percentages for each paraeducator outcome, including the pre-survey group means, post-survey group means, and group mean change for each item. Based on the qualitative theme about collaborative partnerships, I sorted items into two potential constructs for consideration: *Supervisor/ Supervisee Outcomes* and *Collaborative Partnership Outcomes.* Supervisor/Supervisee Outcomes were basic job expectations that required direct supervision and feedback from a supervisor, such as following directions or following the classroom schedule. Collaborative Partnership Outcomes extended beyond basic job expectations, requiring collaboration and teamwork between the team leader and paraeducator. These included items like contributing ideas to the classroom or having a similar vision for students. The items included in each construct are listed in Table 7.

I considered all the possible data sets that could be used to calculate a Cronbach alpha since higher sample sizes are beneficial for accuracy. There were seven CoP members who completed the ILA-PO Part I, including myself and the member with poor attendance. I determined that it was appropriate to use the data sets from all individuals who completed the ILA-PO Part I for this calculation because Cronbach alpha examines internal consistency of the instrument. Therefore, there were 11 sets of pre/post data because CoP members completed the ILA-PO Part I for each paraeducator.

I conducted a Cronbach alpha analysis to measure internal consistency reliability for these potential constructs and determine if I could justify grouping in these two constructs for interpretation. Table 7 shows the coefficient-alpha estimates of internal consistency reliability for Part I of the ILA-PO Survey.

Table 7

Part I ILA-PO Coefficient-Alpha Estimates of Internal Consistency Reliability (n=11)

Factor	Within Factor Items	Coefficient Alpha Estimate of Reliability	
		Pre	Post
Supervisor/Supervisee	Items 3, 4, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 16, 18	0.80	0.93
Collaborative Partnership	Items 1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 11, 14, 15, 17	0.84	0.95
Overall Alpha	Item 1-18	0.90	0.97

Both constructs had high internal reliability. The Supervisor/Supervisee

Outcomes construct had an internal reliability on the pre-survey (α=0.80) and post-survey

(α=0.93). The Collaborative Partnership Outcomes construct had an internal reliability on

the pre-survey (α=0.84) and post-survey (α=0.95). The overall ILA-PO Part I survey had

an internal reliability on the pre-survey (α=0.90) and post-survey (α=0.97). Overall, the

ILA-PO Part I had internal reliability because participants tended to respond to question

items within each set of questions with similar responses. Given this analysis, the ILA-

PO Part I constructs were internally reliable. Therefore, I analyzed ILA-PO Part I

according to these constructs. Findings will be presented in Chapter 4.

I also considered the complementarity of data from ILA-PO Part III, especially

looking for indicators of collaborative partnerships to support emerging qualitative

themes. ILA-PO Part III was designed to explore participant perspectives about the

importance of team leadership strategies in their classrooms. As I looked at pre/post

group mean changes on individual items, I noticed the group means changed without a

clear pattern—some increasing and some decreasing. I reflected on this finding and

realized that group mean changes for team leadership strategies simply indicated that

team leaders became more aware of strategies that do and do not benefit their teams. In that way, increases and decreases were not positive and negative outcomes—but rather, just a change in perspectives about the importance of team leadership strategies for individual teams. To better understand how the perspectives changed, I decided to rank team leadership strategies according to their group means on the pre-survey and their group means on the post-survey to compare participant perspectives before and after the CoP innovation. Findings are presented in Chapter 4.

Teacher Group Reflection Survey (TGRS). The TGRS included eight, 4-point Likert scale questions. After each Team Leadership CoP, I transferred individual team leader responses into an Excel sheet that was disaggregated by each participant. I used Excel to calculate descriptive statistics for individual responses and group responses. I sought patterns that complemented emerging understandings during mixed methods data analysis. I will describe these findings in Chapter 4. Next, I will share how I analyzed qualitative data.

Qualitative Data Analysis

This section describes how I moved through the stages of qualitative data analysis in steps, as described by Greene (2007) with the CoP content logs, focus group, individual pre- and post-innovation interviews, researcher journal, and open-ended questions from the Teacher Group Reflection Survey. According to Marshall & Rossman (2011), "qualitative analysis is a search for general statements about relationships and underlying themes" (p. 207). My understandings developed as I worked with individual sources of qualitative data. Creswell (2013a) refers to this process as a *data analysis spiral*. The data analysis spiral began as I captured and organized the various sources of

qualitative data. As described below, I engaged in deeper qualitative analysis using NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software.

Qualitative data analysis was an iterative process that also involved ongoing reflection on the qualitative data. First, I conducted multiple re-listenings and re-readings of the qualitative data sources, immersing myself to generate ideas about categories and themes (Erickson, 1986). As I did so, I made notes, color-coded and underlined passages, and created new interpretations like matrices (Huberman et al., 1994). When ideas seemed important, I jotted down provisional codes (Saldaña, 2013). I wrote analytic memos to reflect my developing understandings about patterns and themes (Creswell, 2013). Over time, ideas connected with one another and became bigger understandings. When this happened, I sought confirming and disconfirming evidence across multiple data sources (Erickson, 1986) and wrote analytic memos about developing themes. According to Saldaña (2013), provisional codes can be related to a conceptual framework and the researcher's previous knowledge and experiences. As a researcher-participant in the Team Leadership CoP gatherings, I had some hunches about codes in the data. I also developed *in vivo codes*, based on the real-life data and participant quotes from data sources. I created a focused code book (Saldaña, 2013) based on emerging ideas. Then, I tested and revised the codebook by applying the codes to various qualitative documents until the codebook represented the qualitative data corpus. Ongoing mixed methods data analysis provided deeper understanding as I coded data, sought complementarity, and integrated codes into unified themes that represented the findings in Chapter 4.

Overall, this analytic process was time-consuming as I examined individual qualitative data sources to organize, clean, reduce, transform, compare, and interpret

96

greater meaning (Greene, 2007). I was mindful of the ways that I reduced data to understand chunks and representations of information (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). I recorded these decisions in analytic memos (Creswell, 2013) to better understand my decision-making during the analysis process. Next, I will describe how I prepared and analyzed individual qualitative data sources. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the order of this narrative is not meant to imply that I went through this sequential order of sources and steps. Instead, the following discussion simply explains steps taken with individual qualitative data sources.

Content logs of audio recordings from CoP gatherings. Using the logging method for audio data (Derry et al., 2010), I recorded notes about the Team Leadership CoP conversations in a two column, typed landscape orientation format that included group conversation topics and my comments/notes (See Appendix K). I logged each CoP gathering within three days of meeting completion while my memory was fresh. In addition to summarizing the conversation in five-minute segments, I also transcribed relevant participant quotes or conversational exchanges verbatim when audio segments related to research questions. As I completed the logs, I added my own comments, notes, and preliminary jottings (Saldaña, 2013) for analytic consideration during data analysis across sources. While data collection continued, I often re-listened to CoP audio and recorded audio notes to myself about analyzing further sections of the audio. I added notes to the CoP logs throughout the innovation period.

During post-innovation data analysis, I read through all of the CoP logs. I turned all conversations directly related to team leadership into a blue font so they would stand out. Additionally, I created two matrices (Huberman et al., 1994) to better understand

97

how team leaders talked about problems and successes. In the problem matrix, I noted the problem posed, suggested ideas, the meanings discussed, and the final outcome of the conversation. In the celebration matrix, I noted the accomplishment, the reflection and meaning-making, the learning shared, and the group responses. Matrices helped me see the overall data within the CoP logs and helped me identify additional areas of interest. The CoP logs were living documents that evolved with my understanding of the data. I uploaded them to NVivo and applied the codebook in the final stages of data analysis.

      Focus group and individual interviews. The focus group and individual interviews were audio recorded using a digital recording device and sent to a transcription service. When I received completed documents from the transcription service, I carefully reviewed each document while listening to the audio and making corrections. To create a quick snapshot of focus group responses, I created a summary of participant responses in a bulleted list to each question. Further, I created matrices (Huberman et al., 1994) for both the pre-innovation interviews and the post-innovation interviews to examine commonalities and differences in participant responses. In the matrix, I included each question and wrote notes across the matrix about how each participant responded to the question. The process of creating these summary documents provided a chance to step back and see the bigger picture. I imported the full transcripts for the focus group, pre-interviews, and post-interviews into NVivo and applied the codebook. I used the summaries/matrices as a data inventory to locate important conversations during qualitative data analysis.

      Researcher journal. I kept a reflective, researcher journal in a Word document throughout the innovation. The researcher journal was a valuable space to reflect about

developing ideas, questions, personal experiences, worries, and successes. In many cases, I recorded audio notes while driving home from CoP gatherings, interviews, or the focus group; then, I transcribed the audio notes into my researcher journal later. This was essential for capturing all the details in the moment. I reviewed my researcher journals regularly during preliminary data analysis, guiding me in the time between the last CoP gathering, the focus group, and the post-interviews. The researcher journal was the inspiration for many question revisions and conversations when I met with participants for post-interviews. During data analysis, I uploaded the document to NVivo for focused coding and complementarity. My researcher journal was especially important to understand my intentional decisions as I negotiated the duality between the CoP coordinator and CoP member.

Teacher Group Reflection Survey (TGRS). After each CoP meeting, I transferred TGRS data from each participant's open-ended responses into three Word document tables for each team leader, capturing participant responses over time. The first table included responses to TGRS Question 2, the team leadership changes reported by each team leader at CoP gatherings. The cumulative table showed all changes reported by the team leader over the course of the innovation. See Appendix L for the TGRS-Q2 Analysis Template. Table column headers included the questions: change, why did you make a change, and how is it going. I typed each participant's written responses directly into the table and shared individual aspects of this cumulative table with each team leader during their post-innovation interviews.

The second table included participant responses to Questions 3 and 4. These questions asked team leaders to identify their next area of focus and anticipate challenges.

I typed each participant's response directly into this five-column table. Column headers included: date, Q3 Response, Q4 Response, notes about whether the team leader discussed the topic during CoP gatherings, and notes about whether the team leader reported making changes related to the topic on future TGRS documents. See Appendix M for the TGRS-Q3Q4 Analysis Template.

The third analysis table included participant responses to Question 5, the post-CoP reflection question that asked team leaders to indicate how they planned to implement their ideas when they returned to the classroom. I typed participant responses directly into a three-column table that included: date, Q5 Response, and notes about whether the team leader reported making changes to the topic on future TGRS documents. See Appendix N for the TGRS-Q5 Analysis Template.

I imported these three completed Word document tables into NVivo for coding and triangulation with other data sources. Open-ended responses from TGRS served as supplemental data sources for complementarity that supported themes and assertions, as they will be discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, respectively.

Poetic Transcription: A Final Step in Data Analysis and Representation

To represent the findings that emerged from mixed methods data analysis, I will share three poems in Chapter 4. Poems can be a powerful form to articulate the collective voices of participants, represent perspectives, and stimulate reflection for readers (Hopper & Sanford, 2008). This process, called poetic transcription[7], is an emerging form of data representation in which the researcher uses interview transcripts to create poems by

---

[7] This idea was originally employed by Richardson (1994) and named "poetic transcription" by Corrine Glesne (1997), who used the method to transcribe the content of interviews in poetic form.

arranging the words and phrases of the interviewee (Kennedy, 2009). Poetic transcription increases the accessibility of the work and provides a holistic way to represent complex ideas that might otherwise go unnoticed (Lahman et al., 2011). According to Kennedy (2009), poems "bridge the worlds of participants and readers" (p. 1417). I chose poetic transcription as a form of data representation because poetry transmits meaning in a creative and synthesized form (Prendergast, Gouzouasis, Leggo, & Irwin, 2009).

I created the poems as the final step in data representation, a culmination of this research study after analyzing data and writing about my findings. At that time, I returned to my data once again. I re-read the transcripts from pre-interviews, post-interviews, CoP gatherings, and the focus group. I had some loose ideas in mind about the topics of the poems, so I copied applicable quotes and pasted them into a Word document with three columns according to the three emerging poems. Creating the poems was a process of discovery for me to find out how the participant words spoke together on these topics.

After two days of re-reading data, I had a long list of potential participant quotes for each poem. I copied each list into its own document so that I could work on one poem at a time. For each poem, I re-read the bulleted list of participant quotes three or four times to get a sense of the data. Then, I began rearranging quotes that complemented one another with ideas or rhythm. Some stanzas emerged with ease and others took a great deal of rewriting, trial, and error to arrange quotes that were pleasing to the ear and authentic depictions of participant viewpoints. The process took four to six hours for each poem. Overall, the poems represent my complex understanding of participant perspectives using their words, carefully chosen to speak on these issues. My goal in writing the poems was to decrease stigma related to team leadership challenges through

the authentic voices of participants in this study, demonstrating that team leadership

challenges are common—and most importantly, that team leadership efficacy is possible.

The poems will be presented in Chapter 4 to introduce each section of findings.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

In this chapter, I will discuss the results from quantitative and qualitative data sources. Rather than separating this chapter into quantitative and qualitative results, I will intertwine data from multiple sources and discuss their relation to one another, providing opportunities for complementarity (Greene, 2007) and a glimpse of the bigger picture. This unified discussion aligns with my points of interface design (Guest, 2012) and concurrent data analysis methods (Greene, 2007; Ivankova, 2014). The points of interface in the results will demonstrate the integrity of themes and provide a narrative to answer the research questions[8]. In the following discussion, I will present qualitative themes and make connections to quantitative data. In Chapter 5, I will extend the discussion by linking themes and quantitative data together to share assertions.

In Chapter 2, I proposed the tri-theory lens as a framework for understanding this Team Leadership CoP study. My primary interest was the intersection of Experiential Learning Theory (Kolb, 1984), Transformational Leadership Theory (Bass, 1986), and Communities of Practice (Wenger, 1998) as teachers had leadership experiences in their classrooms, discussed experiences during CoPs, and returned to their classrooms to apply new understandings. I suggested that Experiential Learning about Team Leadership in a CoP occurred within both spaces—teachers as team leaders in their special education classrooms and teachers as participants in the CoP. The special education classroom was a place for concrete experiences interacting with paraeducators and applying leadership strategies through active experimentation. The CoP was a place to reflect on leadership experiences, co-create understanding, and discuss new ideas for future experimentation.

---

[8] See Appendix O for a table aligning research questions with quantitative and qualitative findings.

During data analysis, I realized there was a third space in the cycle of Experiential Learning about Team Leadership: The reflective space between CoP conversations and team leadership actions. Team leaders reported they experienced individual reflection about peer feedback during CoP conversations and thereafter. Reflection was important as team leaders reframed limit perceptions about leadership barriers and considered new possibilities for their own classrooms. In Chapter 5, I will propose a revised diagram of Experiential Learning about Team Leadership in a CoP based on this finding.

According to this revised framework of Experiential Learning about Team Leadership in a CoP, I will present the findings in three sections: (a) The CoP: A Transformative Space for Team Leaders, (b) Reframing Leadership Possibilities: From CoP Conversations to Action, and (c) Transformed Team Leaders: Team Leadership in Their Own Classrooms. The first section will discuss team leader perspectives and interactions while participating in the CoP. The second section will provide context about perceived team leadership challenges and describe how reflection was a catalyst for new thinking. The third section will describe how the CoP influenced team leaders, describing leadership actions and outcomes in their individual classrooms. Qualitative and quantitative data will be intertwined in the discussion of findings.

As explained in Chapter 3, each section of this chapter is introduced with a poem that is comprised of quotes from qualitative sources. The first poem will illustrate the essence of the CoP itself. The second poem will provide the context of team leadership challenges and perceived barriers. The third poem will illustrate the transformation of team leadership perspectives. Together, these poems demonstrate the significance of the innovation through the words of participants themselves.

104

The CoP: Team Leadership Together[9]

We all have the same foundation:
Open-mindedness, no judgments, trust,
This is the real deal, a safe haven,
Teachers Anonymous.

Teaching is emotional—It's an emotional job.
If you don't meet those needs, that's why you lose people.
There's no time to talk about this stuff on our campuses,
There's no sped[10] time, we don't have time for that,
You don't give us any time.

Having people in the same room with similar struggles,
Knowing that I'm not the only one.
Wheels turning, like a feeling that I'm moving forward,
Working through the problem, solving it step by step.
I want to bounce ideas off, I want to learn from each other.
Accept the criticism or feedback and move on with it,
Sometimes the truth kind of sucks for a minute,
Just let me talk it out.

We contribute to each other's success,
Better perspective and confidence,
It's about what we really need.
Valuable time, I feel focused,
Everyone has different expertise,
Imaginative about possible solutions,
Seeing how people are succeeding,
Being able to laugh about it sometimes,
More connected, just being here
So important to our sanity and growth.

---

[9] Comprised of participant quotes from CoP gatherings, post-interviews, and the focus group.
[10] The abbreviation "sped" refers to "special education."

The CoP: A Transformative Space for Team Leaders

This mixed methods action research study considered the outcomes for six early career special education teachers who met in a Team Leadership Community of Practice six times in Fall 2015. First, I will briefly discuss evidence to show how the team leaders in this study met the definition of a CoP. Then, I will present five themes about teachers as team leaders working together in the CoP: (a) team leaders engaged in the CoP experience, (b) team leaders sought alignment during CoP conversations, (c) problem-posing conversations reflected the Experiential Learning framework, (d) CoP conversations stretched imagination about team leadership, and (e) team leaders talked about talking to paraeducators. At the close of this section, I will explain how reflection was a critical space for team leaders between CoP gatherings and their leadership actions.

Emergence of a Community of Practice

As discussed in Chapter 2, a Community of Practice exists when a group of individuals develops mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and shared repertoire (Wenger, 1998). Not all groups constitute a CoP, so I will briefly discuss evidence from my researcher journal and CoP content logs to demonstrate how the qualities of a CoP emerged when these participants gathered together to discuss team leadership.

Mutual engagement is the time spent together interacting and sharing knowledge. During CoP 1[11], team leaders co-determined that CoP gatherings would end at 5:30 pm; however, participants were so engrossed that the conversation continued until 5:50 pm the first night. As team leaders created a list of shared challenges to guide future CoP

---

[11] "CoP 1" refers to the first CoP meeting. Subsequent references that involve the CoP followed by a number refer to specific Team Leadership CoP gatherings as they occurred in time.

gatherings, the discussion naturally evolved into the first four problem-posing CoP

conversations. In those conversations, team leaders provided details about their individual

situations and sought peer feedback. Other team leaders listened, asked questions,

provided suggestions, and offered insight. That night, I wrote in my researcher journal:

> We just had our first group meeting and I am really excited about how it went. There were so many times when the group continued to talk and I didn't have to contribute at all. That made me feel really excited because I want the group to really feel like they are jointly experts in problem solving and that they can be resources to one another. So I think it's really exciting that they are all so comfortable talking. (researcher journal, 9/14/15)

Mutual engagement was evident in problem-posing conversations, and this continued to

evolve. After CoP 2, I wrote, "I was amazed how members were equal partners today. I

saw the conversation really bouncing around including people who have said they are

quiet thinkers. It seemed like the group was really responsive and interested in each

other's ideas" (researcher journal, 9/28/15). In the CoP 3 Content Log, I wrote about how

team leaders continued their conversation as they left the building at the end of CoP:

> The whole group walked out together chatting. I could hear them chatting as they went down the hall. To me, this is what represents the group—the way they walk down the hall chatting at the end, continuing the conversation. This is a good example of engagement in shared problem solving as a CoP. Very neat. (10/5/15)

Team leaders spent time together interacting and sharing knowledge, demonstrating

mutual engagement that continued to evolve over the six CoP gatherings.

Team leaders also demonstrated joint enterprise to develop team leadership skills

that were effective with their individual teams. According to Wenger (1998), CoPs

naturally form when members seek common outcomes and benefit from collaborative

efforts to seek those outcomes in community. At CoP 1, team leaders discussed the

purpose of the CoP and determined common goals in the following excerpt:

Jamie[12]: Can we just go over or reiterate the purpose of this group?

Jess: Yeah, but it wouldn't be me doing that though. It would, so—all of us here...

Paige: It's about what we really need. So I know we're probably focusing on [paraeducators] and what it looks like to work with our [paraeducators]—how to work with them better.

Brooke: How can you develop as a leader…

Jamie: My understanding was the focus was [paraeducators]. But I was wondering if it was about other stuff.

Paige gives an example about how working with a student still relates to the team.

Jamie: So it's like a support group. Teachers anonymous. [*Group laughter*]

Lisa: Yeah, I feel like focused. I'm glad everyone is on the same page to talk about working with [paraeducators], because that is definitely something I want to focus on. But also developing as a leader with not only my team in the classroom, but also grade level [teams]. Working with multiple people.

I ask for clarification. Lisa suggests 'Leadership across the board.'

In this excerpt, team leaders jointly share their individual goals and expectations for the group to determine how they will spend their time together. Later during CoP 1, they co-authored a list of team leadership challenges that included: planning for paraeducators, punctuality, training, utilizing paraeducators to their full potential, appropriate staff-student interactions, being compared to other leaders, and giving feedback to paraeducators (9/14/15). These topics represented the common goals and joint enterprise during subsequent Team Leadership CoP gatherings.

Finally, individuals in the Team Leadership CoP demonstrated shared repertoire as special education team leaders with common experiences, terminology, and perspectives. They used acronyms, terms, and abbreviations such as: IEP, PWN, MET, cadre, monitoring, PLC, CPI, psych, sped, gen ed, and EAs without needing to explain the meaning of these terms to one another. Team leaders talked about their real experiences as special education teachers in the field, connecting their own stories to the

---

[12] All names are pseudonyms.

stories told by others. As they co-authored the list of team leadership challenges at CoP 1, there was nodding and verbal agreement with topics suggested. That night, I wrote in my researcher journal:

> I'm excited about the list of challenges that we made. I feel like they are very valid challenges that I've heard people struggle with in the past. I felt like we have some commonalities between us… I'm also excited that it seems like most CoP members are having good experiences with their paraeducators. They seem to feel that their paraeducators have good ideas and that they are really contributing. I hope our CoP will really build the skills of all of our teams, and I am really excited about how that will improve things for kids. (9/14/15)

Overall, team leaders in this study met the definition of a CoP, according to Wenger (1998), with qualities of mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and shared repertoire. Next, I will explain five themes related to their work together as a Community of Practice.

Team Leaders Engaged in the CoP Experience

The CoP was a transformative space for team leaders to enhance their team leadership strategies and perspectives. They demonstrated engagement (Wenger, 1998) as they contributed ideas and benefited from the ideas of other members. The CoP setting was unique because participants co-created their own agendas—in contrast to other professional settings where administrators often determine agendas. Team leaders valued being together, creating their own norms, and sharing ideas to extend the collective knowledge of the group. This theme provides insight into RQ3: *How and to what extent did CoP members identify leadership strategies or co-create resources together?* I fully engaged as a CoP member while balancing responsibilities as the CoP coordinator, carefully negotiating these roles to remain authentic. For this reason, the theme also provides insight into RQ4: *How did I negotiate the duality of being both a CoP*

coordinator and member? I will discuss my own engagement throughout this section with a deeper discussion at the end.

Our agenda. According to participants, the absence of a formal agenda was a very important aspect of the Team Leadership CoP, allowing team leaders to co-create their own agenda based on mutual needs.

Participants valued the opportunity to co-determine the group agenda. Paige reported, "There was no agenda. It [was] kind of like whatever our needs were was how we took it" (focus group). Veronica said the CoP was "more based on what we actually needed versus what someone else thinks that we need" (focus group). Macey said the CoP provided time for "self reflecting on our needs instead of someone else thinking for us [about] what we should do" (focus group). Team leaders criticized mandated learning spaces, such as forced lesson planning with general education teachers, explaining:

> This [time with general education teachers] isn't productive for us. This isn't helpful for us. We sit here for two hours and contribute whatever we can but we have no idea what's going on…If you gave us time to work as a team, we could support each other through our struggles. But it's like, we don't have time for that. You don't give us any time. (Paige, focus group)

Jamie explained, "It's a lot more beneficial for me to be talking about [student] goals or behavior plans rather than going over the [state test] scores" (focus group). Having their own control over the agenda was highly valued by team leaders in the CoP.

Participants co-created a list of team leadership needs and goals during CoP 1. Paige said she wanted the CoP to be about "what we really need…focusing on [paraeducators], what it looks like to work with them, and how to work with them better." Brooke suggested the CoP could be about "developing as a leader" and Lisa suggested, "leadership across the board." At each CoP gathering, participants co-determined the

agenda based on individual needs. In response to RQ4, I negotiated the duality of being both the CoP coordinator and CoP member by setting my own research agenda aside in favor of a co-constructed agenda based on the collective needs of the group.

Better together. Participants benefited from being together with other team leaders who had similar leadership goals because they did not have access to colleagues, time, or space for these conversations at their school sites. CoP conversations situated each participant in the role of "expert" helping other CoP members.

The CoP time provided an outlet that did not exist in their professional or personal lives. At their school sites, talking to colleagues was not an option because, "no one wants to stay late and talk about [team leadership]" (Paige, focus group). Team leaders perceived their colleagues were too busy. During the focus group, Jamie explained:

> I'm overloaded and I know that they're overloaded, so pushing my problems on them doesn't gel well with me because I don't want to take away their time that they can be constructive…But if they gave us time where we could not feel guilty about talking to each other and getting help—that would be awesome.

Given so many responsibilities in a busy teaching day, participants felt the Team Leadership CoP provided them respite to discuss ideas and gain peer feedback. Lisa explained how she felt like our time together in the CoP was resourceful and beneficial:

> It was resourceful where I don't find professional developments very resourceful most of the time because you don't get to chat and talk to other teachers except for a little bit, and the people that run it think they gave you a lot of talk time but I'm like, 'It's not the kind of talk time that I want.' I want to bounce ideas off. I want to learn from each other. I feel like we've learned from each other. Where in professional development, you're taking what you can from the person in charge but like not really getting to share. So I felt like this was so much more beneficial. (focus group)

Discussion time was highly valued because team leaders benefited from peer advice from other team leaders with similar experiences. There were no easy solutions for team

leadership—just many ideas to consider. I wrote about this in my researcher journal:

> This is what I've realized: There is no holy grail of tips or strategies for team leadership. When it comes to social relationships, everything is constructed from scratch as the people socially negotiate their space and time together. Perhaps this is why the CoP is a strategy for team leadership. Teachers have ideas and feel resourceful. They just need accountability partners to listen and bounce around ideas. When teachers think more about being leaders, they become better leaders. (researcher journal, 10/23/15)

As team leaders considered the multiple solutions for team leadership challenges, CoP conversations situated each participant in the role of "expert" helping others. For early career teachers, this was powerful. Paige commented, "There wasn't one leader giving everyone instruction. It was kind of like everyone had expertise on different things and everyone was able to share and help teach each other instead of one person having to do it for everyone" (focus group). The CoP was transformative because it provided time and space for similar colleagues with mutual team leadership goals to jointly construct knowledge in a non-judgmental environment where all opinions were valued.

Reflecting on RQ4, my actions created opportunities for shared expertise when I carefully set my "coach" and "coordinator" identities aside by referring questions back to the collective group. After CoP 1, I reflected on an important moment:

> When Jamie asked about the purpose of our group, I really wanted to respond and explain that team leadership was the topic. Instead, I suggested that we would co-determine the purpose of our group. I think that this was a very important moment. Thankfully, other group members clarified that our CoP was about team leadership with paraeducators (since that is how I had recruited members). However, I think it was very important that I was clear about my role in that moment—being a member and not the researcher. I think that actions like this will be crucial going forward. (guided questions—researcher journal, 9/14/15)

Hyper-awareness of my role and intentional decision-making in the beginning situated me as a co-member so that I could fully engage as the CoP unfolded. The CoP became a

space where I personally benefited from being together with other team leaders for collaborative discussions about team leadership. In the guided questions for my researcher journal after CoP 2, I wrote, "I needed this group as much as anyone else today. I enjoyed the reflection time and the opportunity to have a chat with others who understand the high stakes of negotiating these professional relationships with paraeducators" (researcher journal, 9/28/15). Next, I will talk about the norms and values that fostered our authentic, collaborative conversation space.

Norms and values. Participants talked about how their shared norms and values contributed to feelings of trust and willingness to share openly. This began when team leaders co-constructed norms during the first CoP gathering:

- Respect others while they are talking
- Confidentiality
- Start and end on time
- Communicate with all if unable to attend
- Open-mindedness about others' ideas and opinions
- Support members because each is the expert in her own classroom
- Reflective thinking
- Be an adult (don't play on phone)
- Accept feedback and advice
- No judgment zone

The norms and values conversation laid a foundation for deep conversations right from the beginning. According to Macey, the norms created trust and confidentiality:

> I also feel like I trust this group more [*chuckles*] than I trust my team at work because it is confidential and we may not all see eye-to-eye but we can at least accept the criticism or feedback and move on with it. So, I feel like the community [of] practice group just provided a safe haven. (focus group)

Participants expressed desire to challenge each other in an open, non-judgmental manner in the following excerpt from the norms discussion in CoP 1:

Macey: What about accepting feedback? Sometimes, people say something that you don't want to hear.
Brooke: It's really good to have someone outside your situation be like, 'Well, you could do this.'
Veronica: That's a good point because we want to be able to challenge each other. So if we are worried about hurting each other's feelings, then we might not say that cool thing that the person really needs to hear.
Paige: Sometimes, the truth kind of sucks for a minute. [*Group laughter*]
Lisa: And then you realize that it's the truth.
Paige: And then you realize, 'Yeah you're right, that was a better idea' or 'Yeah, you're right. I could do that differently.'
Veronica: I think sometimes if we just phrase things as ideas. Not like 'You should,' but like 'Have you thought about this?'
Jamie: Personally, I prefer 'you could do this' more than 'you should do this' anyway.

In this excerpt, CoP members laid the groundwork for challenging conversations, honest feedback, and productivity during discussion time in which there was no formal agenda.

Giving ideas. CoP time was not only about *getting* peer input, but also about having the opportunity to *give* peer input. Participants valued giving ideas to others, indicating deep commitment and engagement in shared problem solving.

Participants enjoyed giving ideas to others because it stimulated their thinking, supported colleagues, and gave them ideas for their own classrooms. Lisa explained:

I really actually just enjoyed giving feedback to other people—I think more than getting it. I feel like there wasn't a ton of times that I brought up [my own challenge]. But, I enjoyed hearing others problem solve through things—and giving any ideas that I could…It was nice to see I still had input and could help out in some ways that I could give ideas. (post-interview)

Paige shared, "Helping [others] find a solution to their problem just gave me more ideas of strategies I could use in my class" (post-interview). For Macey, giving ideas increased her leadership identity when she had a solution to offer. She said, "If someone else is having that problem, I can say, 'Well, how about you use this?' So I feel like as a leader, I feel more comfortable" (Macey, post-interview).

114

Engagement in team leadership conversations promoted reifications of knowledge and new thinking as CoP members gave objective, honest advice to others. Additionally, giving ideas to others beneficially contributed to the leadership identities of team leaders. Reflecting on RQ4, I created conditions for giving ideas by carefully negotiating my role at the beginning of the CoP. Initially, I was cautious because I wanted to establish shared expertise, balanced CoP ownership, and my identity as a co-member.

Intentional role awareness was evident in responses to the guided questions in my researcher journal. I answered the following question after each CoP gathering: *How did I contribute and hold back (silent) during problem-solving conversations?* After CoP 2, I wrote about an intentional decision to hold back and the positive outcome from doing so:

> I wanted to tell Jamie that she shouldn't ask her paraeducator to contribute snacks for the class party, but I decide not to. I don't really know for sure—it's only my opinion. Another teacher suggested that she ask the kids instead. It was a perfect suggestion. I'm glad that I was quiet. I still feel the need to be careful about speaking so that it doesn't seem like I'm speaking with authority instead of just expressing an opinion as an equal group member. (guided questions—researcher journal, 9/28/15).

Holding back was necessary initially, but this need faded as the CoP progressed. By CoP 4, I wrote, "I don't remember any feeling the need to hold back during this group. I contributed when I had something to share. In fact, I don't even remember thinking about this dichotomy at all" (guided questions—researcher journal, 10/5/15). Giving ideas became comfortable for me as the CoP progressed, signaling that I was successful in negotiating my duality as both a CoP member and the CoP coordinator. In fact, successful engagement as a CoP member influenced my actions as a researcher.

My CoP engagement influenced research actions. Over time, I developed a comfortable balance between the roles of CoP member, CoP coordinator, and action

115

researcher. This led to a new blended identity rather than a compartmentalized sense of myself. When it came time for post-innovation data collection, it felt strange and inauthentic to set my blended identity aside to act solely as the "researcher" during the focus group. As the date of the focus group approached, I began thinking about how I could actively participate in the focus group as a co-member. The solution, a focus group flip chart (See Appendix F), provides evidence about how I navigated the duality of co-membership and engaged fully in the CoP.

I created the focus group flip chart from an old Amazon box, cut and folded into a makeshift easel. The informal presentation represented my identity as a teacher—making something from nothing—rather than the identity of a researcher or more knowledgeable other who might have presented the same questions on a formal presentation easel. I printed each focus group question on white printer paper and stapled them one on top of the other to create a flip chart so that all CoP members, including myself, could read and respond to questions. The focus group flip chart highly resonated with participants. They asked how I made it and commented about using the idea to make an easel for students in their classrooms. Overall, the focus group flip chart was important evidence that duality was possible for me as I personally engaged in the CoP experience. Next, I will share how teachers engaged one another in alignment conversations during the CoP.

Team Leaders Sought Alignment During CoP Conversations

During CoP conversations, team leaders sought feedback to determine if others shared their thinking about practices or ideas. According to Wenger (1998), alignment is important to develop shared understanding about topics, issues, problems, or new information. This theme provides insight into RQ2: *How and to what extent did the CoP*

engage in problem-solving dialogues about team leadership in special education?

Alignment conversations offered windows into the practices of others, increasing efficacy and decision-making about next steps in team leadership. Participants discovered they were not alone as they compared practices to gain feedback and solicit new ideas.

Not alone. When the CoP gathered together, participants found commonalities as special education teachers and team leaders. They bonded through humor and sharing stories to gain support and affirmation that was not available at their school sites.

The CoP provided affirmation. Paige felt "supported by other people who were in that same position" (focus group). Lisa shared it was nice to "hear from everyone and understand that people are going through similar things" (focus group). Macey liked "getting to know other people's struggles and knowing that I'm not the only one who has [a paraeducator] and doesn't know what the heck to do with them" (post-interview). Team leaders felt isolated at their separate school sites because other team leaders did not talk about team leadership challenges. Macey commented that her colleagues acted like everything was perfect, even when it was not (post-interview). Paige felt hesitant to talk with her colleagues, indicating the stigma I suggested in Chapter 1. She explained:

> I feel like it's hard to talk to someone that you see as a more experienced person about the struggles you are having with your [paraeducators] in your classroom because you are like, 'Well, I don't see them struggling, why would I?' I don't want to admit that I am failing at something and that I don't have control of my class and I don't know how to delegate or instruct someone on how to help me. Because I know at our campus, it's not something openly taught that people will talk about. It's like, 'I know that you are struggling right now but I don't want to just go give you, I don't want to tell you what to do. I wish you'd just bring it up and we could talk about it' but—it's one of those things people don't talk about it because we don't want to admit that we're not good at it. (Paige, focus group)

The CoP decreased isolation as special education team leaders shared authentic experiences and challenges. Macey commented, "[The CoP] made me come back to the surface and know that we'll make it through" (post-interview).

Comparing practices. During CoP conversations, participants had opportunities to discuss and compare their team leadership practices. As team leaders exchanged ideas, they sought alignment to find shared understandings. Alignment conversations were phrased in three different ways: direct questions, statements of self-practices, and suggestions for others.

The first type of alignment conversations was direct questions. In CoP 2, Lisa posed a series of questions about creating lesson plans for paraeducators:

> Does anyone actually have a certain way that they give plans to their [paraeducators]? Or is it just a discussion during the day? Or do you guys have— not To Do lists—but when there is down time you can do this? Or anything like that that you guys do? (CoP 2)

In response, participants shared their lesson planning practices to increase her ideas. A second type of alignment conversation occurred when a participant stated a current practice or future idea to see if other team leaders agreed with the thinking. For example, in CoP 1 Jamie asked if she could let her students work independently so she could observe her paraeducator working with students. She presented her idea to gain feedback:

> So it's ok for me to not be in a small group but have my [paraeducator] be in a small group and I [would] be intermingling amongst the children and not constantly having some new content to be teaching them? (Jamie, CoP 1)

This question prompted a group discussion about the appropriateness of the idea. A third type of alignment conversation occurred when one participant suggested a strategy for another participant. In some cases, these ideas were accepted. In other cases, the ideas

were refuted with an explanation. Here is an excerpt from CoP 4 in which Paige shares an

idea about her paraeducator, but Jamie explains why it would not work for her:

> **Paige:** There's little things that I have [my paraeducator] her do. Like I'll have her go read the CVC words. Like, 'Hey, go read this list of words and tell me which ones they know.'
> **Jamie:** Well, yeah for my other kids I can have her do that. For this child, it was more—a child with a speech and language disability. So I was like, 'I really have to be the person collecting that specific data.'

Alignment conversations provided feedback to participants to confirm or disconfirm

practices, increasing efficacy in taking leadership actions. Lisa explained, "I feel like

other people have the same perspectives as me so it gives you a little bit more confidence

like you are doing things okay in your classroom" (focus group). Macey explained how

the CoP affirmed her practices and gave her a chance for feedback:

> I think having people in the same room with similar struggles, knowing that I'm not the only one. And knowing that everything I do is not necessarily the right thing, and not necessarily the wrong thing and taking advantage of an opportunity like this to sit down and talk about some real good topics and collaborate in a positive way where we can contribute to each others' success and professional growth. (post-interview)

Alignment conversations provided opportunities for peer comparison. In the next section,

I discuss how problem-posing conversations provided opportunities for peer discussion.

Problem-Posing Conversations Reflected the Experiential Learning Framework

In Chapter 2, I explained Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory. According to

this theory, a person has a concrete experience, reflects on the experience, assigns

meaning through a process called abstract conceptualization, and engages in active

experimentation based on the new understanding. I proposed that team leaders, engaged

in a CoP, would have concrete experiences in their classrooms, come to CoP gatherings

to reflect and assign meaning, and return to their classrooms for active experimentation.

Analysis of CoP conversations, TGRS forms, the focus group, and interviews revealed

that participant learning about team leadership in special education followed the

experiential learning framework. This theme provides insight to answer RQ 2: *How and*

to what extent did the CoP engage in problem-solving dialogues about team leadership in

special education? In this section, I will discuss excerpts from the CoP transcripts and

align these conversations with evidence from the TGRS documents. The TGRS

documents were highly important because they provided information about how team

leaders carried out the goals they discussed and established during CoP gatherings.

CoP conversations were rarely problem-*solving* conversations, as implied by RQ

2. Instead, most dialogues were problem-*posing* conversations[13]. In problem-posing

conversations, team leaders posed problems to others through statements, questions, or

stories about their experiences. CoP members discussed the problem, possible

interpretations, and potential solutions. It was rare for participants to arrive at final

solutions during CoP gatherings. Instead, team leaders exchanged many ideas as they

discussed the problem. Participants built on the CoP conversations through personal

reflection, as I will discuss later in this chapter, to determine leadership actions.

Therefore, I determined the term *problem-solving conversations* was not descriptive of

CoP conversations. I opted to use the term *problem-posing conversations* instead to

represent the exchange of ideas following the statement of a problem or challenge.

---

[13] I conceived this term to describe the CoP conversations about problems of practice. Though similar to the term *problem-posing education* (Freire, 2000), this term is not intended to be the same. Team leaders developed greater understanding of their circumstances and options through dialogue; however, the term does not represent a classroom situation with teachers and students considering factors of oppression.

Table 8 shows the analysis of an excerpt from CoP 2 according to elements of

Experiential Learning Theory. In this excerpt, team leaders talked about feeling

compared to experienced teachers at the beginning of their careers. Brooke shared a

concrete experience (CE). Participants reflected (R) about their experiences, made

meaning and abstract conceptualization (AC), and offered some ideas that could be

helpful for active experimentation (E).

Table 8

Evidence of Experiential Learning Theory in CoP Conversation.

Excerpt from CoP 2 Log	ELT
Brooke: Going off of that, and I know I've had a big problem with this. I don't know if you are, but because [my paraeducator] has been with the kids for awhile it's um, there's been a lot of times when I'm feeling compared to the previous teacher. And I know like, she still wants to have that same relationship. And it's really hard, but like I don't know because she—like often times it's like, 'Well, we did it like *this* last year.' And I'm like, 'Well you know, it's not last year anymore, and I don't know what to tell you. I'm sorry I'm not awesome, but like—or as awesome.' But it's just like, I don't know**,** it's really hard when the person who's been there—er, there's somebody that's been there and they stay and then somebody new comes into the situation to try to change.	CE R
Lisa: I've watched another teacher kind of get beat down by [a paraeducator] like talking about the previous year. And I've told her, 'You just need to sit her down and like tell her—' And like, letting them be open is just like a huge thing, too. Like, 'What went well last year? Ok, this is what's new this year.' Like having those conversations.	R E
Paige: I think that [paraeducators] struggle with change sometimes. They are people, too.	AC
Lisa: Yeah, and they get so used to it, too. They are like the kids. They get so used to routines and then you switch.	AC
Paige: Yeah, and you do, too. It's just as people. We don't like change. We like our routines.	AC
Macey: I think the one important thing about communication is the first thing—the first day my [paraeducator] came is, the thing I asked her is 'How do you like to be approached—with how to talk to you?' (*sic*) Some people like a private conversation. Some people like to know right then and there…when there's an issue, we address it right then and there—in a private manner of course. But knowing how to talk to them, and knowing what their likings are.	R E AC
Lisa: That's really important because that's how you start conversations is having them be open first so then you can.	AC
Macey: Part of me hearing you comparing the teacher to last year, like I had that happen to me as well because I came in the middle of the year and they had the teacher next door. And they were like, 'We didn't have that in this grade.' And I was like, 'I am trying my best to do what I need to do help students be successful. Do not compare me to someone else.'	R E
Brooke: Exactly. I even have a few students who do it, too. And it's like, 'Well, I'm sorry. You can go visit her if you want to, but she's not going to be happy when you do.'	CE
Veronica: It's so hard to be the second one when there has been someone before.	AC
Paige: Especially when that person has been there for 13 years.	AC
Brooke: It's very hard to be compared as a first year—or not compared I guess—it's very hard to come in as a first year teacher, following somebody who had a lot of experience.	AC

In this excerpt, team leaders reflected on personal experiences about feeling compared to others. There was empathetic listening and agreement through storytelling about similar experiences. They assigned meaning to paraeducator actions by discussing how para-educators struggle with change and have their own routines. In the end, Brooke did not state a final solution; the conversation moved to the next topic without clear resolution.

There were many excerpts in the CoP logs that included elements of reflection, abstract conceptualization, and suggestions for active experimentation. Overall, there were 42 problem-posing conversations during the six CoP gatherings. I analyzed each conversation looking for evidence of these three elements in each of the 42 problem-posing conversations. Table 9 shows the distribution of problem-posing conversations, according to evidence of Experiential Learning Theory elements in each conversation.

Table 9

Experiential Learning Theory Elements in 42 Problem-Posing Conversations

Element(s) of ELT	R	AC	E	R+AC	R+E	AC+E	R+AC+E
Number of Problem-Posing Conversations with elements of ELT	2	5	2	2	0	1	30

Note. R=Reflection, AC=Abstract Conceptualization, E=Ideas for Active Experimentation

Overall, 30 problem-posing conversations included all three elements within the same conversation. Other conversations had some elements, but not all three. The distribution for the other 12 problem-posing conversations was: 2 with only reflection, 5 with only abstract conceptualization, 2 with only suggestions for active experimentation, 2 with both reflection and abstract conceptualization, and 1 with both abstract conceptualization and suggestions for active experimentation. The majority of problem-posing conversations included all three elements related to Experiential Learning Theory.

122

Problem-posing conversations in the CoP included some of the following topics

related to paraeducators: lesson planning, delegating responsibilities, training, utilizing

paraeducators in the classroom, punctuality, student interactions, effective instruction,

behavior management, providing feedback, setting professional expectations, seeking

paraeducator input, implementing paraeducator ideas, scheduling, and data collection.

The TGRS forms prompted individual reflection that influenced CoP conversations.

Table 10 illustrates the interplay between the TGRS and CoP conversations, showing

how team leaders discussed and resolved many of their TGRS challenges.

Table 10

Alignment of TGRS Challenges and CoP Problem-Posing Discussions For Participants

| Participant | Total Number of Challenges Listed on TGRS | Number of Challenges | | | |
| | | Discussed during CoP | | Reported Resolved | |
		#	% of total	#	% of total
Brooke	4	2	50	3	75
Jamie	7	6	86	4	57
Lisa	8	8	100	6	75
Macey	3	3	100	2	66
Paige	4	3	75	4	100
Sarah	2	0	0	0	0
Veronica	10	4	40	5	50
TOTAL	38	26	68	24	63

Overall, participants wrote 38 challenges on their TGRS forms, discussed 26 of

the challenges (68%) and reported resolving 24 of the challenges (63%). The TGRS

contributed to reflection that influenced the topics of CoP conversations, yielded ideas for

team leadership actions, and ultimately resulted in some team leadership resolutions. In

the second and third sections of this chapter, I will share how participants experienced

individual reflection following the CoP gatherings, took leadership actions in their

classrooms, and experienced positive outcomes with paraeducators. Next, I will share how CoP members stretched one another to imagine new possibilities for their teams.

CoP Conversations Stretched Imagination About Team Leadership

Being together in the CoP with other participants provided new ideas to stretch the imagination of each team leader. According to Wenger (1998), imagination is one of the components of a learning Community of Practice when CoP members share ideas that help other members envision new possibilities or imagine situations in other ways. This theme corresponds with RQ 3: *How and to what extent did CoP members identify leadership strategies or co-create resources together?* Participants influenced each other's imagination when they celebrated success together, shared stories that helped other team leaders avoid pitfalls, and discussed possible strategies for their "tool belt."

Celebrating together. During CoP gatherings participants shared celebrations about their success with new leadership strategies, team practices, conversations, paraeducator outcomes, and student outcomes. Celebrating with other team leaders increased the imagination of participants, helping them envision leadership success. TGRS Question 2 may have influenced sharing celebrations because participants responded to the TGRS at the beginning of each CoP to report leadership changes.

Talking about celebrations was transformative, increasing the efficacy of all, as team leaders witnessed the success of others. In her post-interview, Brooke elaborated:

> I think seeing or hearing how people are succeeding or making progress with their [paraeducators] really helped because I'm listening to [other participants] and [thinking], 'That's okay. Well you worked through this problem this way. Maybe I could try that as well.' It's giving me a strategy to work with [my paraeducators].

Hearing celebrations from others increased Brooke's imagination about possible solutions for her team. Paige felt it was helpful to "hear how they overcame that

boundary or that wall and were able to make progress" (focus group). According to

Macey, celebrations were motivating because "You hear what that person does and it

helps you and motivates you to be better as well" (focus group). Being able to share

celebrations offered team leaders opportunities to reflect aloud about concrete

experiences, bask in their team leadership successes, reflect on strategies that were

working, and offer tips to improve the success of other team leaders. In one example,

Paige shared a recent change, justified her reasoning, and explained the benefits:

> Now [my paraeducator] changes the phonograms in perfect order without asking.
> It's one less thing that I have to do because I plan all of her lessons, all of my
> lessons, write all of the IEPs. And I'm like, 'Something that could take you 10
> seconds is like—that's a lot for me…You're sitting there for 30 minutes anyway
> after the kids get on the bus. You can change them.' (CoP 6)

Celebrating changes was an important component of the CoP that stretched imagination

and confirmed that change was possible for individual team leaders in their classrooms.

Avoiding pitfalls. When participants heard other team leaders talk about

challenges on their teams, they listened carefully and experienced inner dialogue. Team

leaders explained how they considered their own teams and implemented strategies to

avoid pitfalls in the future based on the stories of other teams and their challenges.

Team leaders experienced inner dialogue to learn from team leadership challenges

and improve their own teams. Lisa described listening to challenges and wondering, "Oh

gosh, do my [paraeducators] do that?" so she could reflect and make changes (post-

interview). In her post-interview, Brooke described listening, thinking about emerging

challenges for her team, and considering if similar solutions might work for her team:

> With their challenges, I think, 'Okay. Well, I kinda have that problem too.' Seeing
> them work through problems and kind of working through it myself, whether in
> my head, or out loud. I think hearing how people are succeeding or making

progress with their [paraeducators] really helped as well because I'm listening to you and like, 'That's okay. Well you worked through this problem this way. Maybe I could try that as well.' It's like giving me a strategy to work with them.

Additionally, Paige talked about hearing struggles from others, reflecting on her team, and putting strategies in place immediately to avoid having similar struggles in the future:

> I think hearing people bring up a concern that maybe I had or maybe I didn't want to have and hearing what they had done, maybe what had caused it and help me be proactive to not have that problem come up…But you know, if I have a strategy, well cool. I can put that in place then because I didn't have to take time to really focus on it or maybe it hasn't become something that's boiled up inside that feels like a big problem yet [*laughter*]. Um, and it was easy to like squash a problem before it became a really big problem. (post-interview)

Given the close, interpersonal relationships in special education classrooms, leaders valued avoiding problems that could damage relationships and team morale. Listening to challenges of other CoP members provided a glimpse of future pitfalls so that team leaders could get ahead of tension and drama by implementing immediate strategies.

Increasing tool belt. During team leadership conversations, participants increased their own knowledge about team leadership strategies. Team leaders often referred to this concept as a "tool belt." Team leadership challenges were difficult to anticipate, so participants liked having a variety of strategies on hand and ready.

During problem-posing conversations, brainstorming ideas with others increased the shared knowledge of all. Veronica commented, "Any time somebody presented a challenge that they were experiencing, so many people had different ideas. It just made me really feel imaginative about how many different possible solutions there are" (focus group). Lisa said that it was calming to leave with "your tool belt a little bit more filled or just your own wheels turning in a more effective way in your head" (focus group). Macey explained the CoP was helpful for "talking about and getting different strategies and

126

skills and putting them in my tool belt to use them for when it's necessary" (post-interview). Further, Macey shared, "By the end of [our CoP], I felt like I had enough things in my tool belt to walk away with and use in the future" (post-interview). Gaining ideas from others increased leadership efficacy for team leaders and also increased their positive expectations for their future selves.

In conclusion, CoP conversations stretched team leaders as they celebrated success, shared challenges, avoided pitfalls, and increased their tool belt of strategies. When other team leaders shared their learning, it increased the learning of all. This quality multiplied the learning benefits, enabling participants to become more successful team leaders without experiencing each lesson themselves. In the next section, I will explain how communication strategies were a common topic in the CoP.

Team Leaders Talked about Talking to Paraeducators

During CoP gatherings, team leaders spent time talking about talking to paraeducators to resolve challenges, gain input, or provide feedback. This theme provided insight into RQ 3: *How and to what extent did CoP members identify leadership strategies or co-create resources together?* The most common strategy suggested during CoP gatherings was having a conversation. Additionally, participants talked about delivering the message successfully, sometimes practicing exact wording of the message.

Occasionally, team leaders would self-identify the need for a conversation. When Jamie shared that her paraeducator was not calling to report absences, she added, "I should talk to her about that" (CoP 5). Participants also encouraged one another to have conversations with paraeducators. During CoP 1, Paige asked another teacher, "Have you had a conversation with your [paraeducator] about that?" During CoP 4, a participant

127

wondered if talking to her paraeducator was necessary and Lisa stated, "When it's taking away from your teaching time, I feel like that's a needed conversation" (CoP 4).

While talking about talking to paraeducators, team leaders the importance of personalizing the message and style for each individual. In CoP 2, Brooke explained,

> I think it just depends on which [paraeducator] I'm talking to. Because with one, I have to be very specific. And the other, I don't. So with the [paraeducator] that I have to be more specific with, I have to actually sit down and explain it to her.

In this comment, Brooke shares that she does not communicate with both of her paraeducators in the same way because they are different individuals. In CoP 1, Macey shared how she asked her paraeducator about communication preferences:

> The first day my [paraeducator] came…I asked her, 'How do you like to be approached—how [should I] talk to you?' Some people like a private conversation. Some people like to know right then and there…when there's an issue, we address it right then and there—in a private manner of course. But knowing how to talk to them, and knowing what their likings are [is important].

Team leaders spent time talking about talking to paraeducators in order to overcome the perceived barriers of communication, as discussed later in this chapter.

As team leaders talked about talking, they also engaged in reported speech (Holt, 2009), sharing words they had previously said to paraeducators. I analyzed CoP logs for evidence of reported speech, finding there were instances of other discourse that did not fit into the reported speech category. Therefore, I expanded the concept of reported speech to conceptualize three new categories, based on the way the discourse served team leaders during CoP conversations. New categories included: rehearsed speech, modeled rehearsed speech, and unrefined speech. In the following sections, I will describe and offer examples of all four types of discourse in CoP conversations.

Reported speech. According to Holt (2009), reported speech is "used to refer to the presentation of discourse that purports to be from a prior occasion, and may originate from another author" (p. 190). Reported speech occurred during times when a participant told other participants what she had already said to a paraeducator. There were 24 instances of reported speech in the CoP logs. Reported speech often occurred during storytelling about concrete experiences with paraeducators. Reported speech moments were typically efficacious moments about saying the right things. In the first example of reported speech, team leaders were talking about setting expectations. Brooke shared how she had a conversation with paraeducators to gain their input:

> I had to sit down at the beginning of the year and well—we were a few weeks into school—with both of mine and just be like, 'You know this is what I'm expecting. What are you expecting?' And then we all threw ideas around and made sure that we were on the same page with everything. (CoP 1)

In this example, Brooke reported her exact words. A second example of reported speech occurred in CoP 2 while participants talked about delegating instructional responsibilities to paraeducators. Paige reported the exact words she used with her paraeducator:

> And I was like, 'Ok, this is what I want you to do first. First, I want you to read the story. Then, I want you to just spend a day going over the coin. Count the coin. Play with the coin. Then, here is some practice with it.' And I did that with the penny. And then, I'm like, 'Here's the nickel. Go do the same thing.' (CoP 2)

A third example of reported speech occurred when Lisa talked about keeping team morale high amidst challenging new students. She used exact words to report the conversation, saying, "I gotta remind [my paraeducator] that they're new. Like, 'Remember they're new. This is their first week. And even though everyone else is doing it right, you gotta give them a couple weeks'" (Lisa, CoP 4). A fourth example of reported speech occurred in CoP 5 when Macey reported redirecting her paraeducator to

129

use appropriate volume and voice tone. She explained, "I give her reminders like, 'Ok, we need to keep our voice tone appropriate and make sure that the student has his or her privacy'" (Macey, COP 5). Successful moments with paraeducators often included elements of reported speech as participants shared their story and reflected on the victory.

Rehearsed speech. I created the term *rehearsed speech* to describe discourse when team leaders talked about an upcoming conversation with a paraeducator and planned some words or phrases for the conversation. There were 11 examples of rehearsed speech in the CoP logs. In the first example, Paige rehearsed a conversation to delegate new responsibilities to her paraeducator by asking her to switch the phonograms cards, an oral fluency program, when students master phonograms. Paige rehearsed:

> 'Ok—now, you're doing the phonograms everyday. When they master it, I'm going to put you in charge of changing out the phonogram because I feel like it's extra work for you to tell me that they're done with it and then I go get the phonogram. It's just easier for you to change it. They've mastered it.' (CoP 2)

In a second example of rehearsed speech, Brooke prepared to talk with her paraeducator about consistently holding a student's behavior to high expectations, even though the student would occasionally have a meltdown when held accountable. She rehearsed:

> Yeah, but it's a matter of: 'If we have to [have consequences], then we have to do it. It has to happen. If he's going to sit there and continuously hit you, then it has to happen.' And I don't want her to just sit there and tiptoe around him. (CoP 2)

In a third example of rehearsed speech, Jamie explained how she planned to ask her paraeducator to call or text before absences. She closed the conversation, "Yeah, well. I'll talk to her. Just like: 'If you know you're going to be out, just send me a text'" (Jamie, CoP 5). Rehearsed speech was important in this study because team leaders discussed and planned conversations to make changes in their classrooms. Rehearsing conversations

130

may have contributed to leadership actions if team leaders felt more prepared and confident to begin the conversation.

Modeled rehearsed speech. I created the term *modeled rehearsed speech* to describe discourse when a participant gave advice to another participant about speaking to a paraeducator. There were 21 instances of modeled rehearsed speech in the CoP logs. In the first example of modeled rehearsed speech, Paige modeled how Jamie could talk to her paraeducator about appropriate staff-student interactions:

> So maybe an adult conversation with [the paraeducator] about boundaries with kids and appropriate relationships with kids? Because I think we can have the conversation with our kids but we also need to have it with our [paraeducator]. Like, 'This is what I'm expecting from our kids. So like, can you help reinforce the same expectations and type of things?' (CoP 1)

In a second example of modeled rehearsed speech, Brooke and Jamie discussed the benefits of team-teaching between teachers and paraeducators. Brooke explained:

> When you work with her, I think that you're building that relationship as well. Because you're showing her…that's a good time to collaborate as well. It's like, 'I really like how you're doing it that way. Can I show you how I would do it?' And then you can go back and forth, not arguing. (CoP 1)

In a third example of modeled rehearsed speech, Lisa gave Brooke advice about getting a paraeducator to intervene when a student is misbehaving, saying:

> Make it very clear how that's going to help him, like how it's helping the student and what's going to come of it. And like not being mean about what she's doing, but, 'When you talk to him this way, I'm noticing.' Or like, 'I observed that he is not listening to you and it's not as effective.' Or maybe asking her, too. (CoP 2)

In a fourth example, Paige suggested asking a paraeducator to help with data collection for progress monitoring. She explained her thinking and modeled an example:

> Do you ever have your [paraeducator] pull kids to get data? If you give her a little assessment, can—just because maybe you are really busy and she has down time. That could be a nice thing for her to do. If you give her like, 'Hey, this is exactly

what I want you to do with them. Can you like, do it and record what they did, what they said, and give it back?' (Paige, CoP 4)

In all of these examples of modeled rehearsed speech, participants provided suggested wording for conversations with paraeducators as though they were stepping into the shoes of the other participant, taking on the situation, and imagining what they would personally say in this situation. Modeled rehearsed speech was powerful because team leaders provided ideas to help other leaders get a conversation started, possibly relying on positive past experiences with certain wording and offering an example of wording that might improve success in a future conversation for another participant.

Unrefined speech. I created the term *unrefined speech* to describe discourse in which team leaders said exactly what was on their mind, similar to thinking aloud. There were 20 examples of unrefined speech in the CoP logs. Though completely authentic, unrefined speech was not phrased in a way that a team leader would *actually* talk to a paraeducator due to sarcasm, blaming language, or private thoughts. Instead, unrefined speech were comments that participants just needed to get off their chest in a trusting, non-judgmental environment. During the focus group, team leaders talked about the power of being together and Paige commented, "I feel like I need time to vent …[and] process what I'm feeling and get my frustration out before I can even solve my problem…unless you've said it out loud, you're not ready to move on and solve it" (focus group). Paige's comment may explain the importance of unrefined speech in the CoP. It represented the authentic, emotional response to problems and tension before problem solving could begin. According to Paige, getting the frustration out was the first step.

In the first example of unrefined speech, Paige shared her frustration that her paraeducator arrives late. As though speaking directly to her paraeducator, Paige added: "You're now 30 minutes late and you're not here. Do I need someone else to go get the kids' breakfast? Because I don't know if you're coming or not because you're not telling me anymore!" (CoP 1). The emotional tone and delivery demonstrate characteristics of unrefined speech. In another example of unrefined speech, Brooke expressed frustration about paraeducators having unprofessional conversations in front of students, saying, "One of my [paraeducators] will just talk about personal things a lot and I'm like 'Okay, that doesn't really relate to what we're doing here. I didn't ask you if you were going on vacation'" (CoP 2). The sarcasm in this comment demonstrates characteristics of unrefined speech because these phrases could damage the working relationship. In a third example of unrefined speech, Veronica expressed frustration that her paraeducators complain about substitute teachers on days when she is absent. In the following excerpt from CoP 5, Veronica mentions that she rarely gets a substitute paraeducator to help on days when her paraeducators are absent. On those days, she is short-staffed and has to keep the classroom running with one paraeducator instead of two:

> **Veronica:** You know what drives me nuts? It's when my [paraeducators] gripe and gripe about the sub they had. But any time that one of them is out, there's just two of us left, right?
> **Brooke:** They don't give you a sub!
> **Veronica:** Right! But every time I'm out, they have a person. So I'm like, 'Well, you guys had a third person. I'm the only person who always has to deal with two people. No, simmer down. I can't listen to you complaining.'

The emotional language in this passage indicates that the message might not be ready to deliver to paraeducators. It appeared to come from a raw, unrefined place that did not account for careful delivery of the message and protection of the working relationship.

133

Unrefined speech provided a release for team leaders to express their feelings about a situation. The willingness to engage in this type of discourse represented trust among group members and faith in the "non-judgment" norms established at the first meeting. Interestingly, unrefined speech was often followed by examples of rehearsed speech or modeled rehearsed speech, in which team leaders organized their thoughts in a way to better approach the paraeducator with a refined message.

In this section, I described CoP instances of reported speech, rehearsed speech, modeled rehearsed speech, and unrefined speech. Table 11 shows the total instances of each type of speech according to CoP logs. Reported speech occurred in the most instances, but unrefined speech occurred at every CoP gathering.

Table 11

Instances of Practicing Speech During CoP Gatherings

Type of Practicing Speech	Total Count in CoP Logs	Evidence found in CoP #					
		1	2	3	4	5	6
Reported speech	24	•	•	•	•	•	
Rehearsed speech	11	•	•		•	•	•
Modeled rehearsed speech	21	•	•		•		
Unrefined speech	20	•	•	•	•	•	•

In conclusion of this section, The CoP: A Transformative Space for Team Leaders, I have presented qualitative themes, quantitative data, and evidence to illustrate the findings of this study. I explained how team leaders engaged in the CoP experience, co-creating the agenda based on mutual needs in a non-judgmental environment. I discussed the presence of alignment conversations (Wenger, 1998) to decrease feelings of isolation and compare practices to increase leadership efficacy. I provided evidence of Experiential Learning (Kolb, 1986) in the problem-posing conversations as team leaders

reflected on leadership experiences, assigned meaning, and discussed possible team leadership strategies. I discussed imagination (Wenger, 1998) in the CoP as participants celebrated successes and developed awareness of pitfalls to be avoided. Finally, I explained instances of reported speech (Holt, 2009), rehearsed speech, modeled rehearsed speech, and unrefined speech in CoP logs as participants talked about talking to paraeducators.

The CoP was a transformative space for team leaders because it provided an outlet for team leadership conversations that did not exist within their personal or professional lives. According to the proposed framework for Team Leadership within a CoP, the CoP gave teachers pause to reflect and assign meaning to their concrete experiences before returning to their classrooms for active experimentation. Later, I will explain how the CoP transformed team leaders and their leadership practices.

In the next section, I will describe the essential nature of reflection to reframe limit perceptions before team leaders returned to their classrooms. To set the stage and provide understanding of the barriers they faced, I will begin with a poem about the challenges of team leadership, constructed from the words of team leaders in this study.

Team Leadership: The Struggles are Real[14]

So hard, stressful,
I've never been in this role before,
A lot of power and responsibility,
Instructing another adult what to do.
Tough conversations, conflict,
Don't necessarily get addressed,
Once it comes out, it's going to be a mess.
She's frustrated, I'm being judged,
Just the look on her face,
Hard to get it all together,
No training or preparation for this.
We kind of battled in the beginning,
I don't know what to have her do,
How do I get the confidence?
Plan for myself and then plan for her.
No easy decisions as a leader,
Such high expectations of myself,
I just want to get my work done,
So overwhelmed by everything else.
IEPs, progress reports, monitoring,
Having to balance between work and home,
I don't want to admit that I'm failing,
It's just so hard to grasp.
Where do I start? What are the baby steps?
Finding ways to communicate,
The struggles are real, I'm human,
Didn't want to be the boss.
Take a step back, pick up the puzzle pieces,
Wording things the right way,
This is a team, not stepping on toes,
Adjust to what others need.
Change is hard, I'm not perfect
Can't control everything,
Working toward the same goal,
There's a lot I could do,
How did I get this power?

---

[14] Comprised of participant quotes from pre-interviews and CoP gatherings.

Reframing Leadership Possibilities: Moving from CoP Conversations to Action

As suggested by the poem, team leaders experienced leadership challenges and perceived limitations that influenced their leadership confidence. The CoP provided space to discuss ideas and gain peer feedback. During CoP conversations and thereafter, team leaders reported they reflected on peer feedback to make decisions. Participants reframed their perceptions through active, ongoing reflection. In this section, I will share three limit perceptions that provide context about the circumstances they faced. Then, I will explain the transformative power of reflection in the revised framework for Experiential Learning about Team Leadership in a CoP. The discussion of limit perceptions provides context for later discussions in this chapter related to RQ1: *To what extent did the CoP influence early career teachers' perceptions of their ability to lead paraeducators in their classrooms?* Limit perceptions included: (a) Team leaders felt overwhelmed by the complexities of team leadership, (b) Team leaders felt constrained by traditional leadership identities, and (c) Communication was a perceived leadership barrier, as described by team leaders in this study.

Participants Felt Overwhelmed by the Complexities of Team Leadership

When I asked participants what it felt like to be the team leader during the pre-innovation interviews, they gave responses like "stressful" and "not my favorite." Participants shared the opinion that team leadership was a challenging role that added pressure on top of other job responsibilities. The complexities of team leadership were a limit perception that complicated leadership actions.

Participants felt unprepared for their roles as the team leader because they had little experience leading adults. Brooke reflected about the challenge:

I've never really been in this role before. So just having people to be in charge of on top of having to do everything else for the classroom is extremely difficult. I don't know. They prepare you for the kids in school. But they don't at all—there's no preparation for [paraeducators]. So that's—I don't know. (pre-interview)

Brooke's feelings of being overwhelmed by the leadership role echo in the repeating phrase "I don't know." With much work at the beginning of a special education career, spending time on relationships with paraeducators added extra pressure. Lisa explained, "we obviously love their help and I can't imagine a classroom without them, but there are times I don't want to make small talk. I just want to get my work done" (pre-interview).

Macey described feeling pressure to provide training and model strategies, saying:

I feel like I have to be the example of what I want in my classroom and …with the ten other tabs that I have in my brain…it stresses me out to have an extra tab of an adult who should know, but [doesn't]. (pre-interview)

Paige felt pressure to provide training so that her paraeducator could be successful with students, explaining that her paraeducator had no experience being the lead teacher even though she had many years of experience being a paraeducator:

She hasn't been doing *this* for 15 years. She's been doing like, being [a paraeducator] for 15 years. She's never taught coins. Like you're the teacher. You have the background knowledge. You're the one with the content knowledge. You need to pass that down. (pre-interview)

Planning for paraeducators created additional pressure. Brooke shared, "I plan for myself. And then I also have to plan for them. And that's really hard, especially with all the different levels in my class" (pre-interview). Lisa explained that it was challenging to figure out what paraeducators should do initially when she was also trying to figure out what she was supposed to be doing in the classroom (focus group). Overall, participants felt unprepared and overwhelmed as team leaders. In the next section, I will describe how team leaders felt constrained and disconnected from the traditional identity of "boss."

Team Leaders Felt Constrained by Traditional Leadership Identities

Team leaders felt constrained by traditional leadership identities. They did not

feel like the "boss," so they were unsure of how to act like the leader while avoiding

undesired, traditional leadership behaviors. This theme provides context about identity

perceptions of team leaders in the CoP.

Participants made comments that set themselves apart from the traditional

definition of a "boss," indicating participants did not identify with the stereotypical

behaviors. Here is an excerpt from Brooke's post-interview transcript:

> **Brooke:** In the beginning I didn't really want to be the boss of anybody. Not that I
> want to be the boss of somebody, but like, I, it's nice to have other people who are
> there to help you.
> **Jess:** So you're thinking a lot about the shared responsibility of it.
> **Brooke:** Yeah. Exactly. Like, and not having one person who is like the head
> honcho. So like, having that, you know. You know, we have, we all have the
> same role in here. We're all here to help everybody, and, or help the kids, and I
> don't know.
> **Jess:** So you're really seeing it as a partnership now.
> **Brooke:** Yeah. Mm-hmm (affirmative).

In this excerpt, Brooke mentioned that she was "not the boss" twice—first saying that she

did not want to be the boss in the beginning and then repeating that she still does not want

to be the boss. Then, she went further to say that she did not think one person should be

"head honcho." She used multiple phrases to set herself apart from being the "boss."

During CoP 2, Jamie suggested an example of something to say to a paraeducator,

clarifying responsibility for the classroom, but also indicating limitations to the

leadership role, using the phrase "not the supreme ruler." She said:

> You could tell them, 'not to be like, I'm the supreme ruler or anything. But we are
> the teacher and ultimately we are the sole person responsible for everything that
> happens in this classroom, including your actions and reactions. So I am held
> responsible for you. So when you're making decisions, you need to keep that in

mind. It's not because I don't think that you can make that decision or that I think that I'm better than you—it's just like legally, those are the facts. I am legally responsible for you and the children and everything that you all do.' So I think just them understanding that just helps ease unnecessary tensions or like those feelings of like I'm inadequate or you're treating me like one of the students.

The language in this excerpt indicated that power involved with being the team leader was not by choice. In CoP 6, Lisa commented, "It makes me feel like such a nag. I don't want to be like—to have to micromanage…It's not even confrontation. It's that asking them makes me feel bad." In this statement, Lisa used the terminology "micromanage" and then set herself apart from it. Participants felt especially awkward about being considered the "boss" when they worked with older or more experienced paraeducators. Paige talked about the power conflict during her pre-interview, saying:

At first it felt like a lot of power, a lot of responsibility—that you are not only in charge of all of the children, but in charge of I guess instructing another adult on what to do…it almost feels like being someone's boss. That can be kind of scary coming right out of college to that position of power over someone who is double your age. And you're just like, 'Oh my gosh. How did I get this power? How do I manage and not look like the first year teacher who has no idea what they're doing—but still has to do everything?'

Brooke made a similar comment that it was "crazy" to be like a boss because it is "really hard to tell somebody who's older than me what to do" (pre-interview).

Overall, participants felt constrained by the traditional identity of "boss." During CoP gatherings, participants redefined team leadership identity and discussed their desire for balanced partnerships. The reflective space between conversation and action transformed their ideas about leadership identity. When team leaders returned to their classrooms, they sought collaborative partnerships with paraeducators, as discussed later in this chapter. Next, I will discuss how perceived communication barriers created limit perceptions for team leaders in their classrooms.

140

Perceived Communication Barriers Influenced Leadership Actions

Though team leaders possessed many ideas for their classrooms, they perceived communication barriers that reduced leadership actions. Feelings of resourcefulness and professional knowledge conflicted with fear of upsetting relationships with their paraeducators, offending someone, or creating tension. Team leaders were most concerned about: inadequate communication skills, fear of disturbing the peace, and their qualifications to be the leader. This theme provides context about the circumstances of team leaders in the CoP as they considered their ability to influence change. Team leaders redefined their circumstances through CoP conversations and reflection, increasing their perceptions of influence by the end of the innovation period.

Inadequate communication skills. According to participants, they did not yet have sufficient communication skills for team leadership. Team leaders talked about needing to improve their own communication skills to achieve their team goals.

Team leaders expressed desire to improve the frequency and clarity of communication. Paige said, "I feel like I'm not getting what I want because I haven't been very explicit about what I want or need…I just need to give more feedback based on what I expect and what I need from [my paraeducator]" (pre-interview). According to Paige, she needed to increase the clarity and frequency of directions and feedback. Some participants found this challenging because they perceived there was little time for communication in their workday (Jamie and Paige, focus group). Other participants found communication difficult because they had negative perceptions of their communication skills. Lisa said, "It's hard being a leader just because my communications skills aren't as good, so that will always be a weak point and something I

141

have to work on" (pre-interview). Participants were highly aware that communication was important, but their communication confidence affected their leadership actions because team leaders doubted their potential success.

Fear of disturbing the peace. Given their low communication confidence, team leaders felt anxiety about disturbing positive qualities in their classrooms. They did not want to introduce tension, conflict, or disagreement by asking their paraeducators to make changes. Fear of disturbing the peace was a communication barrier.

Participants desired to make changes in their classrooms, but they perceived there was risk involved. Macey shared, "[My paraeducator] wants to help me in any way and it's more or less me afraid to tell her instead" (pre-interview). Lisa shared, "I don't know why, but there is intimidation in communication…I know once it comes out it's going to be a mess" (focus group). Macey explained, "I'm very blunt and to the point and sometimes that's not the way to approach it" (pre-interview). Team leaders felt challenged to find the right way to deliver information so that paraeducators would feel supported and collaborative instead of defensive or offended.

Team leaders needed the help of their paraeducators in the classroom, so they desired to maintain positive relationships with their teams. Brooke explained how she felt worried about upsetting her paraeducator during a feedback conversation:

> I was twiddling my thumbs and it was just like, I'm sweating, shaking…Because she's awesome…she's so creative and I'm not. So yeah, I would lose a big part of her. Cause she'd probably be like, "Now you can do your own bulletin boards"… [but] I love when she gives input and it's really helpful. So I don't want to lose that at all. (pre-interview)

Difficult conversations were further complicated if team leaders and paraeducators were friends outside of work. Macey explained feeling worried about giving her paraeducator

142

feedback, saying, "because [my paraeducator] and I are friends outside of work, like—I don't want her to get the message that it's going to affect our friendship in any way" (CoP 5). Overall, disturbing the peace was something that team leaders considered carefully. Participants valued the relationships with team members and positive things happening in their classrooms; therefore, perceived risks influenced their leadership actions because team leaders were unsure what would happen if they disturbed the peace.

Feeling unqualified to give feedback. In addition to the fear of disturbing the peace, team leaders also questioned their qualifications to give feedback or make decisions. This was especially true when paraeducators were older or more experienced.

Feeling unqualified created team leadership challenges when paraeducators were more experienced. Early career special education team leaders felt like they were still learning themselves and were not qualified to give feedback. Jamie expressed feeling unqualified to write lesson plans for her paraeducator, saying, "I don't know how to because I'm still working on planning for myself" (COP 1). Paige explained having questions like, "How do I approach someone who has more knowledge than me?…How do I get the confidence to be that leader? And how do I earn your respect as a leader?" (focus group). Macey explained that it was hard to give directions when she was not sure of the solution. She shared, "It's kind of hard to say, 'Well I think this is going to work and we should try this before we do something else'" (Macey, focus group). Giving corrective feedback was especially hard. In her pre-interview, Paige explained:

> I have a hard time addressing something...that might be like corrective feedback but maybe doesn't feel like it's my place to say something…I mean she's been doing her job for longer than I've even been out of high school… So sometimes it's like, 'Can I say this or are you going to give backlash?'… And it's just like I don't know if I want to cross that line or kind of hold back.

143

These quotes show how team leaders felt unsure about leading paraeducators in an area where they did not yet feel professionally competent. Overall, perceived communication barriers decreased leadership actions when participants felt low efficacy about their communication skills, fear of disturbing the peace, and unqualified to guide decision-making due to their status as early career teachers.

In conclusion, team leaders experienced limit perceptions related to the complexities of team leadership, traditional leadership identities, and communication. Next, I will discuss the importance of reflection to reframe these limit perceptions so team leaders could determine appropriate leadership actions for their classrooms.

Team Leaders Experienced Individual Reflection about Team Leadership

Following CoP gatherings, participants experienced individual reflection about CoP conversations, their own classroom team, and possible leadership actions. Reflection was essential as team leaders grappled with the complexities of team leadership, leadership identity, and perceived communication barriers. This theme relates to RQ1: *To what extent did the CoP influence early career teachers' perceptions of their ability to lead paraeducators in their classrooms?* The CoP was a place for reflection, abstract conceptualization, and discussion of possible leadership actions. As a co-member in the CoP, I experienced individual reflection about my own team following CoP gatherings. Therefore, this theme also relates to RQ4: *How will I negotiate the duality of being both the CoP coordinator and co-member?*

For team leaders, individual reflection was an extension of the CoP problem-posing discussions. Therefore this theme also relates to RQ2: *How and to what extent did the CoP engage in problem-solving dialogues about team leadership in special*

144

education? As discussed earlier, participants did not often arrive at final solutions during problem-posing conversations. Team leaders left the CoP reflecting on their leadership abilities, considering next steps for active experimentation, and reconciling their limit perceptions with new understanding. Team leaders talked about preparing for leadership actions by reflecting in four ways: during the CoP, on their drive home, during a motivation period for a few days after the group, and during critical moments in their classrooms. Reflection was transformative in this study, influencing leadership actions that influenced perceptions about team leadership abilities.

During CoP gatherings. The first reflective space occurred during CoP conversations as team leaders discussed their teams, considered implementing changes in their classrooms, and listened to peer feedback about strategies.

CoP conversations stimulated reflection that prepared participants for leadership actions. Lisa explained, "[Conversations] just got the wheels turning I feel like—which was nice—I could actually write things down like, 'Okay I need to do this'" (focus group). Paige shared that CoP conversations stimulated thinking, saying, "All the ideas that we talked about—it sparked something like, 'Oh, I really want to try that. I want to do this'" (post-interview). Additionally, the CoP provided team leaders time to consider the steps for their goals and anticipate challenges. Brooke explained that it helped,

> working through the problem instead of just jumping on it immediately and solving it step by step. 'Cause, sometimes I feel like I'm the kind of person that's just like, 'Okay, here's my problem, let me tackle it.' And I think we kind of broke it down, and you gave us some resources that were helpful, like some of the papers that are in [our folders], and like you know, 'This is the way that you can talk and stuff.' So yeah…like actually problem solving... breaking it down individually, like, 'This is happening because of this reason' (post-interview).

Participants valued the time to plan actions with other team leaders. Lisa commented, "Having that extra think time to process it was huge" (post-interview). She talked about how she spent the time thinking through the steps to introduce changes to her paraeducators so that she could be strategic instead of overloading them with too many changes at once. Paige talked about how the CoP gave her time to talk through ideas aloud. She shared, "The COP just gave me a lot more ideas of what to do and helped me talk through things that I would struggle with" (Paige, post-interview).

During CoP gatherings, there were times of silence as participants looked around thinking. I could tell that they were thinking because their eyes moved around instead of focusing on specific objects. Silence became comfortable in the group and more common than in other professional settings. I wrote about silence in my researcher journal:

> There were some really awkward silences tonight. What was that? Am I disappointing people by not having more structure? Maybe people just come and need that reflective space. Maybe the quietness is a sign that there are things changing in their mind. That would be interesting. (researcher journal, 10/05/15)

As the CoP coordinator, I often wondered about how participants were perceiving the CoP time because it was highly important to me that team leaders felt they were spending their time wisely. There is evidence of my worry in this passage as I considered what the silence meant. Given qualitative evidence from the focus group and post-interviews, I now realize that the silence was a very important sign of the reflective space created in the CoP. The silence was transformative.

The drive home. Team leaders reported that reflection, thinking, and planning continued in their cars on the drive home after the CoP. Time together in the CoP was a springboard to additional reflection, beginning on the drive home. Veronica explained,

"As long as we talk about things, even if we didn't come to a solution to whatever I was thinking about, I would be driving home still thinking about it. You know? It got my wheels turning again" (focus group). Paige explained,

> On my way home I feel like I put a lot of thought because I have a lovely drive home. I would, you know, get all my brainstorm for like how I want to go in the next day and how I want to approach the problem if there is one. (post-interview)

Lisa explained that having the extra time to think during the CoP gatherings, "kept my thinking going even, like, my car ride home" (post-interview). When I asked Lisa if she thought about team leadership between CoP gatherings, she responded that her car ride was the most important thinking space for her. She said that she would reflect on the CoP conversations, thinking, "Oh, this is what I want to do, this is what I could do" (Lisa, post-interview). I experienced this personally and wrote about it in my researcher journal:

> I am totally thinking about my own team tonight instead of thinking about my research. What I'm realizing is that every team can always get better. I think that I have a great team. My team has been complimented numerous times. Any time that anyone spends time in my room, they are amazed by our team. And yet still there are things that I am thinking about –wishing it could be better or wishing that it could be smoother or wishing that it could be more successful. I think that is interesting (researcher journal, 9/28/15).

I was amazed by the power of reflection after CoP gatherings. I often found that I drove home thinking about my own classroom and how to take my team to the next level— rather than thinking about the research and how the CoP gathering went. I had to consciously switch gears for researcher tasks like journaling because the temptation to continue reflecting about my own team was so strong. I personally found that reflective thinking was like a mindset that I carried with me for a few days after group, considering the ideas we had discussed and thinking about how to apply the new ideas in my own classroom. Next, I will share participant quotes to support this thinking.

Motivation period. Participants reported the reflective mindset continued for a few days after CoP gatherings as they considered how to implement leadership actions in the classroom. CoPs created a motivation period. Participants set leadership goals during CoPs and felt accountability to report progress at following CoPs. Paige explained:

> For the first few days after the meetings, I was pretty focused on what I wanted to do and I felt more motivated after the meetings to give away that responsibility that I was giving away. So I was like, 'Okay, I said I was going to do it. I really have to do it now' [*laughter*]. I really have to have that conversation with her and tell her that I need her to be this person in the room. So I feel like talking about it at the meeting…held me responsible for this stuff that I said I was going to do, and I tried to do it as fast as possible so I didn't forget. (post-interview)

Paige explained feeling highly motivated right after CoPs, desiring to accomplish her goals before other job responsibilities distracted her focus. Lisa reported feeling calm after CoPs because they gave her a sense of "leaving with your tool belt a little bit more filled or just your own wheels turning in more effective way in your head" (focus group). CoPs equipped team leaders with ideas and created accountability for accomplishing goals. After CoP 3, I made an entry in my researcher journal about CoP accountability:

> One thing that is really cool is that it seemed like everyone has some things that they are moving forward with. I'm excited to see what their TGRS forms show. Maybe what it means is that only some of the conversation has to happen in the group and that teachers are taking steps on their own. They do know what to do and they need to do it. They just need accountability partners to report back to. Maybe that's what our group is: accountability partners. (10/05/15)

Team leaders engaged in a reflective process following CoPs, implementing changes in their classrooms based on their goals from CoP conversations and their TGRS forms.

Critical moments. Team leaders also reported feeling reflective during critical team leadership moments in their classrooms. Paige explained that CoP conversations were helpful in critical moments because she thought, "Oh, I remember we talked about

this. I can use it right here" (post-interview). I asked Brooke if she thought about team

leadership between CoP gatherings and she responded:

> Yeah, definitely. Because, I mean, it's not like the struggles that we have here in
> the classroom are only happening on those days. It's like they're an everyday
> thing. So I had to use those different strategies that we learned and I had to even
> come up with my own, like 'Well, how can I figure this out 'cause it needs to be
> fixed now, not at our next meeting.' (post-interview)

Lisa reported that she utilized critical moments for conversations with her paraeducators.

She explained, "I think I'm doing better at sitting them down in specific situations instead

of letting it build up and me get frustrated" (Lisa, post-interview). CoP conversations

equipped team leaders with ideas to approach critical moments in their classrooms.

In conclusion, team leaders experienced reflection in the CoP, the drive home,

during the motivation period, and during critical moments in their classrooms. Time

together in the CoP altered participant thinking and created additional opportunities for a

reflective mindset around team leadership decisions. During CoPs, team leaders were not

looking for direct answers or solutions from one another; instead, they interacted like

brainstorming partners during CoPs and continued with independent reflection after

CoPs. The CoP modeled the reflective process by giving participants an opportunity to

pause, consider options, determine steps, and anticipate challenges. Later in this chapter,

I will share how team leaders replicated these reflective conversations to solve problems

of practice with their own teams.

In this section, Reframing Leadership Possibilities: Moving From CoP

Conversations to Action, I described the important reflective space between CoPs and

leadership actions as teachers considered peer feedback, possible options, and steps for

success to implement team leadership goals in their classrooms. Through reflection, teachers reframed their perceived limit situations and embraced their role as team leaders.

In the next section, I will share how the CoPs influenced team leaders to transform their relationships with paraeducators into collaborative partnerships. Intentional leadership actions promoted successful leadership outcomes, transforming teachers into efficacious team leaders who reframed perceived barriers in their classrooms. I will begin with a transformation poem, comprised of words from team leaders as they reflected on their enhanced leadership identities.

Team Leader Transformed[15]

I had to take that leadership role,
Taking initiative and making time,
Communication and collaboration,
Making my paraeducator[16] feel valued.
Model what I want, delegate certain things,
Just a conversation to get better,
Asking the team[17] to contribute ideas.
A leader is not just one person,
It's how that person can delegate,
We're here to benefit the kids,
Make whatever it is successful.
Many solutions to one problem,
Not having 100% control,
Reflective, open, honest, mindful,
We need those skills to move on.
More clear vision as the leader,
Be the change I want to see,
We've been honest with each other,
Didn't need all the power.
We're a little more balanced,
Give the praise that she deserves,
She needs that immediate feedback,
Making my expectations clear.
Little things I do are leadership,
Be the role model, I have influence,
Enough things in my tool belt,
More comfortable with myself.
I have grown as a leader,
Other teachers are starting to see,
Got it together, not intimidated,
Putting myself out there,
Growth.

---

[15] Comprised of participant quotes from post-interviews and the focus group, with exception of the title.
[16] The word used by the participant was "assistant."
[17] The word used by the participant was "them."

Transformed Team Leaders: Team Leadership in Their Own Classrooms

Over the innovation period, team leaders enhanced their perspectives about team leadership and became more confident as team leaders. The CoP provided time and space to discuss team leadership among peers to construct knowledge, gain feedback, and affirm practices. Following CoPs, team leaders engaged in reflection to prepare for leadership actions. When team leaders returned to their classrooms and implemented new strategies, they experienced positive leadership outcomes that increased their leadership efficacy. In this section, I will discuss how the CoP influenced: (a) collaborative team leadership values, (b) intentional leadership actions, and (c) identity transformation.

The CoP Influenced Collaborative Team Leadership Values

During CoP conversations, team leaders turned their attention away from being "supervisors" and instead, emphasized goals related to cultivating collaborative partnerships with paraeducators. In their classrooms, team leaders took steps to improve these partnerships and reported success, providing insight into RQ1: *To what extent did the CoP influence early career teachers' perceptions of their ability to lead paraeducators in their classrooms?* CoP discussions influenced collaborative leadership values and willingness to take action. In turn, team leaders perceived they had greater influence to lead their paraeducators in the following areas: (a) shared values and practices, (b) utilizing paraeducators, (c) team interdependence, (d) growth mindset, and (e) collaborative team conversations. In this section, I will discuss these theme-related components and then present quantitative data to support this theme at the end.

Shared values and practices. Participants desired to have teams with shared practices and shared values, working together toward the same goals with students. Team

152

leaders discussed these qualities during CoPs, took action to improve these qualities in their classrooms, and reported improvements for their teams.

During pre-interviews, team leaders envisioned teams with shared values and practices. Participants wanted their team to have greater consistency with students by adopting similar techniques. Lisa envisioned that her team could be "on the same page with behavior managing, but also [know] that kids are different" (pre-interview). Paige talked about wishing her paraeducator would take more initiative to be engaged with the kids, saying, "I just wish she'd be more active with them... Because I have kids that refuse to play unless she's playing with them" (pre-interview). Team leaders wanted their paraeducators to teach with their same passion and engagement, maximizing every learning opportunity. Lisa explained her desire for shared values and practices:

> I would love to see a team that interacts equally with the kids...I would love to see more interaction throughout the day and them teaching at random moments or things like that. Sometimes they think that we're the only ones that can have those interactions, which is totally false. They have the same exact power and title in the classroom as a teacher. (pre-interview)

CoP conversations influenced leadership actions that nurtured collaborative partnerships in classrooms. While together in the CoP, team leaders discussed shared values and practices in areas such as: staff-student interactions (CoP 1 and 5), instructional strategies (CoP 3), behavior management (CoP 1-5), celebrating student progress (CoP 2), positive attitudes about students (CoP 4), and professional conversations (CoP 2). In one example, participants talked about providing guidance and feedback to their paraeducators while teaching together. They decided on the term *team teaching* after discussion of other terms. When participants talked about the benefits of team teaching, Brooke commented about increasing collaboration through the process:

153

When you work with her, I think that you're building that relationship as well…It's like, 'I really like how you're doing it that way. Can I show you how I would do it?' And then you can go back and forth, not arguing. (Brooke to Jamie, CoP 1)

This comment and the term *team teaching* embody the collaborative perspectives of team leaders in the CoP. Conversations about shared values and practices affirmed the importance of this team quality and motivated team leaders to increase shared practices through training and team conversations. In post-interviews, participants reported greater influence over shared values and practices in their classrooms, describing a more unified team. Paige commented, "It's like we're a little bit more balanced—like, they can't tell the difference between who's the [paraeducator] and who's the teacher (post-interview). Lisa shared, "I see them using language I use, so that's nice to see that" (post-interview). Brooke reported, "Ultimately we all do have the same goal in mind, that the kids are why we're here. So, we just like working together, and everything like that has really improved" (post-interview). Overall, team leaders invested time in training and communicating shared practices during the innovation period, yielding teams with more aligned practices in the classroom.

Utilizing paraeducators. Team leaders also desired to have greater influence over classroom outcomes by utilizing their paraeducators in a collaborative partnership. Participants discussed this topic at every CoP. They agreed that it was helpful to know paraeducator strengths, interests, and preferences so they could utilize paraeducators accordingly. Team leaders wanted paraeducators to enjoying contributing to the classroom, feel successful, and "take ownership of the teaching" (Paige, CoP 2). The CoP improved team leaders' ideas about utilizing paraeducators in their classrooms.

Utilizing paraeducators was complicated because it required team leaders to consider paraeducators' strengths and delegate appropriate tasks. Determining the tasks was challenging. Jamie explained having difficulty planning for her paraeducator:

> I don't know how to properly utilize my paraeducator to her full potential. I don't know what to have her do. I don't know how to plan for her. Because she is completely and utterly and fully capable of it….I don't know how to because I'm still working on planning for myself…And even when I feel like I am prepared, I go and I do it and by the end of the day, I feel totally unprepared for tomorrow. So it's just, I don't know how to plan for her. And that bothers me a lot. Because I like being organized…and I know that when I work on my strength, the kids get more out of it. So if she's working on her strength and I'm working on my strength, then it's just like BOOM [success]. (CoP 1)

CoP conversations influenced team leaders as they discussed appropriate responsibilities to utilize paraeducators and then reported stories of success. Team leaders agreed that it was much easier to utilize paraeducators who had natural teaching skills or desire to pursue teaching certification in the future (CoP 3). Those paraeducators were internally motivated, keeping themselves busy working with students or accomplishing appropriate tasks. Therefore, team leaders spent more time discussing how to utilize externally motivated paraeducators who did not seek to utilize themselves. These paraeducators needed intentional leadership, so team leaders talked about leadership actions that could positively utilize their paraeducators in new ways. In CoP 2, Paige explained and justified giving new responsibilities to her paraeducator:

> My goal is to give my [paraeducator] more responsibilities. I feel like I do all of the planning for everything. And there are some things that I feel like she should be able to do. Like, I pick out the phonograms[18] for the kids and I'm like, 'But I don't do the phonograms with the kids. And I don't know when they've mastered a phonogram.' So it's like, 'Ok—now, you're doing the phonograms everyday. When they master it, I'm going to put you in charge of changing out the

---

[18] Phonograms relate to a reading fluency program

155

phonogram because I feel like it's extra work for you to tell me that they're done
with it and then I go get the phonogram. It's just easier for you to change it.
They've mastered it.'

Together, team leaders collectively developed new understandings about how to

maximize paraeducator outcomes through intentional leadership actions. Most

importantly, team leaders realized that all paraeducators should be utilized differently

based on their strengths and preferences. Brooke shared that she initially worried that

asking the paraeducator to run copies would make the paraeducator feel bored (pre-

interview), but she came to realize that her paraeducator was good at running copies and

enjoyed doing it (post-interview). As team leaders focused on intentional leadership

actions, they perceived greater influence over paraeducator contributions to the classroom

and discovered new ways to utilize their paraeducator's strengths to benefit students.

Interdependent team. Participants desired an interdependent team of individuals

with awareness of required tasks, motivation to contribute, and concern for helping one

another. They wanted their paraeducators to *ask* how to help rather than waiting to be told

what to do. Team leaders sought interdependence as they avoided the identity of "boss."

With much to do in special education classrooms, team leaders wanted their

paraeducators to be focused on classroom tasks while they were on the clock. When team

leaders saw paraeducators off task, they felt tense and frustrated. During pre-interviews,

Paige stated that she wanted her paraeducator to ask, "Hey, you know, is there anything

you need me to do?" instead of playing on her phone during downtime. Macey said it was

frustrating to see her paraeducator on the computer when there were "a million things to

do in [her] head" (pre-interview). Team leaders wanted paraeducators to take initiative or

ask how they could contribute to the classroom without being told what to do.

156

Participants envisioned teams that mutually relied on one another. This further strengthened their goals to build interdependent partnerships; however, they also found that paraeducators waited for leadership direction and willingly complied with requests. Interdependence continued to be desired, but team leaders became more aware of their role guiding paraeducators as well. Later in this chapter, I will share how participants stepped fully into their roles as team leader, delegating tasks to paraeducators so that downtime was no longer a concern. As a result, team leaders and paraeducators found collaborative partnerships when team leaders increased their leadership actions instead of waiting for paraeducators to take the initiative. Macey described how her ideal team could get through anything as a team, saying, "There's going to be times where I depend on you and you depend on me, and we can depend on each other going forth, and it's going to be okay, and we'll get through it" (post-interview).

Growth mindset. Team leaders embodied a growth mindset throughout the innovation period that reflected their value of collaborative partnerships. They joined the CoP with a desire to advance their team, initiating leadership changes with intent to grow individually alongside their team members. At the end of the CoP, team leaders continued to express a vision to advance their team further with future goals.

Team leaders joined the CoP with a positive outlook that their teams were already successful and a growth mindset that improvements were still possible. Lisa shared, "I want to build on that [success] even more because we have a really strong team this year…I think we can make this even better—which I think [in the] long run is going to make our whole year smoother" (pre-interview). Participants embraced learning opportunities and valued the knowledge of paraeducators. Brooke reported, "I'm learning

157

from [my paraeducator] just as much as I'm learning from the kids" (pre-interview). I wrote about my desire to continue growing my own team after the first CoP gathering when we co-created our shared list of list of team leadership goals. I wrote:

> I'm excited about the list of challenges that [our CoP] made. I feel like they are very valid challenges that I've heard people struggle with in the past. I felt like we have some commonalities between us. I'm glad that I am struggling with some team leadership stuff myself because I think that this will help me be authentic as a CoP member. I actually need the group myself… And it's not that we need [discussions about team leadership] because we are unskilled. We need these things because team leadership is hard. I am glad to have other colleagues around that will value me as an expert on my team and give me the space to think things through and make my team the best team possible. (researcher journal, 9/14/15)

In this passage, I reflected on the strengths of my team with a growth mindset that there were still opportunities for improvement. Team leaders, including myself, valued the CoP as a space to embrace the growth mindset and identify team leadership goals.

During CoPs, team leaders considered areas to improve the team, reflecting on themselves as part of the team with a growth mindset to grow as individuals alongside paraeducators. Language included the words "we" and "us" instead of "you" or "them." The focus was not directed at paraeducators' flaws. Instead, the energy focused on renegotiating and improving the team together. For example, Paige said:

> I think it depends on how you approach feedback with them like, 'It's not me reprimanding you. This is just a conversation for how to get better. I am not saying that by any means that you did anything bad or wrong, but I am just saying how *we* could be better.' (Paige, focus group)

Team leaders maintained a growth mindset throughout the innovation. In post-interviews, team leaders continued to speak with a growth mindset. When I asked Paige how the CoP influenced her as a leader, she responded, "It made me really think about the relationship

that I have with my [paraeducator] and how it affects our kids and how I can make it even better" (post-interview). Ongoing improvement was a continuous goal.

Collaborative team conversations. Team leaders desired collaborative team conversations. The richness of these conversations in classrooms improved over the innovation period, expanding from simple exchanges into collaborative team conversations that were similar to the problem-posing conversations in the CoP.

Initially, team leaders sought basic input from paraeducators to improve decision-making. They valued paraeducator opinions and perspectives about students, classroom routines, and instructional activities. Macey explained how she makes decisions with her paraeducator about student expectations, talking together to decide, "This goes. This doesn't go. Anything in between is not allowed" (CoP 1). Paige explained how she asked her paraeducator for information about a student as she considered a placement change:

> I need to know everyday the type of academics that [the student's] doing with you and if she's doing it independently or not. Because if we're going to consider [a placement change], I need to be able to prove that she's not doing it in here. I want to know exactly what you're doing. (pre-interview)

Team leaders valued collaborative team conversations to make classroom decisions, and they shared stories of success during CoP gatherings. CoP discussions about collaborative team conversations affirmed the importance of this leadership practice.

As discussed earlier in the chapter, the CoP utilized problem-posing conversations as they worked through team leadership challenges. During those conversations, they considered many options, gaining input from others in an open, non-judgmental dialogue. Diverse opinions were valued. There was no pressure to make final decisions about solutions because participants continued to reflect after CoPs.

159

This CoP model for shared problem solving influenced team leaders when they

returned to their classrooms, creating richer dialogue with their paraeducators. Brooke

reported, "I definitely took the communication and problem solving skills we worked on

in [the CoP] into my classroom. I felt more open to collaborate with my [paraeducators]

about different topics" (personal communication, January 1, 2016). Lisa explained that

the CoP influenced her willingness to engage in collaborative team conversations:

> [The CoP] definitely gave me a better perspective and confidence of going back
> into the classroom. Even if I didn't have a solution or know what I wanted to
> change right away, at least I would have ideas and conversations and talking
> points for the future. (focus group)

Lisa described having confidence to discuss ideas with her team before the solutions were

clear to her as a leader. Macey also talked about going to her team with multiple ideas

without feeling pressure to have the final solution ready to go. She explained seeking

team input about a variety of ideas and choosing the final solution as a team, saying:

> I can come to my team and say, here are multiple [ideas]. Let's pick. Let's plan it
> all out and see. Is it going to work? And then if something comes up where it's
> not going to work, great, well, we have another one to pick from the table. And
> it's just not one solid fixer-upper. It's multiple, multiple bandaids ... uh, to try and
> make it successful. (Macey, post-interview)

Macey's explanation indicates evidence of collaborative team conversations to identify

initial strategies as well as revise strategies as needed. Team leaders began to seek more

input from their paraeducators and appreciate the outcomes. Macey explained:

> We've been really honest with each other and so it's helped us develop, building
> up to the honesty and knowing that sugar coating's not going to help anything.
> And that it just needs to be very compassionate about the way that we
> communicate and know that again, it's not personal. It's student-based decisions
> that we're making. (post-interview)

Collaborative team conversations were the cornerstone of the overall theme related to cultivating collaborative team partnerships, showing how the CoP influenced team leader perspectives. Prior to the CoP, team leaders perceived communication barriers that made communication challenging. The CoP provided a model for collaborative problem-solving conversations that team leaders implemented in their classrooms with more confidence. Through collaborative team conversations, team leaders were able to utilize paraeducators and develop interdependent teams with shared practices. Brooke explained,

> I felt like I could lead the conversations as more of a leader compared to when we first started our [CoP]. By talking to [my paraeducators], I was able to see how they liked things to flow in our classroom and how they may have reacted if their ideas weren't necessarily used. I like to have the community feel in our class so I feel like a lot of our conversations are open. (post-interview)

Collaborative team conversations were essential to developing collaborative team partnerships. In the following section, I will describe quantitative results the provide complementarity to this qualitative theme.

ILA-PO Part I results: Collaborative partnership outcomes improved. ILA-PO Part I pre/post results provide complementarity regarding team leaders' perspectives about collaborative partnerships. As described in Chapter 3, the ILA-PO Part I used a semantic differential measure. Participants marked on a 4-inch line to indicate agreement with each statement, called the *agreement percentage*. The agreement percentage was based on the placement of their mark, indicating agreement between 0-100%. The change between the pre- and post-survey was called the *agreement change,* indicating how team leader perceptions of paraeducator outcomes changed over the innovation period. I calculated descriptive statistics to explore how participant responses changed over time.

161

There were two constructs in ILA-PO Part I that emerged during concurrent data analysis: Supervisor/Supervisee Outcomes and Collaborative Partnerships Outcomes. Tables 12 and 13 show group responses for the ILA-PO Part I items according to these two constructs, including the group means and standard deviations on the pre-survey, group means and standard deviations on the post-survey, and the agreement changes. First, Table 12 shows results from the Supervisor/Supervisee Outcomes construct.

Table 12

Supervisor/Supervisee Outcomes, Pre/Post Group Means and Agreement Change

Supervisor/Supervisee Outcomes (n=9)	Agreement Percentage (%)				Agreement Change (%)
	Pre		Post		
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Q3. When I show my paraeducator how to complete a task, s/he completes it appropriately.	83.7	18.4	92.9	12.2	+9.2
Q4. When I tell my paraeducator to do something, s/he follows my directions.	80.6	28.2	91.3	11.8	+10.7
Q8. My paraeducator follows the classroom schedule without reminders from me.	99.6	0.8	85.5	17.7	-14.1
Q9. My paraeducator follows professional rules (i.e. no cell phones, punctual, dress codes, attends campus duties as scheduled).	65.6	28.2	74.8	18.2	+9.2
Q10. When I give my paraeducator feedback, s/he listens and makes changes as needed.	80.6	24.0	88.8	17.6	+8.2
Q12. My paraeducator uses effective approaches while working with our students.	65.8	22.7	73.9	19.8	+8.1
Q13. My paraeducator maintains student confidentiality (does not talk to teachers outside our team).	83.7	17.5	76.3	25.9	-7.4
Q16. My paraeducator knows his/her role and responsibilities in the classroom.	69.9	18.6	84.8	17.8	+14.9
Q18. My paraeducator adjusts the instructional/behavior strategy when it's not working for a student.	58.3	34.2	62.5	33.6	+4.2
OVERALL CONSTRUCT	**78.7**	**11.4**	**81.2**	**10.0**	**+2.5**

Note. Agreement ranged from 0% (no agreement) to 100% (complete agreement) for each statement.

In Table 12, the group means for individual items in the Supervisor/Supervisee construct increased for all but two paraeducator outcomes. The group mean for the Supervisor/Supervisee construct increased 2.5% between the pre- and post-survey, changing from 78.7% agreement (*SD*=11.4%) to 81.2% (*SD*=10.0%). Next, Table 13 shows results from the Collaborative Partnership Outcomes construct.

162

Table 13

Collaborative Partnership Outcomes, Pre/Post Group Means and Agreement Change

Collaborative Partnership Outcomes (n=9)	Agreement Percentage (%)				Agreement Change (%)
	Pre		Post		
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Q1. My paraeducator uses instructional strategies that are similar to my instructional strategies.	59.8	25.0	78.8	12.4	+19.0
Q2. My paraeducator uses behavior strategies that are similar to my behavior strategies.	42.0	20.0	74.8	14.5	+32.8
Q5. When I suggest a new idea, my paraeducator is supportive/willing to try the new idea.	85.0	18.2	96.0	7.4	+11.0
Q6. My paraeducator stays focused on tasks that benefit our classroom/students.	79.2	23.1	85.3	15.8	+6.1
Q7. When my paraeducator feels like there is nothing to do, s/he asks me what to do to help.	38.2	32.3	50.7	17.4	+12.5
Q11. My paraeducator leads routine classroom activities (i.e. circle time, small groups, etc.) if I am busy.	64.3	40.0	79.9	23.8	+15.6
Q14. My paraeducator contributes ideas for the classroom.	65.2	41.0	75.2	24.7	+10.0
Q15. My paraeducator treats me with respect like I am the team leader.	89.7	18.4	91.3	14.6	+1.6
Q17. My paraeducator has a vision for our students that is similar to my vision.	61.6	35.4	73.9	23.8	+12.3
OVERALL CONSTRUCT	65.0	17.7	78.4	12.9	+13.4

Note. Agreement ranged from 0% (no agreement) to 100% (complete agreement) for each statement.

In Table 13, the group means for individual items increased for all paraeducator outcomes. The group mean for the Collaborative Partnership construct increased 13.4% between the pre- and post-survey, changing from 65.0% agreement (*SD*=17.7%) to 78.4% (*SD*=12.9%).

Examining the overall constructs, the agreement change for the Collaborative Partnership construct was greater (+13.4%) than the agreement change for the Supervisor/Supervisee construct (+2.5%). On the pre-survey, participants reported higher agreement with Supervisor/Supervisee outcomes (*M*=78.7, *SD*=11.4) than Collaborative Partnership outcomes (*M*=65.0, *SD*=17.7). The difference between the constructs was 13.7%. On the post-survey, agreement with both constructs was more similar, with a Supervisor/Supervisee group mean of 81.2 (*SD*=10.0) and a Collaborative Partnership group mean of 78.4 (*SD*=12.9). The difference was reduced to 2.8%. Overall, participant

agreement increased for both Supervisor/Supervisee outcomes and Collaborative

Partnership outcomes on the ILA-PO Part I; however, the increase in Collaborative

Partnership outcomes was greater. Table 14 illustrates these differences.

Table 14

Pre/Post Comparison of Paraeducator Outcomes Constructs

Paraeducator Outcomes Construct (n=9)	Agreement Percentage (%)				Agreement Change (%)
	Pre		Post		
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Supervisor/Supervisee	78.7	11.4	81.2	10.0	+2.5
Collaborative Partnership	65.0	17.7	78.4	12.9	+13.4

Note. Agreement ranged from 0% (no agreement) to 100% (complete agreement) for each statement

In conclusion, the CoP influenced collaborative partnership values for team

leaders in their classrooms. At the end of the innovation, team leaders perceived they had

greater influence over the following collaborative partnership qualities on their teams: (a)

shared values and practices, (b) utilizing paraeducators, (c) team interdependence, (d)

growth mindset, and (e) collaborative team conversations. Collaborative team partnership

values influenced the intentional leadership actions of team leaders in their classrooms.

The CoP Influenced Intentional Leadership Actions

When team leaders returned to their classrooms between CoP gatherings, they

implemented new strategies, engaging in the process of active experimentation described

in Experiential Learning Theory (Kolb, 1986). Active experimentation with team

leadership strategies improved the team and increased leadership efficacy. This theme

provides insight into RQ 1: *To what extent did the CoP influence early career teachers'*

perceptions of their ability to lead paraeducators in their classrooms? In this section, I

will describe how the CoP influenced intentional leadership actions, supporting the

arguments with qualitative and quantitative data. Team leaders overcame delegation

anxiety, developed appreciation for the positive outcomes, and sought to identify new responsibilities to delegate to their paraeducators. They reported that nothing "bad" happened when they took leadership actions, almost as though this was a surprise—instead, leadership actions transformed the team, increasing paraeducator contributions and engagement in the classroom.

Intentional leadership. Over the time of the CoP, team leaders experimented with new team leadership strategies. They embraced modern leadership ideas that aligned with Transformational Leadership (Bass & Avolio, 1993; Crowley, 2011; Pounder, 2006), with idealized influence, inspirational motivation, individualized consideration, and intellectual stimulation. As they had opportunities to gain peer feedback in the CoP, they stepped into their leadership role to guide the team.

Team leaders began to view themselves as experts as they shared and gained ideas during the CoP conversations. Macey talked about feeling more efficacious modeling and explaining her practices as the team leader with her paraeducators, saying:

> I'm being the role model of how I want communication with the kids to be and setting parameters up with voice tone level and in a positive way so the student doesn't feel that we're coming off too as negative. I feel like I'm able to now say, 'Hey, listen to what I'm saying,' and take away something. And so when that happens, I can say, 'Okay, what did you take away from that?' (post-interview)

This quote represents new perspectives about idealized influence as the team leader. Macey is seeing herself as the model, taking intentional steps to provide training, and having conversations with her paraeducators to check their understanding. Further, this description demonstrates evidence of more open, collaborative dialogue in Macey's classroom compared to her pre-interview description of feeling shut down in times of conflict. Brooke described providing more training and feedback to paraeducators:

165

I feel like I've become a better team leader…like, actually being prepared and making my expectations clear…Now if I overhear [my paraeducator] teaching a kid something and it's not right—or it's not the way that it's supposed to be taught—I immediately am like, 'Okay, I've got to jump in now or else the kid's going to learn it, and she's gonna keep doing it that same way. So with her, I just jump in immediately now. And I feel like, in the beginning I didn't do that.' (post-interview)

In this comment, Brooke is reflecting about her important role as the instructional leader for the team, monitoring instruction and jumping in to provide training for her paraeducator when different strategies were needed. Brooke's comment also demonstrates awareness of idealized influence as the team leader and her understanding that student progress is the team vision, even if there are uncomfortable moments when re-teaching on the spot is necessary. Lisa talked about taking more leadership initiative, giving more responsibilities to paraeducators, and seeing positive outcomes, saying:

Taking an initiative completely changed. I think I viewed [my paraeducators] in a very positive way in seeing what they are capable of, as well as with guiding the leadership and maybe putting a little bit more on them—understanding how to give that information or trust them with maybe more or things like that. I think [the CoP] really helped with team leadership in seeing how it can really affect your classroom. (post-interview)

Brooke also saw benefits in taking more leadership actions. She commented, "I noticed that [my paraeducator] needs that immediate feedback…if she does it [the wrong way]. If I just show her like, 'That's the wrong way. Here's the right way'—that immediately feedback—then it'll never happen again" (Brooke, post-interview). When participants talked about the changes they made in their classrooms, they talked about stepping into the leadership role, seeing themselves as the model in their classroom, and providing paraeducators with intentional guidance with student instruction, behavior management, and completing classroom tasks. Rather than seeing this new role as being "bossy,"

participants came to see this role as supporting their team. Brooke commented, "I had to take that leadership role and be like, "Okay, well you guys are supporting me in every way that you can. So now I have to support you as well" (post-interview).

Overcoming delegation anxiety. Team leaders spent a great deal of CoP time talking about delegating new responsibilities to their paraeducators. Delegation was both a challenge and a vision at the beginning of the CoP. Team leaders desired a classroom that ran with greater interdependence, as described earlier in this chapter, but they experienced delegation anxiety about passing duties to their paraeducators.

When participants talked about delegating new tasks to paraeducators, they shared the opinion that it could be challenge. Paige said, "giving that much responsibility scares me…struggling to release power" (CoP 2). Macey shared, "One of the challenges I have is letting go of being a control freak" (CoP 2). When another participant asked Jamie about getting her paraeducator to help collect assessment data, her response illustrated the challenge of beginning the delegation process. She said:

> Some things, I just kind of feel like are better if I do them myself. At this point in time, I feel more comfortable with me doing it. But yeah, there will probably be some stuff that I will have her do. (Jamie, CoP 4)

Jamie went on to mention doing this "some day," but clarified that she was not ready yet. Releasing control was one of the biggest challenges of delegating tasks to paraeducators. As team leaders met together in the CoP, they collaborated to figure out ways to delegate appropriate responsibilities. They shared feelings of worry and angst about the process. For example, Brooke talked about letting her paraeducator teach a science lesson, saying, "That was really hard—that somebody else was going to teach my class—legitimately teach them. I'm having a hard time with that" (CoP 2). Delegating responsibilities was an

167

emotional challenge, but participants celebrated their successes together. Lisa shared,

"I've realized how much more I can have them do in the morning in order to get ready

and how to make our room better" (CoP 6). Paige reflected:

> I had this idea that I had to be the only one in charge in my room and after coming [to CoP], kind of being okay with not having 100% control all of the time and making my [paraeducator] feel more valued, like, 'I know that you are capable of doing this so I am going to just let you do it and like trust you'—handing over some of that control. (focus group)

During her post-interview, Paige said that leadership is "being able to delegate the things

that you need done and being able to trust someone else." She continued:

> By giving [my paraeducator] more responsibilities, that helped me see that I didn't need all the power—kind of stepping away and trying not to have them be so dependent on me, and have the classroom be so dependent on me. Every time I give something away, it lets me know like: It's going to be okay. They're going to be fine. They will survive. Someone can handle this. It doesn't have to be me. (Paige, post-interview)

Though it took courage to pass on responsibilities, team leaders reported that delegating

tasks to paraeducators transformed their classrooms. Once they overcame delegation

anxiety, they entered a new phase of appreciating delegation outcomes and seeking

additional opportunities to pass responsibilities to their paraeducators.

New appreciation for delegation outcomes. Team leaders saw new strengths in

their paraeducators when they succeeded with delegated responsibilities. As a result,

team leaders developed interest in delegating additional responsibilities to their team.

Paraeducators became more engaged in the classroom and sought more

opportunities to help with appropriate tasks. Paige shared that her paraeducator was more

responsive about correcting behavior during circle time instead of waiting for directions

(post-interview). She also commented, "It's nice how she puts her own twist on stuff"

while leading circle (Paige, post-interview). Brooke shared that her paraeducator started

taking more initiative to help with various tasks, explaining:

> In the beginning [of the year], she was just kind of sitting there. And then, I started telling her, 'You know, well you can do this,' or 'You know, you can do this,' or whatever. But, now she's like, 'Okay. Well, can I do this for you?' and things like that or 'I noticed this needs to be done, can I do it?' (post-interview)

When team leaders took intentional leadership actions to delegate tasks, the team became

more interdependent as paraeducators figured out how to contribute. Paige explained how

her paraeducator took ownership of modifying strategies for a student, saying:

> I think it was because I was like, 'Here you go, teach it,' and she was like, 'Oh, he doesn't get it. How can I fix it?' Because I have been giving her more responsibility. I think she took it like, 'Oh okay well, I'm teaching this, so I need to find the strategy to teach it.' So she's kind of taking on more. I don't even know if she's realized that she's working more independently and finding strategies. (post-interview)

Lisa experienced similar transformation with her paraeducators. As the paraeducators

took on more projects in the classroom, they created wonderful new things that benefited

Lisa's students. Further, the paraeducators were more engaged with the students as they

used the materials that the paraeducators had made. Lisa explained, "They get more

excited about it and want to contribute more to it…They kind of enjoy having more

freedom with it and responsibility" (post-interview). Though team leaders experienced

delegation anxiety at the beginning of the innovation, they experienced delegation

enthusiasm at the end of the innovation when they saw how delegating tasks gave them

extra time in their day, transformed paraeducators, and benefited students. Positive

outcomes related to delegating tasks had ongoing influence on their leadership actions as

they sought additional opportunities to delegate new tasks to their paraeducators and

provide training to support the team's success.

Overcoming fears of failure. When participants shared stories about making changes as team leaders, there was an underlying narrative that "nothing bad happened." These comments seemed to indicate that positive outcomes exceeded participant expectations and disproved their fears, increasing leadership actions.

Team leaders seemed surprised when bad things did not happen. When I asked Lisa how her paraeducators were responding to more feedback, she answered, "Yeah, I mean, they haven't said anything negative. I think they're probably fine. (Lisa, post-interview). When Paige explained delegating tasks to her paraeducator, she added:

> She didn't seem to have any negative response to it. She was kind of like, 'Okay, I'll do it' and I think that for some of the things she was like, 'Oh, good. If I do them, then they'll be done.' (post-interview)

Participants often mentioned that bad stuff did not happen. When nothing bad happened, participants experienced an efficacy boost that contributed to more leadership actions. During Paige's post-interview, I asked her directly about this phenomenon in the following excerpt about delegating more responsibilities to her paraeducators:

> **Jess:** So do you thing that, as you've passed each thing on and seen successful results, that's reinforced the idea of passing more things on?
> **Paige**: Yeah, because every time I give her something, she's been pretty receptive and she's like, 'Okay, I'll do it,' and then I'm like, 'Oh, why don't you do this?' 'Okay, I'll do it.' 'And this?' 'Okay, I'll do it.' And it just like ... it's all transitioning to her pretty smoothly, and the kids are adjusting, and they don't seem to have too big of an issue when I change something.

The CoP increased intentional leadership actions for team leaders and decreased the fear of failure because they had additional ideas in their 'tool belt.' Brooke explained that she approached failure with a relaxed attitude, saying "Oh, that didn't go so well, so let's try a different way" (post-interview). Macey explained that she felt more comfortable explaining her ideas because it was "only going to help me better myself and my

170

leadership skills" (focus group). As participants acted more like leaders, nothing bad happened and they realized that intentional leadership actions improved their classrooms.

ILA-PO Part III results: Team leaders revised their leadership strategies. As discussed in Chapter 3, ILA-PO Part III included four Transformational Leadership (Bass & Riggio, 2006) constructs: Idealized Influence, Inspirational Motivation, Intellectual Stimulation, and Individualized Consideration. Each construct included five items, for a total of 20 team leadership strategies. Participants rated the importance of each team leadership strategy for team success from 1 (no influence) to 10 (high influence). I calculated descriptive statistics to examine how participant responses changed between the pre- and post-survey. Team leader perspectives about the importance of team leadership strategies changed over the innovation period, as shown below in Table 15, providing complementarity for themes discussed earlier in this chapter.

Table 15

ILA-PO Pre/Post Group Mean Change by Transformational Leadership Construct

Team Leadership Constructs	Pre		Post		Mean Change
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Idealized Influence	7.43	2.52	8.07	1.75	+0.63
Inspirational Motivation	7.57	2.03	7.90	2.09	+0.33
Intellectual Stimulation	7.00	2.32	7.27	2.38	+0.27
Individualized Consideration	7.40	2.10	7.33	2.11	-0.40

Note. Response values ranged from 1 (Strategy has no influence on team success) to 10 (Strategy has high influence on team success).

Idealized influence had the greatest change in the group mean (+0.63). As discussed earlier, team leaders perceived they had greater influence as models in their classrooms. Group means also increased for Inspirational Motivation (+0.33) and Intellectual Stimulation (+0.27). The CoP influenced team leader perspectives about

171

collaboration and delegation that motivated paraeducators and stimulated their thinking.

The group mean for Individualized Consideration decreased by 0.40, suggesting team

leaders were less interested strategies like getting to know their paraeducators. This

change may be related to the timing of the study. In September, getting to know their

paraeducators was more important than in December after they were well-acquainted.

To better understand how participant opinions changed, I ranked all 20 team

leadership strategies according to their group means. Tables 16 and 17 show the ranking

for the top 10 team leadership strategies on the pre-survey and post-survey, respectively.

Following these tables, I will compare the top five team leadership strategies from the

post-survey with their rankings from the pre-survey to see how team leader perspectives

changed regarding the importance of team leadership strategies. The CoP influenced team

leadership strategies when team leaders returned to their classrooms, changing

perspectives about the important strategies for team success.

Table 16

ILA-PO Pre-Survey Top 10 Team Leadership Strategies, Ranked by Group Mean

Rank	Mean	SD	Strategy for Team Leadership (Construct)
1	9.00	1.26	Delegate tasks/responsibilities to my paraeducator so our classroom runs efficiently. (IM)
2	8.83	2.04	Have informal team chats (as needed daily). (IS)
3	8.67	2.34	Get to know some personal details about my paraeducator. (IC)
4*	8.50	1.97	Lead by example, being a model for my paraeducator. (II)
4*	8.50	2.07	Celebrate student progress as a team. (IM)
4*	8.50	2.35	Ask my paraeducator to contribute ideas for our classroom/students. (IS)
7	8.17	2.23	Express my appreciation for my paraeducator. (IM)
8	7.67	2.58	Talk to my paraeducator immediately when there is a problem/concern. (IC)
9	7.50	2.88	Show my paraeducator how to work with our students. (II)
10*	7.33	2.94	Tell my paraeducator when s/he is successful with a student or task. (IC)
10*	7.33	3.01	Reflect on my leadership strategies and how they are working with my paraeducator. (II)

Notes. Response values ranged from 1 (Strategy has no influence on team success) to 10 (Strategy has high influence on team success). II= Idealized Influence. IC= Individualized Consideration. IM= Inspirational Motivation. IS= Intellectual Stimulation. * Items in 4th and 10th place had ties with the same group mean.

Table 17

ILA-PO Post-Survey Top 10 Team Leadership Strategies, Ranked by Group Mean

Rank	Mean	SD	Strategy for Team Leadership (Construct)
1	9.17	0.75	Delegate tasks/responsibilities to my paraeducator so our classroom runs efficiently. (IM)
2*	8.83	0.98	Lead by example, being a model for my paraeducator. (II)
2*	8.83	1.60	Talk to my paraeducator immediately when there is a problem/concern. (IC)
4	8.67	2.34	Express my appreciation for my paraeducator. (IM)
5	8.50	1.87	Reflect on my leadership strategies and how they are working with my paraeducator. (II)
6	8.33	1.86	Ask my paraeducator to contribute ideas for our classroom/students. (IS)
7	8.17	2.56	Celebrate student progress as a team. (IM)
8	8.00	2.76	Show my paraeducator how to work with our students. (II)
9	7.83	2.71	Have informal team chats (as needed daily). (IS)
10	7.67	3.44	Write lesson plans that my paraeducator can understand. (II)

Notes. Response values ranged from 1 (Strategy has no influence on team success) to 10 (Strategy has high influence on team success). II= Idealized Influence. IC= Individualized Consideration. IM= Inspirational Motivation. IS= Intellectual Stimulation. *These items tied in 2nd place with the same group mean.

Team leadership actions and CoP conversations changed participant perspectives, aligning ILA-PO Part III post-survey responses with qualitative themes from this study. Table 18 shows how the five most important team leadership strategies on the post-survey ranked on the pre-survey, reflecting how perspectives changed for these items. Group means for all these items increased between the pre- and post-survey.

Table 18

Pre/Post Means and Ranks of the Post-Survey Top 5 Team Leadership Strategies

Team Leadership Strategy	Pre-Survey Mean (SD)	Rank	Post-Survey Mean (SD)	Rank
Delegate tasks/responsibilities to my paraeducator so our classroom runs efficiently.	9.00 (1.26)	1	9.17 (0.75)	1
Lead by example, being a model for my paraeducator.	8.50 (1.97)	4	8.83 (0.98)	2*
Talk to my paraeducator immediately when there is a problem/concern.	7.67 (2.58)	8	8.83 (1.60)	2*
Express my appreciation for my paraeducator.	8.17 (2.23)	7	8.67 (2.34)	4
Reflect on my leadership strategies and how they are working with my paraeducator.	7.33 (3.01)	10	8.50 (1.87)	5

Notes. Response values ranged from 1 (Strategy has no influence on team success) to 10 (Strategy has high influence on team success). *These items tied in 2nd place with the same group mean.

In the following paragraphs, I will discuss how perspectives changed for these five strategies. I will also make connections about the complementarity to qualitative themes from this chapter.

Participants responded that *delegating tasks and responsibilities* was the most important team leadership strategy for their teams on both the pre-survey (*M*=9.00, *SD*=1.26) and post-survey (*M*=9.17, *SD*=0.75). Further, they grew closer in agreement about the importance of delegation, as shown by the decreased standard deviation. The CoP provided team leaders opportunities to discuss appropriate tasks to delegate to paraeducators and plan how to do so. As discussed earlier, team leaders overcame delegation anxiety and observed positive outcomes from collaborative partnerships.

Two items tied for second place on the post-survey ranking. One of those items was *Leading by example, being a model for my paraeducator.* On the pre-survey, this team leadership strategy was ranked in fourth place, tied with two other items. On the post survey, the group mean of this item increased from 8.50 (*SD*=1.97) to 8.83 (*SD*=0.98) and the standard deviation decreased, indicating closer participant agreement. During CoP gatherings, team leaders spoke about modeling good instruction and providing coaching if paraeducators were not using effective strategies, as discussed earlier in this chapter. Additionally, team leaders had opportunities to been seen as experts in the CoP, increasing their efficacy as leaders.

The second item in second place on the post-survey was *Talk to my paraeducator immediately when there is a problem/concern.* This item was ranked eighth place on the pre-survey. The group mean increased from 7.67 (*SD*=2.58) to 8.83 (*SD*=1.60), changing by +1.16. This provides complementarity to the theme that team leaders valued and

practiced talking to paraeducators, as discussed earlier in this chapter. This finding demonstrates significant transformation considering participants initially perceived communication barriers that prevented communication. During CoP gatherings, team leaders talked about talking to paraeducators to gain ideas and feedback from peers.

The item ranked in fourth place was *Express my appreciation for my paraeducator.* This item was ranked in seventh place on the pre-survey. On the post-survey, the mean of this item increased from 8.17 (*SD*=2.23) to 8.67 (*SD*=2.34). Team leaders appreciated their paraeducators and cultivated collaborative team partnerships.

The item ranked in fifth place was *Reflect on my leadership strategies and how they are working with my paraeducator.* This item ranked tenth on the pre-survey. On the post-survey, the group mean of this item increased from 7.33 (*SD*=3.01) to 8.50 (*SD*=1.87). As discussed earlier in this chapter, reflection was a transformative space for team leaders between CoP gatherings and their own classrooms.

In this section, I have shared how the CoP influenced teachers' roles as team leaders, collaborative partnerships, and intentional leadership actions. Finally, I will discuss how team leaders experienced identity transformation as they embraced their important role as the leader of the team.

Team Leaders Experienced Identity Transformation

As team leaders increased their leadership actions in classrooms and discussed leadership in the CoP, they enhanced their leadership identities. According to Wenger (1998), individuals are constantly negotiating and re-negotiating identity. In the CoP, team leaders were treated like experts as they shared challenges, suggested solutions, and offered feedback. This contributed to increased identity as leaders. First, I will share

175

results from ILA-PO Part II. Then, I will describe how team leaders developed a new view of leadership that affected their ideas about their future self and their opportunities for leadership beyond their classrooms. This theme provides insight into RQ1: *To what extent did the CoP influence early career teachers' perceptions of their ability to lead paraeducators in their classrooms?*

Increased efficacy responses on ILA-PO Part II. As discussed in Chapter 3, the ILA-PO Part II measured team leadership efficacy (Bandura, 1977) for three constructs: *Influencing Professional Behavior of Paraeducators, Influencing Instructional Practices of Paraeducators,* and *Influencing the Team of Paraeducators.* The following three tables show the pre/post group means for items in these constructs, demonstrating the change in team leader perspectives about influencing paraeducators. Table 19 shows changing perspectives about efficacy for influencing professional behaviors; Table 20 shows changing perspectives about efficacy for influencing the instructional practices of paraeducators; and Table 21 shows changing perspectives for efficacy about influencing the team qualities. Discussion points will follow.

Table 19

Pre/Post Group Means for Influencing Professional Behavior of Paraeducators

How much can I do so that my paraeducator… (n=5)	Feelings of Influence (1-10)				Mean Change
	Pre		Post		
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
1. Clocks in/out on time, including lunch break?	5.50	2.59	6.75	2.79	+1.25
2. Does not share confidential student information with inappropriate staff at school?	6.83	2.93	7.67	2.58	+0.83
3. Follows the times/activities in the classroom schedule?	9.17	0.98	9.83	0.41	+0.67
4. Uses his/her cell phone at appropriate times (per my discretion)?	7.50	2.07	9.00	1.55	+1.50
5. Knows what to do (responsibilities) during the school day?	9.17	1.60	9.33	1.63	+0.17
6. Has a positive attitude at work?	6.00	1.55	6.83	2.71	+0.83
7. Does not share inappropriate information with a parent/guardian?	9.00	0.89	8.17	1.83	-0.83
CONSTRUCT TOTAL	**7.60**	**2.31**	**8.23**	**2.24**	**+0.63**

Note. Response range varied from 1 (Nothing) to 10 (A great deal).

Table 20

Pre/Post Group Means for Influencing Instructional Practices of Paraeducators

| How much can I do to… (n=5) | Feelings of Influence (1-10) | | | | Mean Change |
| | Pre | | Post | | |
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
8. Promote positive interactions between paraeducators and students?	8.50	0.84	8.83	1.60	+0.33
9. Get a paraeducator to use effective instructional practices while working with students?	8.50	1.05	8.17	1.83	-0.33
10. Set the example for effective instructional practices when I work with students?	9.00	2.00	9.67	0.52	+0.67
11. Alter the strategies my paraeducator uses with students?	8.00	1.67	8.58	1.28	+0.58
12. Gain input from my paraeducators about student progress?	9.33	0.82	9.83	0.41	+0.50
CONSTRUCT TOTAL	**8.67**	**1.35**	**9.02**	**1.34**	**+0.35**

Note. Response range varied from 1 (Nothing) to 10 (A great deal).

Table 21

Pre/Post Group Means for Influencing the Team of Paraeducators

| How much can I do to… (n=5) | Feelings of Influence (1-10) | | | | Mean Change |
| | Pre | | Post | | |
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
13. Have a common vision?	8.17	1.47	9.67	0.52	+1.50
14. Have common team goals?	8.67	1.63	9.83	0.41	+1.17
15. Have positive interpersonal relationships between team members (getting along)?	8.33	1.63	9.17	1.33	+0.83
16. Gain suggestions from paraeducator(s) to improve the classroom or student progress?	9.50	0.55	9.67	0.52	+0.17
17. Have regular opportunities to discuss team procedures for classroom/students?	9.50	0.55	8.67	1.86	+0.17
18. Encourage my paraeducator to grow professionally to reach personal goals?	7.67	3.61	7.00	3.46	-0.67
CONSTRUCT TOTAL	**8.64**	**1.87**	**9.00**	**1.88**	**+0.36**

Note. Response range varied from 1 (Nothing) to 10 (A great deal).

Participants reported greater efficacy for all three areas of team leadership in special education: influencing the professional behavior of paraeducators (+0.63), influencing instructional practices of paraeducators (+0.35) and influencing team qualities (+0.36). Group means increased for all items, except for 7, 9, and 18. The professional behaviors construct showed the greatest increase on the post-survey, but was lowest scoring construct compared to instructional practices and influencing the team. Efficacy influenced their leadership identity, as I will discuss in the following three sub-sections.

New view of leadership. The CoP influenced team leaders by providing time and space to discuss team leadership. Team leaders developed a new vision of team leadership and a new view of themselves as unstoppable change leaders in their context.

Team leaders redefined what team leadership should look like in their classrooms. They realized the importance of their roles to promote student progress. Lisa explained, "I think having a more clear vision as a team leader has really helped and changed how I've been a leader in the classroom…because I see that there's so much growth in these kids when we're all working as a team" (post-interview). Participants developed understanding of collaborative partnerships and the importance of delegation. Macey said she realized a "leader is not just one person; it's how that person can delegate certain things to make whatever it is that you are working on successful" (focus group). Paige stated, "It doesn't mean that you are not a leader because you are not in charge" (focus group). In her post-interview, Brooke explained that her perspectives changed, expanding her ideas about delegation and giving her paraeducators a chance to grow as well, saying:

> If I were still in the same spot that I was in the beginning of the year, I would definitely say, 'Okay, yup. None of us are going to be able to work together.' But now that I've grown as a leader, and I think they have too, I've kind of given them more responsibility...so they're able to grow as well. And I think, if I wouldn't have grown, then they would still be in the same spot they were as well.

In this quote, Brooke reports a new view of leadership that enabled her team to stay together, working collaboratively in a new way that utilized all team members. A month after the CoP ended, Brooke reported that one of her paraeducator took a promotion, leaving a position vacant. Brooke smiled and talked about feeling confident that she would be successful with a new paraeducator based on the things she had learned in the Team Leadership CoP.

178

Team leaders felt successful and unstoppable. When Macey completed her ILA-PO Part II post-survey, she rated her ability to influence every item at level 10, high influence. She explained feeling like she could overcome any obstacle in the future. Macey described overcoming the fear of failure by adjusting new ideas until they were successful. She explained, "If sometimes my ideas don't work, then they just don't work and that's okay. I think it's important to be okay with trial and error" (Macey, post-interview). At the beginning of the CoP, team leaders were paralyzed with fear about taking imperfect leadership actions. At the end of the CoP, they were comfortable with the unpredictable nature of leadership in special education.

Leading beyond the classroom. The CoP influenced team leaders' efficacy as leaders in their classrooms, influencing their leadership confidence beyond their classrooms as well. Macey talked about viewing herself as a resource to others on her campus, saying, "I kind of reflect back on what we discuss [in the CoP] and give them that [advice] based on what they tell me" (post-interview). Macey's comment shows how she sought opportunities to relate to others with problem-posing conversations outside of the CoP, taking the CoP model to her own school site. Brooke shared that she felt more comfortable speaking up to collaborate with veteran teachers on her grade-level team after feeling silenced for a long time. She explained:

> In the beginning of the year, I was not speaking up at all. I just felt like, in my PLC team, they're all veteran teachers. So I'm just sitting here like, this first year teacher, like, 'Okay, cool, yeah, you guys say that. I'm just going to write it down,' or you know whatever. And finally, I was just like, 'You know, this is enough. I'm not being heard. I don't agree with any of this…' And, so just being able to talk to them as well and then using some of the strategies, like 'Well, I see that you are thinking this, and this is how I'm thinking.' (Brooke, post-interview)

This quote shows how a CoP of peers can influence early career teacher confidence to cross the boundaries of legitimate peripheral participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991) in settings with more experienced colleagues. Lisa explained that she was more attuned to leadership opportunities outside her classroom. She explained thinking, "Okay, how can I be more of a leader? How can I step up in the classroom and in the school?" (post-interview). The CoP influenced team leaders' confidence so much in their classrooms that they expanded their leadership identity into other settings on their school campus. When I reflected on these stories from post-interviews, I wrote about this concept in my researcher journal:

> We were our own learning community and that created a spark that made learning communities pop up in other places. It gave teachers voice and a sense of efficacy that made them feel like they could contribute to other learning communities… It's like they became boundary brokers of that mindset. (12/9/15)

CoP conversations were a unique space to co-construct leadership knowledge and identity that extended beyond the four walls of the special education classroom.

In this chapter, I discussed themes in qualitative and quantitative data that support the assertions in this study. In Chapter 5, I will discuss each assertion and make connections to existing literature or theory.

CHAPTER 5: ASSERTIONS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter articulates five assertions based on the findings of this mixed methods study. I will begin with an overview of the study. Then, I will present assertions in the context of supporting literature and extend the discussion further with my own reflections about how this study is situated within existing scholarship.

Overview of the Study

In this mixed methods action research study, I cultivated a Team Leadership CoP with six early career special education teachers. I participated as both a CoP member and coordinator. The CoP met six times over a three-month period to reflect on leadership experiences, co-create understandings, and discuss team leadership strategies. The CoP evolved organically after its initial conception, developing balanced co-ownership of the group's agenda among members. Data sources included pre-interviews, post-interviews, a focus group, the Teacher Group Reflection Survey, the Intentional Leadership Actions and Paraeducator Outcomes Survey, and Content Logs from audio recordings.

According to Green (2007), the purpose of a mixed method study with a focus on complementarity is to study complex and multifaceted phenomena. In this research, I used points of interface (Guest, 2012) as a mixed methods design to provide opportunities to collect complex sources of data, analyze them with complementarity, and combine results to understand how the data is related to answer the following research questions:

- **RQ1:** To what extent did the CoP influence early career teachers' perceptions of their ability to lead paraeducators in their classrooms?

- **RQ2:** How and to what extent did the CoP engage in problem-solving dialogues about team leadership in special education?

- **RQ3:** How and to what extent did CoP members identify leadership strategies or co-

  create resources together?

- **RQ4:** How did I negotiate the duality of being both a CoP coordinator and member?

Assertions

In this section, I will articulate and describe five key assertions related to this

study, explain how the themes from Chapter 4 inform each assertion, situate the

assertions within existing literature, and extend the literature with the findings of this

study. Figure 9 illustrates the relationship between assertions and themes from Chapter 4.

Assertion 1: Team leaders avoided the identity of supervisor/boss *over* their paraeducators and sought a collaborative partnership *with* paraeducators to promote student progress and negotiate classroom responsibilities.
• Team leaders felt constrained by traditional leadership identities • The CoP influenced collaborative partnership values (including ILA-PO Part I) • The CoP influenced intentional leadership actions (including ILA-PO Part III)
Assertion 2: To overcome perceived communication barriers, team leaders spent CoP time planning and preparing for conversations with paraeducators.
• Perceived communication barriers influenced leadership actions • Team leaders talked about talking to paraeducators
Assertion 3: Leadership in communion with others stretched team leaders as a learning Community of Practice in which I intentionally maintained my role as a co-member.
• Team leaders engaged in the CoP experience • Team leaders sought alignment during CoP conversations • CoP conversations stretched imagination about team leadership • Problem-posing conversations reflected the Experiential Learning framework
Assertion 4: The CoP was a framework for Experiential Learning about Team Leadership, especially ongoing reflection within and outside the CoP, as team leaders determined leadership actions.
• Problem-posing conversations reflected the Experiential Learning framework • Team leaders experienced individual reflection about team leadership
Assertion 5: When team leaders experienced positive leadership outcomes, they sought more leadership opportunities in their classroom and beyond.
• The CoP influenced intentional leadership actions (including ILA-PO Part III) • Team leaders experienced identity transformation (including ILA PO Part II)

Figure 9. Alignment of Assertions with Themes

Assertion 1

Assertion 1 is: *Team leaders avoided the identity of supervisor/boss over their paraeducators and sought a collaborative partnership with paraeducators to promote student progress and negotiate classroom responsibilities.* Assertion 1 is supported by three qualitative themes: (a) Team leaders felt constrained by traditional leadership identities, (b) The CoP influenced collaborative partnership values, and (c) The CoP influenced intentional leadership actions. Additionally, Assertion 1 is supported by quantitative results from ILA-PO Parts I and III.

Team leaders felt constrained by traditional leadership identities. Initially, team leaders felt unprepared for leadership responsibilities and unqualified to be positions of power, seeking to avoid the identity of "boss." They disliked the idea of giving direct orders to paraeducators, especially when paraeducators were older or more experienced. During CoP conversations, team leaders did not talk about becoming the "boss." Instead, they discussed collaborative partnership values with shared practices, interdependence, utilizing paraeducators, a growth mindset, and collaborative team conversations. When team leaders returned to their classrooms, they implemented new team leadership strategies that reflected their collaborative partnership values. They delegated responsibilities to paraeducators and provided support as the team leader. As a result, collaborative team partnerships became stronger and paraeducators sought more opportunities to contribute to the team.

At the end of the innovation period, participants reported greater influence over collaborative team partnership qualities in their classrooms. Teams became more aligned in their practices, working together with interdependence to promote student progress.

183

Collaborative team conversations transformed the practices of team leaders because they gained input from paraeducators, opening the door for innovation and decreasing the fear of failure. ILA-PO Part I results showed that Collaborative Partnership outcomes increased more than Supervisor/Supervisee outcomes. Team leaders were focused on qualities of collaborative partnerships during the innovation rather than being the "boss." According to ILA-PO Part III, team leaders valued strategies that reflected collaborative partnerships, including delegating responsibilities to paraeducators, expressing appreciation for their contributions, seeking their input, and having informal team chats. Informal team chats ranked much higher than formal team meetings, 9th and 20th respectively, possibly indicating that teachers preferred to be situated in a collaborative discussion role rather than a more formal leadership role. Essentially, team leaders wanted to be the "team captain" rather than the "team boss."

Assertion 1 indicates misalignment between scholarly literature and the leadership perspectives of participants in this study. Currently, a great amount of literature discusses the act of "supervising" paraeducators in special education settings (French, 1997, 2001, 2003; Gerlach & Lee, 1997; Pickett & Gerlach, 1997; Steckelberg et al., 2007; Trautman, 2004; Wallace, Shin, Batholomay, & Stahl, 2001). In Chapter 1, I stated the term "supervising" paraeducators is outdated. Modern day employees desire opportunities for self-actualization, respect, recognition, and fulfillment in the workplace alongside transformational leaders (Crowley, 2011). In Assertion 1, team leaders gravitated toward collaborative partnerships and avoided terms like "supervisor" and "boss." As shown in this assertion, the time has come for an updated term like "team leadership" that reflects the complexities of the team leader's role and the benefits of collaborative partnerships.

184

According to scholars, collaborative partnerships benefit the team (Capizzi & Da Fonte, 2012). Assertion 1 reflected this truth. In the literature, paraeducators report higher job satisfaction and feelings of respect in collaborative environments (Riggs, 2004), especially when they are entrusted with important responsibilities, given opportunities to provide input, and shown gratitude for their contributions (Giangreco et al., 2001). This study supports the work of Chopra et al., (2011), who reported the following actions to promote paraeducator success: (a) the teacher leads the team, (b) the teacher treats the paraeducators as important team members, (c) the teacher sets boundaries for paraeducators' roles and relationships with students and parents, (d) the teacher plans with paraeducators, (e) the teacher coaches and guides paraeducators, (f) the teacher encourages the paraeducators' professional development, and (g) the teacher is a role model for paraeducators (p. 19-22). The shift in the literature from "supervising" paraeducators to "leading" collaborative teams is beginning and should continue so that literature reflects the contemporary workplace in schools today.

Assertion 2

Assertion 2 is: *To overcome perceived communication barriers, team leaders spent CoP time planning and preparing for conversations with paraeducators.* Assertion 2 is supported by two themes: (a) Perceived communication barriers influenced leadership actions and (b) Team leaders talked about talking to paraeducators. Additionally, Assertion 2 is supported by quantitative results from ILA-PO Part III.

Team leaders perceived communication barriers that influenced their leadership actions. Though they felt resourceful, anxiety prevented action because team leaders felt they possessed inadequate communication skills, lacked training in communication

185

strategies, and might not deliver the message successfully. The high stakes of maintaining positive relationships and avoiding tension in the classroom further complicated matters.

To overcome these barriers, team leaders talked about talking to paraeducators during CoP gatherings. Communication was the most frequently suggested team leadership strategy, and team leaders discussed ideas to approach conversations positively. Though team leaders did not outwardly say they were practicing for conversations, communication practice flowed naturally through the CoP dialogue. There were instances of reported speech (Holt, 2009) when team leaders reported words they had already spoken to paraeducators, celebrating their team leadership success. Additionally, there were other instances of discourse[19], including rehearsed speech, modeled rehearsed speech, and unrefined speech. As team leaders talked about talking to paraeducators, they broke through perceived barriers and faced limit perceptions by getting peer feedback. Increased confidence contributed to increased team leadership actions when leaders returned to their classrooms. On the ILA-PO Part III, team leaders reported increased importance of the team leadership strategy *Talk to my paraeducators immediately when there is a problem or a concern*. This strategy increased in rank from 8th to 2nd place with a group mean increase from 7.67 (*SD*=2.58) to 8.83 (*SD*=1.60). Talking about talking transformed team leaders, increasing their confidence as communicators so they could implement changes they envisioned for their classrooms.

Assertion 2 is supported by scholarly literature. Negotiation of meaning led to reification of knowledge that was mutually understood by CoP members (Wenger, 1998).

---

[19] As noted in Chapter 4, I conceived the terms rehearsed speech, modeled rehearsed speech, and unrefined speech to illustrate the function of this discourse in CoP conversations.

In the CoP, communication strategies were reifications of co-constructed knowledge about team leadership as participants talked about talking to paraeducators. As similarly reported by Carlson, May, Loertscher, & Cobia (2003), this study supported the importance of early career teachers being grouped together with peers for conversations, brainstorming, learning new practices, solving problems, and developing skills. Team leaders discussed communication strategies and enhanced their feelings of efficacy. Carlson et al. (2003) reported adults retain knowledge by actively hearing, saying, doing, and seeing the skill they are practicing. This study supported Carlson et al.'s work because team leaders practiced talking to paraeducators as though speaking to them directly during CoP conversations. As a social framework for learning, CoP members learned by engaging with other members of the CoP (Lave & Wenger, 1991) as they co-constructed communication strategies to face the perceived barriers in their classrooms.

Assertion 3

Assertion 3 is: *Leadership in communion with others stretched team leaders as a learning Community of Practice in which I intentionally maintained my role as co-member.* Assertion 3 is supported by four themes: (a) Team leaders engaged in the CoP experience, (b) Team leaders sought alignment during CoP conversations, (c) CoP conversations stretched imagination about team leadership, and (d) Problem-posing conversations reflected the Experiential Learning framework.

In Chapter 2, I proposed that teachers who participated in this study would experience individual transformation if the CoP evolved into a learning community that shared resources and strategies with one another. The CoP did evolve into a learning community with the three modes of belonging: engagement, alignment, and imagination

187

(Wenger, 1998). First, team leaders worked together for the purpose of learning, solving problems, and changing their thinking. Second, they developed shared understanding about topics, issues, problems, and new information. Third, team leaders shared ideas to help each other envision new possibilities and imagine situations in other ways. They benefited from being together with other team leaders who had similar leadership goals— co-creating their agenda—because they did not have access to colleagues, time, or space for these conversations at their school sites. Participants discovered similarities and realized they were not alone in their team leadership struggles. Together, they embarked on a shared journey to transform team leadership in their individual classrooms.

The CoP provided an opportunity for early career teachers to be "experts" to one another in a trusting environment with authentic peer feedback, affirming ideas or creating paths to new thinking that increased their 'tool belts.' The new thinking about team leadership was the reification of knowledge in the CoP. Through problem-posing conversations, team leaders stretched each other by promoting reflection, suggesting alternate meanings, offering objectivity, and discussing possible leadership actions. Giving and receiving peer feedback increased leadership efficacy and contributed to leadership actions. Participants celebrated successes and shared their individual lessons through reflective stories, multiplying the shared learning for all. Most importantly, problem-posing conversations were a model for collaborative team conversations that participants integrated into their school sites with paraeducators and colleagues. The CoP stretched team leaders through shared dialogue with their peers, sparking a desire to cultivate similar dialogues with others in their professional world.

Assertion 3 is supported by scholarly literature. According to Meyer (2002), "many novice teachers feel isolated and eager to find a safe place to examine their early teaching experiences" (p. 38). The CoP provided support to teachers as they struggled and succeeded in communion with other team leaders. Team leadership is a complex challenge, especially for early career special education teachers (French & Chopra, 2006; McGrath et al., 2010). The CoP enabled team leaders to co-negotiate the complexities of team leadership together with an agenda that reflected their needs.

In his work to bring literacy and liberation to illiterate citizens in Brazil, Freire (2000) refuted the traditional banking model of education[20] and wrote about the importance of problem-posing education. According to Freire, the banking concept of education stifles new ideas, advances the one-sided perspective of the instructor, and limits students to "receiving, filing, and storing deposits" (p. 72). Undoubtedly, Freire's work was different than the work of team leaders in this study, but the joint co-construction of knowledge and freedom to determine their own agenda was an important element of this study. The CoP was a setting unlike traditional professional development spaces in schools today. This innovation intentionally shifted the power of knowledge creation into the hands of team leaders, outside of the constraints of a formal professional development agenda constructed by others. By maintaining my role as a co-member in the CoP and carefully navigating my steps as a researcher and CoP coordinator, team leaders experienced freedom to advance their own ideas through conversation. Freire (2000) writes, "human beings in communion liberate each other" (p. 133). In this study,

---

[20] A teaching style in which participants are subjected to direct-instruction from someone deemed to be a "qualified expert" with an agenda that participants do not control.

team leadership in communion with others liberated team leaders from limit perceptions so they could reframe barriers and embrace their role as team leaders in their classrooms.

Cuddupah & Clayton (2011) suggest new teachers should have opportunities to collaborate with peers in CoPs to develop and reflect on practices, share resources, encourage each other, and solve problems. This study supports the work of Cuddupah & Clayton. Team leaders benefited from learning about team leadership in the CoP. During discussions, teachers shared vulnerabilities, encouraged one another, and "in helping each other make meaning of their experiences, they validated one another's practices and mentored each other" (Cuddapah & Clayton, 2011, p. 70). The Team Leadership CoP was valuable because it reframed the work of novice teachers, shifting away from the view that new teachers lack knowledge. Instead, this model affirmed new teachers as knowledgeable professionals with resources to share. The CoP gave early career team leaders immediate status as full members of the CoP, eliminating the legitimate peripheral participation trajectory (Lave & Wenger, 1991) that typically occurs when novices participate in CoPs alongside veterans.

Assertion 4

Assertion 4 is: *The CoP was a framework for Experiential Learning about Team Leadership, especially ongoing reflection within and outside the CoP, as team leaders determined leadership actions.* Assertion 4 illustrates and extends the theoretical framework of this study: Experiential Learning about Team Leadership in a CoP. Assertion 4 is supported by two themes: (a) Problem-posing conversations reflected the Experiential Learning framework and (b) Team leaders experienced individual reflection about team leadership. Assertion 4 is also supported by results from ILA-PO Part III.

190

The CoP provided a gathering space for Experiential Learning (Kolb, 1986) that enhanced team leadership practices. Team leaders had concrete experiences in their own classroom contexts. During the CoP, team leaders described their concrete leadership experiences and engaged in problem-posing conversations with elements of reflection, abstract conceptualization, and ideas for active experimentation. Problem-posing conversations moved from topic to topic without clear resolutions. Team leaders were not looking for direct answers or solutions from one another; instead, they interacted like brainstorming partners during CoPs and continued with independent reflection after CoPs. The CoP supported the reflective process of Experiential Learning by providing designated time for participants to pause, consider options, determine steps, and anticipate challenges.

Team leaders described ongoing, individual reflection during the CoP gatherings, on their drive home, during a motivation period that lasted for a few days after CoPs, and during critical moments in their classrooms. Time together in the CoP altered participant thinking and created additional opportunities for a reflective mindset around team leadership decisions. Participants reported they were more likely to pause and consider options during critical moments instead of implementing fast solutions without considering all the factors. ILA-PO Part III findings about the importance of team leadership strategies reflected this shift in mindset. The item *Reflect on my leadership strategies and how they are working with my paraeducator* increased in rank from 10th to 5th place with a group mean increase from 7.33 (*SD*=3.01) to 8.50 (*SD*=1.87). Given Assertion 4, I revised my theoretical framework for Experiential Learning about Team Leadership in a CoP, shown in Figure 10.

1. Concrete leadership
experience in classroom
(Something happens)

2. Reflective observation
during CoP conversation
Collaboratively discussing
leadership experience with peers

4. Active leadership
experimentation in classroom
Leader applies newly constructed
team leadership ideas (from COP and
individual reflection)

Individual
reflection about
CoP conversation
and peer feedback

Pre-planning
future actions

3. Abstract conceptualization
Constructing meaning about
leadership experiences
(Co-constructed during CoP and
individually constructed after CoP)

Experiential Learning about Team Leadership in a COP

Figure 10. Revised theoretical framework: ELT/TFL/CoP

In the revised theoretical framework for Experiential Learning about Team

Leadership in a CoP, I added a loop in the middle of the diagram to represent each team

leader's ongoing reflection and abstract conceptualization before and after the CoP

gatherings. The initial theoretical framework did not account for individual reflection

outside of the CoP. Additionally, I added the step "pre-planning future actions" to

represent the CoP conversations in which participants discussed team leadership actions

but did not finalize their decisions during the CoP conversations. Pre-planning

conversations were important because participants continued to reflect on peer feedback

from those conversations to determine the appropriate team leadership actions for active

experimentation in their classrooms. Reflection was actually the most transformative

aspect of this tri-theory framework as team leaders considered CoP conversations when

they returned to their classrooms. Through reflection, team leaders put the CoP

conversations into dialogue with their own knowledge as team leaders to determine the

appropriate team leadership actions for their individual teams.

192

Assertion 4 and the revised ELT/TFL/CoP framework are supported by scholarly

literature. According to Experiential Learning Theory (Kolb, 1984), the learner is an

active participant in the learning process instead of a passive observer. Team leaders

actively participated in the learning process during CoP gatherings, listening for ideas

and considering whether those ideas were appropriate for their teams. Kolb, Baker, &

Jensen (2002) use the term *conversational learning* to describe reflective peer dialogue.

In conversational learning, meaning construction occurs before, during, and after[21] group

conversations. In this study, reflection was a change agent that transformed team leaders

through ongoing inner dialogue before, during, and after CoPs. Assertion 4 and the

revised ELT/TFL/CoP framework align with the ideas of conversational learning.

Harrison et al. (2005b) state that reflection "is a process of making *what we learn*

make *sense*, so we better understand it" (p. 423). Team leaders made sense of team

leadership strategies during the CoP through peer dialogue. Ongoing personal reflection

outside of the CoP deepened their understanding of CoP conversations. Gehrke & McCoy

(2012) recommend teachers need time to reflect on their personal beliefs through

discussion with peers and consider alternative practices. The CoP provided opportunities

for peer problem-posing conversations and discussion of alternative practices. According

to Miller (2008), peer dialogue provides a means for teachers to reflect with colleagues

and modify practices over time. The CoP provided opportunities for reflective peer

dialogue about team leadership, facilitating thinking for team leaders to make sense of

their experiences and modify their team leadership practices accordingly. The reflective

---

[21] Kolb et al. use the terms *precourse* (before), *discourse* (during), and *postcourse* (after).

time multiplied their learning as they considered new ideas before, during, and after the CoP. Active experimentation in the field, CoP conversations, and ongoing reflection influenced team leader perceptions of their ability to lead paraeducators in their classrooms and accomplish their team leadership goals.

Assertion 5

Assertion 5 is: *When team leaders experienced positive leadership outcomes, they sought more leadership opportunities in their classroom and beyond.* Assertion 5 is supported by two themes: (a) The CoP influenced intentional leadership actions and (b) Team leaders experienced identity transformation. Additionally, Assertion 5 is supported by quantitative results from ILA-PO Part II and Part III.

The CoP influenced intentional leadership actions as team leaders developed greater clarity regarding their roles as team leaders. Participants overcame delegation anxiety, embraced their roles guiding the team, and increased leadership actions in their classrooms. Increased leadership actions contributed to greater leadership outcomes, reinforcing the importance and confidence of the team leaders. Team leaders appreciated the extra support when paraeducators accepted new responsibilities. This enhanced their imaginations about utilizing paraeducators to promote student progress in new ways, contributing to additional team leadership actions in a positive reinforcement loop. The CoP was the supportive structure for leaders to share and celebrate stories of success.

When team leaders experienced positive outcomes from their leadership actions, they diminished perceived barriers and experienced identity transformation. Participants reported they were able to implement new ideas to improve the learning environment. Partnerships made risk manageable because team leaders collaborated with their

194

paraeducators when changes were needed. Team leaders encouraged authentic dialogues and critical feedback on their teams. Identity transformation enabled team leaders to openly discuss their practices, being vulnerable and open to new ideas that could improve outcomes for kids. Therefore, team leaders overcame their fears of failure when nothing "bad" happened on their teams, and they sought to be innovative with new goals. On ILA-PO Part III, team leaders highly rated the importance of idealized influence, seeing themselves as a model for their paraeducators. The strategy *Lead by example, being a model for my paraeducator* increased in ranking from 4th to 2nd with group mean increase from 8.50 (*SD*=1.97) to 8.83 (*SD*=0.98). As a result of these leadership actions and positive outcomes, team leaders reported higher perceptions of influence over paraeducator professional behaviors, instructional behaviors, and team values on ILA-PO Part II.

The CoP was the change agent for this identity transformation. Participation in the Team Leadership CoP provided early career special education teachers with opportunities to be experts to their peers. Increased leadership actions and positive outcomes further supported and enhanced leadership identity. Limit perceptions decreased and team leaders began to see themselves as influential change leaders who could accomplish their team leadership goals. They co-created a new view of team leadership that valued collaborative partnerships, delegation, and balanced power; however, this idea did not diminish their view of themselves as leaders. Instead, team leaders saw themselves as the leaders orchestrating the details of the partnership. With courage, team leaders thought of themselves as leaders within their classroom and sought new opportunities for leadership beyond their classrooms as well.

Assertion 5 is supported by scholarly literature. Cohen (2010) found that concepts of teacher identity develop through shared conversation with colleagues, especially when conversation relates to collaboration and problem solving. CoPs constantly negotiate meaning and identity through shared experiences and social interactions within their group (Wenger, 1998). In this study, CoP conversations influenced team leadership actions when team leaders co-determined authentic leadership strategies that felt natural for their personalities. According to Bass & Riggio (2006), Transformational Leadership behaviors are not inherent traits, but intentional actions by leaders. The CoP assisted team leaders with determining appropriate actions for their teams.

Actions resulted in positive outcomes that influenced team leadership efficacy. As defined by Bandura (1977), self-efficacy relates to an individual's beliefs about competence for an activity. Increased team leadership efficacy increased team leadership actions, promoting change through a positive reinforcement loop of actions and repeated success. According to Hoy & Spero (2005), self-efficacy affects the effort teachers invest in teaching, their goals and aspirations, and resilience. Team leaders invested time by attending CoP gatherings. Team leadership efficacy developed through individual classroom experiences and shared experiences in the CoP, influencing team leader goals and resilience with their teams.

According to Bandura (1977), "expectations of personal efficacy determine whether coping behavior will be initiated, how much effort will be expended, and how long it will be sustained in the face of obstacles and aversive experiences" (p. 191). The CoP was a support structure that enhanced team leadership efficacy because team leaders celebrated their success together and jointly negotiated challenges, increasing the

196

momentum of the group as they worked toward their goals. Without supports, challenges can decrease self-efficacy as teachers develop professional identity (Day et al., 2006). In this study, team leadership in communion with others in the CoP enhanced teacher resilience so they could overcome challenges and barriers together.

The team leader is responsible for implementing leadership strategies that promote the effectiveness of the team (Atwater & Bass, 1994). When team leaders increased their leadership identity in this study, it transformed their actions and their teams. According to Chopra et al. (2011), teacher leadership in special education classrooms is the most important factor for team collaboration, paraeducator effectiveness, and student success. When team leaders increased their leadership identity, they sought to provide more training, guidance, and opportunities for collaborative conversations. According to Trautman (2004), paraeducators need regular training about instructional strategies and behavior management. When provided coaching, paraeducators increase instructional strategies and self-efficacy about teaching students (Chopra et al., 2011). Team leaders in this study reported greater team interdependence and student engagement as paraeducators increased their initiative and efficacy in the classroom.

When team leaders in this study developed greater identity as leaders in their classrooms, they behaved like leaders and found they had influence in their classrooms to lead paraeducators and maximize student progress. According to Langley et al. (2009), individuals must embrace the unexpected to develop and test change because waiting for perfection stifles the innovative process. Positive leadership outcomes were so rewarding that team leaders began to view themselves as leaders in their greater context as well. The

197

CoP experience facilitated identity development from legitimate peripheral participation to full membership (Lave & Wenger, 1991), giving team leaders efficacy to find their voice as leaders beyond their classrooms at a time when teacher leadership is highly important.

Complementarity of Quantitative and Qualitative Data

In Chapter 3, I presented a clear rationale for mixing methods and a description of how quantitative and qualitative results were analyzed concurrently (Greene, 2007) according to a points of interface design (Guest, 2012). In Chapter 4, I integrated quantitative and qualitative results together to describe the findings of the study. Earlier in this chapter, I stated assertions and supported them with data from both quantitative and qualitative sources to provide complementarity (Caracelli & Greene, 1993; Greene, 2007). Complementarity occurs when evidence from quantitative and qualitative sources support one another, as described in this study. Mixing methods, concurrent data analysis, and points of interface were essential to achieve complementarity in this study. Different sources informed, enhanced, and elaborated aspects of the themes (Greene, 2007) to reveal complementarity in the overall results when I stepped back to see the whole picture.

Limitations

This mixed methods action research study was unique to the specific team leaders in the particular district of the study. Given the small sample size, it was not possible to extend quantitative analysis beyond descriptive statistics to show validity or reliability in the ILA-PO results. Measures of central tendency are highly sensitive to extreme scores with small samples, so generalizing ILA-PO data beyond this study requires careful

consideration. However, the overall findings of this study have theoretical generalizability (Fine, 2008) and transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) when stakeholders from other contexts individually consider how the findings resonate with their own understanding, situation, or context.

As a study about Communities of Practice, this study has limitations because CoP participants were recruited intentionally. I took steps to clearly define my role and situate myself among my peers, but one might argue that my actions to cultivate the CoP could have influenced its effectiveness and operation. Given the opt-in recruitment procedures for this study, it could also be possible that team leaders volunteered to participate because they already felt efficacious and resourceful as team leaders. Further, outcomes may have been related to maturation of team leaders. As team leaders gained additional team leadership experiences and became better acquainted with the preferences and skills of their paraeducators, there may have been a natural improvement in leadership strategies and efficacy. This would explain improved leadership strategies in their own classrooms, but would still not fully explain the camaraderie they reported during their time together with other team leaders in the CoP.

Implications for Practice

The following section outlines implications for practice for those who support early career special education teachers, those in the role of team leader for their special education classroom, and those supporting early career special education teachers in SESD. As stated above, the findings of this study are situated in the local context; however, there are implications that can be transferable (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and theoretically generalizable (Fine, 2008) in similar contexts elsewhere.

Implications for Mentoring Early Career Special Education Teachers

For the team leaders in this study, the CoP was a transformative space to discuss team leadership strategies, negotiate meaning, celebrate progress, and consider solutions for challenges. According to Wenger et al. (2002), an organization can cultivate a CoP to its full potential by valuing the learning of members, making time and resources available, encouraging participation, and reducing barriers. For those who serve early career special education teachers in a similar context, this study might inform possible innovations for team leadership development. In those cases, it would be interesting to create conditions for a Team Leadership CoP to arise by reducing barriers, encouraging participation, making time and resources available, and valuing the learning of members.

Further, mentors who support early career teachers might also consider whether there are opportunities for CoPs to arise about other topics that are meaningful to early career teachers in various disciplines. Smith & Ingersoll (2004) found that new teacher induction programs were most likely to improve teacher retention when there were multiple levels of support, including both group meetings and individual or small group mentoring support. At a time when teacher attrition is high, mentors might want to consider the CoP structure as an additional support that could potentially facilitate thinking for early career teachers and positively influence success and retention.

As administrators design professional development opportunities for teachers in the modern workplace, I encourage them to carefully consider the decision about controlling the agenda or allowing teachers to co-create their own agendas. McCormack et al. (2006) suggest that new teachers benefit from decreased focus on professional development trainings conducted by expert colleagues, shifting the focus toward new

teachers as active learners who shape their own knowledge through informal discussions. Paige's words speak loudly about the need for peer collaboration time in her workday: "If you gave us time to work as a team, we could support each other through our struggles. But it's like, we don't have time for that. You don't give us any time" (focus group). Collaborative peer discussion groups have meaningful possibilities for professional development in place of or in addition to traditional professional development training. Providing time for teachers to have conversations with their peers increases the likelihood of collaboration and decreases the burden teachers face by creating these opportunities outside their workday.

Implications for Team Leaders in Special Education

This study suggests the possibility that team leaders in other settings might want to cultivate their own CoP to discuss team leadership strategies, celebrate success, and consider solutions for challenges. According to Wenger (1998) "Communities of Practice have life cycles…they come together, they develop, they evolve, they disperse, according to the timing, the logic, the rhythms, and the social energy of their learning" (p. 96). CoPs arise based on the mutual needs of members, and all interactions of the CoP should be co-negotiated between participants (Wenger, 1998). In this particular study, the CoP was an authentic, confidential space where participants valued honest feedback. These characteristics could potentially benefit other CoPs if members mutually agree that these characteristics are important. If others choose to cultivate a CoP about team leadership in special education, CoP members might benefit from the use of the ILA-PO Survey to evaluate and discuss team leadership changes in their classrooms.

Implications for Coaching Early Career Team Leaders in SESD

The findings of this study inform my ongoing steps and approaches for mentoring early career special education teachers in SESD. As I reflect on Assertion 1, I plan to reframe dialogue with future team leaders to decrease team leadership terminology that relates to being the "boss," favoring terms like "team leader" or "team captain." If we use team leadership terms that teachers cannot relate to, it might limit their leadership actions because they cannot adopt the identity. It is important to choose terms that speak to the heart of early career team leaders, enabling them to step into their important leadership role with more gusto.

Reflecting on Assertion 3, it is important to remember that early career teachers benefit from opportunities to be together, co-creating their own agenda. As an induction coach, I will seek opportunities to value peer discussion groups and encourage the conditions for CoPs to arise. Reflection on Assertion 5, it is highly important to give team leaders opportunities for peer dialogue that situates them in the roles of "expert" to nurture the development of leadership identity. We cannot simply provide training about team leadership and hope that teachers grow into leaders. Instead, we must treat teachers like leaders and provide opportunities to co-construct their knowledge with peers.

Personal Reflection

When I first began this action research three years ago, I was motivated to "fix" and "help" early career special education teachers with their team leadership "problems." I operated from the perspective of a more knowledgeable other, ready to share my knowledge with those in need. I envisioned a training course or a wiki packed with resources to help with this problem.

My perspectives have changed so much. Now I realize how the banking model of education is deeply embedded in professional development approaches for teachers today—so embedded that it felt natural for me to take up this cause to be "helpful" as a knowledgeable other. Today, I believe the banking model of education is outdated and inappropriate for developing professionalism and teacher leadership. I see the benefits of problem-posing education and opportunities for co-constructed peer dialogue. I understand why stakeholders in my context desired to have a CoP with *peers* rather than a CoP with *peers and veteran teachers.* Early career teachers desire opportunities to be seen as experts in their contexts. I am forever grateful to those who encouraged me to carefully negotiate the role of CoP Coordinator with very intentional restraint and clarity. The authenticity of the CoP was at stake, and now I see the benefits of the co-owned space so clearly.

Three months after the study ended, as I planned for an upcoming special education induction meeting with another coach, we decided to give our teachers peer collaboration time. We began the meeting with time for teachers to co-determine conversation topics around their problems of practice. Interestingly, the first topic suggested was team leadership.[22] Additional topics were suggested and the room broke into small groups. With excitement, I sat down and listened as ten team leaders from different classrooms discussed their classroom challenges. One teacher said, "One of the most stressful parts of my job is dealing with staff and getting them to take initiative" (personal communication, March 3, 2016). During the conversation, teachers mentioned

---

[22] The actual words used were "supervising adults," representing old terminology from induction conversations before I came to understand the importance of the term "team leadership."

long-term team goals like interdependence, collaborative problem solving, and paraeducator input. They discussed limit perceptions like communication barriers, disturbing the peace, and figuring out steps to lead change. I listened to many themes from this dissertation study discussed within the forty-five minute period. It was an interesting retrospective about where the research began three years ago, verifying that the need for the Team Leadership CoP has not expired.

For the first time as a coach, I listened without a burning desire to "help" them with my own ideas. Instead, I sat back and listened. I asked questions to promote reflection. I let others offer suggestions because I know how team leaders benefit from the opportunity to *give* ideas to one another. I noticed that few team leaders found clear answers or solutions during the conversations. Instead, I saw their eyebrows raise, their eyes gaze off, and their wheels begin turning. In the past, I might have worried that teachers did not benefit from the conversation. Instead, I was excited to see the reflective process begin as team leaders headed home to consider new ideas and determine the appropriate solutions for their teams.

Next Steps

As an action researcher, the natural response to this study is to conduct additional action research about this topic. It would be interesting to further explore the function of rehearsed speech, modeled rehearsed speech, and unrefined speech to better understand how these forms of discourse facilitate thinking in the CoP or influence communication between team leaders and paraeducators in the classroom.

It would also be interesting to investigate the outcomes of CoPs with a different group of special education teachers. All team leaders in this study served students in self-

contained settings with paraeducators who spent most of their day in the classroom. It would be highly interesting to implement a CoP structure with team leaders from a resource or inclusion setting with paraeducators who spend the majority of the day mainstreaming special education students in general education classrooms. If the CoP structure does not appeal as a support for resource and inclusion team leaders, then it would be interesting to explore other innovations that might support team leadership for special education teachers in these roles. Further, it would be interesting to explore the implementation of CoPs to support other needs of early career special education teachers, such as lesson planning or special education compliance. Perhaps teachers might benefit from being together, as described in Assertion 3, for topics beyond team leadership.

Finally, it would be interesting to explore paraeducator opinions about team leadership strategies that appeal to them in the classroom. Gaining feedback from paraeducators could enhance teacher understanding of team leadership strategies and contribute to greater success in their early years. Additionally, these factors might be important to understand retention and attrition of paraeducators and special education teachers in SESD.

Reflecting on the literature in light of this study, it could be important to consider whether terms like "supervisor" and "boss" are appropriate terminology for training future special education teachers and teacher candidates. If additional studies show that early career special education teachers struggle to adopt these identity terms in the same way that participants avoided these terms in this study, there might be need for a shift in the literature. Perhaps scholars and instructors would consider adopting the terms I have defined in this study, speaking to teachers about "team leadership" instead.

REFERENCES

Abell, S. K., Dillon, D. R., Hopkins, C. J., McInerney, W. D., & O'Brien, D. G. (1995). "Somebody to count on": Mentor/intern relationships in a beginning teacher internship program. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *11*(2), 173–188. doi:10.1016/0742-051X(94)00025-2

Algozzine, B., Gretes, J., Queen, A. J., & Cowan-Hathcock, M. (2011). Beginning teachers' perceptions of their induction program experiences. *The Clearing House*, *80*(3), 137–144.

Ashbaker, B. Y., & Morgan, J. (2012). Team players and team managers: Special educators working with paraeducators to support inclusive classrooms. *Creative Education*, *03*(03), 322–327. doi:10.4236/ce.2012.33051

Athanases, S. Z., Abrams, J., Jack, G., Johnson, V., Kwock, S., McCurdy, J., … Totaro, S. (2008). Curriculum for mentor development: Problems and promise in the work of new teacher induction leaders. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, *40*(6), 743–770. doi:10.1080/00220270701784319

Atwater, D. C., & Bass, B. M. (1994). Transformational leadership in teams. In B. M. Bass & B. J. Avolio (Eds.), *Improving organizational effectiveness through transformational leadership* (pp. 48–83). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.

Avolio, B. J., & Bass, B. M. (1995). Individual consideration viewed at multiple levels of analysis: A multi-level framework for examining the diffusion of transformational leadership. *The Leadership Quarterly*, *6*(2), 199–218. doi:10.1016/1048-9843(95)90035-7

Avolio, B. J., Garnder, W. L., & Walumbwa, F. O. (2007). Authentic leadership questionnaire. Retrieved February 10, 2015, from www.mindgarden.com

Bandura, A. (1977). Self-efficacy: Toward a unifying theory of behavioral change. *Psychological Review*, *84*(2), 191–215.

Bandura, A. (2006). Guide for constructing self-efficacy scales. In F. Pajares & T. C. Urdan (Eds.), *Self-Efficacy Beliefs of Adolescents* (pp. 307–337). IAP. Retrieved from http://web.stanford.edu/dept/psychology/bandura/pajares/014-BanduraGuide2006.pdf

Barnett, B. G. (1995). Developing reflection and expertise: Can mentors make the difference? *Journal of Educational Administration*, *33*, 45–59. doi:10.1108/09578239510098527

Bass, B. M. (1993). A seminal shift: The impact of James Burns' leadership. *The Leadership Quarterly*, *4*(3), 375–377. doi:10.1016/1048-9843(93)90042-R

Bass, B. M. (1995). Theory of transformational leadership redux. *The Leadership Quarterly*, *6*(4), 463–478. doi:10.1016/1048-9843(95)90021-7

Bass, B. M. (2010). Two decades of research and development in transformational leadership. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, *8*(1), 9–32. doi:10.1080/135943299398410

Bass, B. M., & Avolio, B. J. (1993). Transformational leadership and organizational culture. *Public Administration Quarterly*, *17*(1), 112–121.

Bass, B. M., & Avolio, B. J. (2004). Multifactor leadership questionnaire. Retrieved February 10, 2015, from mindgarden.com

Bass, B. M., & Riggio, R. E. (2006). *Transformational leadership* (2nd ed.). Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

Bass, B. M., & Steidlmeier, P. (1999). Ethics, character, and authentic transformational leadership behavior. *The Leadership Quarterly*, *10*(2), 181–217. doi:10.1016/S1048-9843(99)00016-8

Breton, W. (2010). Special education paraprofessionals: Perceptions of preservice preparation, supervision, and ongoing developmental training. *International Journal of Special Education*, *25*(1), 34–45. Retrieved from http://www.internationaljournalofspecialeducation.com/issues.cfm

Brookfield, S. (1995). *Becoming a critically reflective teacher* (Vol. 1st). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. doi:10.1007/s11606-010-1463-1

Burns, J. M. (1978). *Leadership*. New York, NY: Harper & Rowe.

Capizzi, A. M., & Da Fonte, M. A. (2012). Supporting paraeducators through a collaborative classroom support plan. *Focus on Exceptional Children*, *44*(6), 1–17.

Caracelli, V. J., & Greene, J. C. (1993). Data analysis strategies for mixed-methods evaluation designs. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, *15*(2), 195–207.

Carlson, N. M., May, W. E., Loertscher, R., & Cobia, C. (2003). Apprenticeship: Applications in adult education. *Journal of Adult Education*, *32*(1), 29–42.

Chao, G. T. (2008). Mentoring and organizational socialization: Networks for work adjustment. In B. R. Ragins & K. E. Kram (Eds.), *The handbook of mentoring at work: Theory, research, and practice* (pp. 179–197). SAGE Publications, Inc.

Cheng, Y. C. (1994). Teacher leadership style: A classroom-level study. *Journal of Educational Administration*, *32*(3), 54–71. doi:10.1108/09578239410063111

Chopra, R. V., Sandoval-Lucero, E., & French, N. (2011). Effective supervision of paraeducators: Multiple benefits and outcomes. *National Teacher Education Journal*, *4*(2), 15–26.

Cohen, J. L. (2010). Getting recognised: Teachers negotiating professional identities as learners through talk. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *26*(3), 473–481. doi:10.1016/j.tate.2009.06.005

Collins, K. M. T., Onwuegbuzie, A. J., & Sutton, I. L. (2006). A model incorporating the rationale and purpose for conducting mixed-methods research in special education and beyond. *Learning Disabilities: A Contemporary Journalties: A Contemporary Journal*, *4*(1), 67–100.

Council For Exceptional Children. (2010). *CEC Special education professional practice standards*. Retrieved from http://www.azed.gov/special-education/files/2013/07/m2.7-handout-1.pdf

Creswell, J. W. (n.d.). [John Creswell]. (2013, February 19). *What Is Mixed Methods Research [Video File]*. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1OaNiTlpyX8

Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (3rd ed.). Los Angeles, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.

Cronbach, L. J. (1951). Coeffficient alpha and the internal structure of tests. *Psychometrika*, *16*(3), 297–334.

Crowley, M. C. (2011). *Lead from the heart: Transformational leadership for the 21st century*. Bloomington, IN: Balboa Press.

Cuddapah, J. L., & Clayton, C. D. (2011). Using Wenger's Communities of Practice to explore a new teacher cohort. *Journal of Teacher Education*, *62*(1), 62–75. doi:10.1177/0022487110377507

Day, C., Kington, A., & Stobart, G. (2006). The personal and professional selves of teachers: Stable and unstable identities. *British Educational Research Journal*, *32*(4), 601–616. doi:10.1080/01411920600775316

Derry, S. J., Pea, R. D., Barron, B., Engle, R. a., Erickson, F., Goldman, R., … Sherin, B. L. (2010). Conducting video research in the learning sciences: Guidance on selection, analysis, technology, and ethics. *Journal of the Learning Sciences*, *19*(917277623), 3–53. doi:10.1080/10508400903452884

Devlin, P. (2008). Create effective teacher-paraprofessional teams. *Intervention in School and Clinic*, *44*(1), 41–44. doi:10.1177/1053451208318874

Dick, B. (2007). Action research as an enhancement of natural problem solving. *International Journal of Action Research*, *3*(1), 149–167.

Drecktrah, M. E. (2000). Preservice teachers' preparation to work with paraeducators. *Teacher Education and Special Education: The Journal of the Teacher Education Division of the Council for Exceptional Children*, *23*(2), 157–164. doi:10.1177/088840640002300208

Eaton, E., & Sisson, W. (2008). *Why are new teachers leaving? The case for beginning-teacher induction and mentoring*. Retrieved from http://thehill.com/images/stories/whitepapers/pdf/ICFI_WhyAreTeachersLeaving.pdf

Erickson, F. (1986). Qualitative methods in research on teaching. In M. Wittrock (Ed.), *Handbook of research on teaching* (3rd ed., pp. 119–161). New York, NY: Macmillan. doi:10.1007/s13398-014-0173-7.2

Fine, M. (2008). An epilogue, of sorts. In J. Cammarota & M. Fine (Eds.), *Revolutionizing education: Youth participatory action research in motion* (pp. 213–234). New York, NY: Routledge.

Fowler, F. J. (1995). *Improving survey questions: Design and evaluation*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

French, N. K. (1997). Management of paraeducators. In A. Lou Pickett & K. Gerlach (Eds.), *Supervising paraeducators in school settings: A team approach* (pp. 91–169). Austin, Texas: PRO-ED.

French, N. K. (2001). Supervising paraprofessionals: A survey of teacher practices. *The Journal of Special Education*, *35*(1), 41–53.

French, N. K. (2003). *Managing paraeducators in your school: How to hire, train, and supervise non-certified staff*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

French, N. K., & Chopra, R. V. (2006). Teachers as executives. *Theory Into Practice*, *45*(3), 230–238.

French, N. K., & Pickett, A. Lou. (1997). Paraprofessionals in special education: Issues for teacher educators. *Teacher Education and Special Education: The Journal of the Teacher Education Division of the Council for Exceptional Children*, *20*(1), 61–73. doi:10.1177/088840649702000107

Fullan, M. G. (2001). *Leading in a culture of change*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Fullan, M. G. (2007). *The new meaning of educational change* (4th ed.). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Fullan, M. G. (2008). *The six secrets of change: What the best leaders do to help their organizations survive and thrive*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Furtado, L., & Anderson, D. (2012). The reflective teacher leader: An action research model. *Journal of School Leadership*, *22*(3), 531–568.

Gehrke, R. S., & McCoy, K. (2012). Designing effective induction for beginning special educators: Recommendations from a review of the literature. *The New Educator*, *8*(2), 139–159. doi:10.1080/1547688X.2012.670571

Gerlach, K., & Lee, P. (1997). Team building: Communication and problem solving. In A. Lou Pickett & K. Gerlach (Eds.), *Supervising paraeducators in school settings: A team approach* (pp. 171–205). Austin, Texas: PRO-ED.

Giangreco, M. F., Edelman, S. W., & Broer, S. M. (2001). Respect, appreciation, and acknowledgment of paraprofessionals who support students with disabilities. *Exceptional Children*, *67*(4), 485–498.

Gilligan, C., Spencer, R., Weinberg, M. K., & Bertsch, T. (2003). On the listening guide: A voice-centered relational method. In P. M. Camic, J. E. Rhodes, & L. E. Yardley (Eds.), *Qualitative research in psychology: Expanding perspectives in methodology and design* (pp. 157–172). Washington, D.C.

Glesne, C. (1997). That rare feeling: Re-presenting research through poetic transcription. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *3*(2), 202–221. doi:10.1177/107780049700300204

Greene, J. C. (2007). *Mixed methods in social inquiry*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Griffin, C. C., Winn, J. A., Otis-Wilborn, A., & Kilgore, K. L. (2003). *New teacher induction in special education*.

Guest, G. (2012). Describing mixed methods research: An alternative to typologies. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, *7*(2), 141–151. doi:10.1177/1558689812461179

Hanuscin, D. L., & Lee, M. H. (2008). Mentoring new teachers. *Science & Children*, *45*(9), 56–57.

Harrison, J., Dymoke, S., & Pell, T. (2006). Mentoring beginning teachers in secondary schools: An analysis of practice. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *22*(8), 1055–1067. doi:10.1016/j.tate.2006.04.021

Harrison, J., Lawson, T., & Wortley, A. (2005a). Facilitating the professional learning of new teachers through critical reflection on practice during mentoring meetings. *European Journal of Teacher Education*, *28*(3), 267–292. doi:10.1080/02619760500269392

Harrison, J., Lawson, T., & Wortley, A. (2005b). Mentoring the beginning teacher: Developing professional autonomy through critical reflection on practice. *Reflective Practice: International and Multidisciplinary Perspectives*, *6*(3), 419–441. doi:10.1080/14623940500220277

Holt, E. (2009). Reported speech. In J. Östman, J. O., & Verschueren (Ed.), *The pragmatics of interaction (Vol. 4)*. John Benjamins Publishing.

Hopper, T., & Sanford, K. (2008). Using poetic representation to support the development of teachers' knowledge. *Studying Teacher Education*, *4*(1), 29–45. doi:10.1080/17425960801976339

Hoy, A. W., & Spero, R. B. (2005). Changes in teacher efficacy during the early years of teaching: A comparison of four measures. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *21*, 343–356. doi:10.1016/j.tate.2005.01.007

Huang, H. B. (2010). What is good action research?: Why the resurgent interest? *Action Research*, *8*(1), 93–109. doi:10.1177/1476750310362435

Huberman, M. A., Miles, M. B., & Saldana, J. (1994). Designing matrix and network displays. In *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook* (3rd ed., pp. 320–357). Sage. doi:10.1136/ebnurs.2011.100352

Imel, B. (2012). *The impact of a multilevel intervention on special education induction teacher retention indicators*. Arizona State University.

Individuals With Disabilities Improvement Act of 2004, Pub. L. No. 108-446, 118 Stat. 2647 (2004). Retrieved from http://nichcy.org/wp-content/uploads/docs/PL108-446.pdf

Ivankova, N. V. (2014). Planning integration of quantitative and qualitative methods in a mixed methods action research study. In *Mixed methods applications in action research: From methods to community action*. Sage Publications, Inc.

Jabr, N. H. (2011). Social networking as a tool for extending academic learning and communication. *International Journal of Business and Social Science*, *2*(12), 93–103.

Jacob, S. A., & Furgerson, S. P. (2012). Writing interview protocols and conducting interviews: Tips for students new to the field of qualitative research. *The Qualitative Report*, *17*(42), 1–10.

Johnson, S. (n.d.). (2010, July). Where good ideas come from. [Video file]. Retrieved from http://www.ted.com/talks/steven_johnson_where_good_ideas_come_from.html

Jones, A. (2014). Coaching v mentoring: What works better for teachers? Retrieved March 25, 2015, from http://www.theguardian.com/teacher-network/teacher-blog/2014/aug/05/coaching-mentoring-teachers-professional-development

Kennedy, B. L. (2009). Infusing participants voices' into grounded theory research: A poetic anthology. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *15*(8), 1416–1433. doi:10.1177/1077800409339569

Kolb, D. A. (1984). *Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Kolb, D. A., Baker, A. C., & Jensen, P. J. (2002). *Conversational learning: An experiential approach to knowledge creation*. Westport, CT: Quorum Books.

Lahman, M. K. E., Rodriguez, K. L., Richard, V. M., Geist, M. R., Schendel, R. K., & Graglia, P. E. (2011). (Re)forming research poetry. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *17*(9), 887–896. doi:10.1177/1077800411423219

Langley, G. L., Moen, R. D., Nolan, K. M., Nolan, T. W., Norman, C. L., & Provost, L. P. (2009). *The improvement guide: A practical approach to enhancing organizational performance* (2nd ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*. New York, NY: Cambridge Pniversity press.

Lee, A. (2007). How can a mentor support experiential learning? *Clinical Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, *12*(3), 333–340. doi:10.1177/1359104507078455

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

LoCasale-Crouch, J., Davis, E., Wiens, P., & Pianta, R. (2012). The role of the mentor in supporting new teachers: Associations with self-efficacy, reflection, and quality. *Mentoring & Tutoring: Partnership in Learning*, *20*(3), 303–323. doi:10.1080/13611267.2012.701959

Marshall, C., & Rossman, G. B. (2011). *Designing qualitative research* (5th ed.). Los Angeles, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.

McCormack, A., Gore, J., & Thomas, K. (2006). Early career teacher professional learning. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, *34*(1), 95–113. doi:10.1080/13598660500480282

McGrath, M. Z., Johns, B. H., & Mathur, S. R. (2010). Empowered or overpowered? Strategies for working effectively with paraprofessionals. *Beyond Behavior*, *19*(2), 2–6.

McNiff, J. (2013). Action research, transformational influences: Pasts, presents, and futures. Retrieved September 26, 2013, from http://www.jeanmcniff.com/items.asp?id=11

Meyer, T. (2002). Novice teacher learning communities: An alternative to one-to-one mentoring. *American Secondary Education*, *31*(1), 27–43.

Miller, M. (2008). Problem-based conversations: Using preservice teachers' problems as a mechanism for their professional development. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 77–99.

Mills, G. E. (2014). *Action research: A guide for the teacher researcher* (5th ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson.

National Resource Center for Paraeducators. (n.d.-a). State paraprofessional handbooks. Retrieved November 16, 2013, from http://www.nrcpara.org/paraprofessional-handbooks

National Resource Center for Paraeducators. (n.d.-b). State paraprofessional standards. Retrieved November 16, 2013, from http://www.nrcpara.org/paraprofessional-standards

No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, Pub. L. No. 107-110, 115 Stat. 1425 (2002). Retrieved from http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/107-110.pdf

PAR2A Center. (2013). Why train paraprofessionals? Retrieved October 16, 2013, from http://www.paracenter.org/paraeducators/why-train-paraprofessionals/

Pickett, A. Lou, & Gerlach, K. (1997). *Supervising paraeducators in school settings: A team approach*. Austin, TX: PRO-ED.

Plano Clark, V. L., & Creswell, J. W. (2010). *Understanding research: A consumer's guide*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill. doi:13-978-0-13-158389-4

Pounder, J. S. (2006). Transformational classroom leadership: The fourth wave of teacher leadership? *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, *34*(4), 533–545. doi:10.1177/1741143206068216

Prendergast, M., Gouzouasis, P., Leggo, C., & Irwin, R. L. (2009). A haiku suite: the importance of music making in the lives of secondary school students. *Music Education Research*, *11*(3), 303–317. doi:10.1080/14613800903144262

Presser, S., Couper, M. P., Lessler, J. T., Martin, E., Rothgeb, J. M., Bureau, U. S. C., & Singer, E. (2004). *Methods for testing and evaluating survey questionnaires* (Vol. 68). Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Richardson, L. (1994). Writing: A method of inquiry. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed., pp. 516–529). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Riel, M. (2010). Understanding action research. Retrieved September 16, 2013, from http://cadres.pepperdine.edu/ccar/define.html

Riggs, C. G. (2004). To teachers: What paraeducators want you to know. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, *36*(5), 8–12. Retrieved from http://teachingld.net/pdf/teaching_how-tos/riggs_36-5.pdf

Saldana, J. (2013). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.

Salkind, N. J. (2011). *Statistics for people who (think they) hate statistics* (4th ed.). Los Angeles, CA: SAGE.

Seidman, I. (2013). *Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education and the social sciences*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Shyman, E. (2010). Identifying predictors of emotional exhaustion among special education paraeducators: A preliminary investigation. *Psychology in the Schools*, *47*(8). doi:10.1002/pits

Smeets, K., & Ponte, P. (2009). Action research and teacher leadership. *Professional Development in Education*, *35*(2), 175–193.

Smith, T. M., & Ingersoll, R. M. (2004). What are the effects of induction and mentoring on beginning teacher turnover? *American Educational Research Journal*, *26*(3), 681–714. doi:10.3102/01623737026003681

Steckelberg, A. L., Vasa, S. F., Kemp, S. E., Arthaud, T. J., Asselin, S. B., Swain, K., & Fennick, E. (2007). A web-based training model for preparing teachers to supervise paraeducators. *Teacher Education and Special Education: The Journal of the Teacher Education Division of the Council for Exceptional Children*, *30*(1), 52–55. doi:10.1177/088840640703000106

Tillery, C. Y., Werts, M. G., Roark, R. R., & Harris, S. (2003). Perceptions of paraeducators on job retention. *Teacher Education and Special Education: The Journal of the Teacher Education Division of the Council for Exceptional Children*, *26*(2), 118–127. doi:10.1177/088840640302600205

Trautman, M. L. (2004). Preparing and managing paraprofessionals. *Intervention in School and Clinic*, *39*(3), 131–138. doi:10.1177/10534512040390030101

van Kraayenoord, C., Honan, E., & Moni, K. B. (2011). Negotiating knowledge in a researcher and teacher collaborative research partnership. *Teacher Development*, *15*(4), 403–420.

Wallace, T., Shin, J., Batholomay, T., & Stahl, B. (2001). Knowledge and skills for teachers supervising the work of paraprofessionals. *Exceptional Children*, *67*(4), 520–533.

Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of practice: Learning, meaning, and identity*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Wenger, E., McDermott, R., & Snyder, W. M. (2002). *Cultivating communities of practice*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.

Yin, R. K. (2006). Mixed methods research: Are the methods genuinely integrated or merely parallel? *Research in the Schools*, *13*(1), 41–47.

Yost, R. (2002). " I think I can ": Mentoring as a means of enhancing teaching efficacy. *The Clearing House*, *75*(4), 195.

Zambo, D., & Isai, S. (2012). Action research and the educational doctorate: New promises and visions. *Journal of Research on Leadership Education*, *8*(1), 97–112. doi:10.1177/1942775112464960

APPENDIX A

RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Greetings! I am a graduate student under the direction of Professor Melanie Bertrand in the Teachers College at Arizona State University. I am conducting a research study to explore the outcomes for early career teachers who participate in a Communities of Practice (CoP) group about team leadership in special education. During CoP meetings, group members will collaborate to develop strategies, share successes, discuss challenges, and co-create resources about team leadership in special education. You are being invited to participate because you are an early career teacher in the New Teacher Induction program with 0-3 years teaching experience in special education.

I am recruiting individuals to attend biweekly CoP group meetings. At our first group meeting, members will co-determine the length of the meetings. It is estimated that meetings will range from 60-90 minutes. The group will meet nine times between October 2015 and January 2016. As a thank you for your participation, I will provide snacks for our group meetings. Additionally, some participants will be randomly selected to participate in pre- and post-interviews that will take between 30-60 minutes. If you are selected as an interview participant, you will have the choice of a $5 gift card for Starbucks, Chipotle, or ColdStone Creamery to thank you at the end of each interview. Finally, there will be a one-hour focus group to discuss group perspectives at the end of the study.

If you choose to participate, your identity will be kept confidential. All participants will be assigned a pseudonym for the purposes of the research. Interviews, group meetings, and the focus group will be audio recorded. All data will be stored in a secure, password protected location. Your participation in this study is voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time without penalty. Results of the study will be published in a doctoral dissertation.

Thank you for your consideration of this opportunity. If you have any questions concerning the research study, please call me at (480) 277- 3872 or email me at: jledbetter@gesd40.org.

Warmly,
Jess Ledbetter

APPENDIX B

INTRODUCTION EMAIL TO COP MEMBERS

Subject: Welcome to our (awesome) Team Leadership COP!

Welcome everyone! I am really excited to be starting our Team Leadership COP together! What a stellar group of people! A Community of Practice (COP) occurs when people gather together for a shared purpose. I think that teachers—as leaders—benefit from time to be together in shared dialogue, so I am really jazzed about the group!

I will be creating the Outlook invites by the end of the week. Remember to accept each of the invites so your calendar shows you as "busy" during that time. That should discourage anyone from scheduling you for another meeting at that time, and provide you an option to nicely decline an invitation if they try :)

I wanted to share a little bit about my role in the group: I see myself as the 'group coordinator,' spreading the word about the group to bring people who are interested in Team Leadership together at the same time and place. I don't see myself as the 'group leader' because we are all leaders in our own classrooms and experts about our own teams. I think we are all resourceful, and we can work together to talk about ideas, identify resources we already have, and create the resources we need. We will all be equally contributing COP members to determine topics, group norms, and how we spend our time together. As the coordinator, I will do things like arranging times/locations, sending out the Outlook invites, bringing snacks, helping the group connect, and bringing tools to help us reflect and grow as leaders. At the beginning of the group, I'll also share some information about past groups and their reflections—so we can figure out how to be the most productive with our time together.

At our first meeting, I'd like to chat about ways we can keep in contact between group meetings—perhaps through a Facebook private group, Edmodo, Samepage, or another online collaboration tool. It would give us a meaningful way to connect and collaborate as leaders, so think about the options and your opinions. Also, I've started building an (incomplete!) wiki page of resources about Team Leadership. I was thinking it would be helpful to have our resources in the same place. We can add resources to the wiki together—things we find or make—when the group thinks of ideas and strategies that seem helpful with this topic. If you want to check it out right away, the wiki address is: www.spedteamleadership.pbworks.com. Your username is the same as your district username. Your password is: Iamaleader (I am a leader).

I'll be sending each person an email to schedule a quick individual meeting to get some business out of the way before our first meeting. Can't wait to get our group started!

Warmly,

Jess

APPENDIX C

SECOND EMAIL TO COP MEMBERS

Subject: Team Leadership CoP info and quick survey link

Hi leaders! I'm excited about our first group gathering on Monday at 4:15. Our group will assemble at the District Office in the C&I Conference Room. I'm attaching a map so it's really clear. In summary: Park in the main DO parking lot, enter through the main entrance (where the secretary is at the front desk), go through the double doors on the left, and the conference room is the second door on your left.

I am really looking forward to our time talking about team leadership in special education. As the group "coordinator," my role is getting us all together in the same location with snacks, but there is no pre-planned agenda. A true Community of Practice decides together what their "work" will be and collaborates to develop new understandings. As you are thinking ahead about what that might look like, here are some preliminary ideas our group might want to talk about on Monday to get us started:

- Should we do a team-building/ice-breaker activity? I will bring one just in case. If you have one you like, bring that along, too!
- Should we establish group norms?
- Should we talk about the length and dates of our meetings?
- How should we determine our group's "work" as a Community of Practice? Should we do something like create a list of challenges we face as team leaders? Should we talk about what our ideal perfect EA team would be like? Do we need something like a mission statement?
- Should we use tools for group problem-solving conversations? I've seen some cool protocols called "Critical Friends Groups." I will bring them for us to glance over.
- How can we keep in touch between meetings? Should we share ideas through a private Facebook group, Edmodo, Samepage, or another tool?
- Are there other steps we should take as our group moves forward?

Before our gathering on Monday, could you please fill out this quick 3-5 minute survey so we can better understand our group demographics? (survey link)

I'm really looking forward to gathering together on Monday and sharing our thoughts about team leadership in special education! If you have any questions, send me an email or call my cell number! (phone number)

APPENDIX D

INTENTIONAL LEADERSHIP ACTIONS

& PARAEDUCATOR OUTCOMES SURVEY (ILA-PO)

INTENTIONAL LEADERSHIP ACTIONS
AND PARAEDUCATOR OUTCOMES SURVEY (ILA-PO)

STOP! Please fully read directions before beginning survey.

OVERVIEW:

This survey will ask you some questions about your leadership perspectives and the outcomes you notice with your paraeducator(s). The term *paraeducator* describes a non-certified personnel member who works in your classroom and/or school campus under your supervision. Other terms for this position include: paraprofessional, educational assistant, teaching assistant, Title I assistant or teacher aide. The survey will refer to this team member as a paraeducator.

This survey is <u>not</u> asking you about any other professionals on the team, such as related service personnel. **When you see the word** *team*, **the survey is asking** <u>only</u> **about you and your paraeducators.**

PART I DIRECTIONS:

For the first section of this survey, you will read a statement and mark your level of agreement on a line. **You can mark anywhere on the line based on your disagreement or agreement with statements.** The line looks like this:

Disagree |··| Agree

FOR EXAMPLE:

If you **strongly disagree** with a statement to the greatest extent, your response would look like this:

Disagree |●···| Agree

If you **strongly agree** with a statement to the greatest extent, your response would look like this:

Disagree |···●| Agree

OTHER POSSIBLE EXAMPLES:

Disagree |··················●······························| Agree

Disagree |···················●····························| Agree

Disagree |························●·······················| Agree

Disagree |······························●·················| Agree

Once again, you can mark anywhere on the line to indicate your level of agreement.

WRITE YOUR NAME → _____

223

PART I: PARAEDUCATOR OUTCOMES

Directions: Make a mark (•) on each line to indicate your level of agreement with each statement for your paraeducator.

If you have more than one paraeducator: You will complete a survey for each paraeducator. Put your paraeducators in order by first name alphabetically (Paraeducator #1, Paraeducator #2, Paraeducator #3). Write the corresponding numbers on each survey. All your responses to this survey should relate to the paraeducator you have indicated in this box here.

Write ⇨ **Paraeducator #** [ ]

#	Statement	Disagree		Agree
1	My paraeducator uses instructional strategies that are similar to my instructional strategies.	Disagree	··	Agree
2	My paraeducator uses behavior strategies that are similar to my behavior strategies.	Disagree	··	Agree
3	When I show my paraeducator how to complete a task, s/he completes it appropriately.	Disagree	··	Agree
4	When I tell my paraeducator to do something, s/he follows my directions.	Disagree	··	Agree
5	When I suggest a new idea, my paraeducator is supportive/willing to try the new idea.	Disagree	··	Agree
6	My paraeducator stays focused on tasks that benefit our classroom/students.	Disagree	··	Agree
7	When my paraeducator feels like there is nothing to do, s/he asks me what to do to help.	Disagree	··	Agree
8	My paraeducator follows the classroom schedule without reminders from me.	Disagree	··	Agree
9	My paraeducator follows professional rules (i.e. no cell phones, punctual, dress codes, attends campus duties as scheduled).	Disagree	··	Agree
10	When I give my paraeducator feedback, s/he listens and makes changes as needed.	Disagree	··	Agree
11	My paraeducator leads routine classroom activities (i.e. circle time, small groups, etc.) if I am busy.	Disagree	··	Agree
12	My paraeducator uses effective approaches while working with our students.	Disagree	··	Agree
13	My paraeducator maintains student confidentiality (does not talk to teachers outside our team).	Disagree	··	Agree
14	My paraeducator contributes ideas for the classroom.	Disagree	··	Agree
15	My paraeducator treats me with respect like I am the team leader.	Disagree	··	Agree
16	My paraeducator knows his/her role and responsibilities in the classroom.	Disagree	··	Agree
17	My paraeducator has a vision for our students that is similar to my vision.	Disagree	··	Agree
18	My paraeducator adjusts the instructional/behavior strategy when it's not working for a student.	Disagree	··	Agree

224

Directions: This portion of the questionnaire is designed to explore some situations and topics that create difficulties for teachers working with paraeducators. Please indicate your opinion about each statement by circling the correct number. Lower numbers indicate that you can do nothing to influence a situation. Higher numbers indicate that you can do a great deal to influence a situation.

A. Influencing Professional Behavior of Paraeducators

How much can I do so that my paraeducator…	Nothing		Very little		Some influence		Quite a bit		A great deal
1	…clocks in/out on time, including lunch break?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
2	…does not share confidential student information with inappropriate staff at school?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
3	…follows the times/activities in the classroom schedule?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
4	…uses his/her cell phone at appropriate times (per my discretion)?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
5	…knows what to do (responsibilities) during the school day?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
6	…has a positive attitude at work?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
7	…does not share inappropriate information with a parent/guardian?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

B. Influencing Instructional Practices of Paraeducators

How much can I do to…	Nothing		Very little		Some influence		Quite a bit		A great deal
8	…promote positive interactions between my paraeducator and students?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
9	…get a paraeducator to use effective instructional practices while working with students?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
10	…set the example for effective instructional practices when I work with students?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	…alter the strategies my paraeducator uses with students?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
12	…gain input from my paraeducator about student progress?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

C. Influencing the Team* of Paraeducators

Team includes you as the teacher plus one or more paraeducators. It does not include other professionals like related service personnel.

How much can I do to…	Nothing		Very little		Some influence		Quite a bit		A great deal
13	…have a common team vision (why we do the work we do with students)?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
14	…have common team goals (what we are working toward with students)?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
15	…have positive interpersonal relationships between team members (getting along)?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
16	…gain suggestions from paraeducator(s) to improve the classroom or student progress?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
17	…have regular opportunities to discuss team procedures for classroom/students?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
18	…encourage my paraeducator to grow professionally to reach personal goals?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

225

PART III: OPINIONS ABOUT BENEFICIAL STRATEGIES FOR TEAM* LEADERSHIP

*Team includes you as the teacher plus one or more paraeducators. It does not include other professionals like related service personnel.

Directions: This portion of the questionnaire is designed to explore opinions about leadership strategies that influence your success as a team. Read each statement and indicate if the strategy influences your paraeducator as s/he works with students or completes job responsibilities. Higher numbers indicate the strategy highly influences paraeducator success. Lower numbers indicate the strategy does not influence paraeducator success.

	My paraeducator(s) and I are a successful team because I…	No influence									High influence
						INFLUENCE ON SUCCESS					
1	…have formal team meetings (scheduled time each week).	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
2	…have informal team chats (as needed daily).	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
3	…lead by example, being a model for my paraeducator.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
4	…tell my paraeducator when s/he is successful with a student or task.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
5	…coach my paraeducator to improve areas of weakness.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
6	…get to know some personal details about my paraeducator (family life, interests, etc).	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
7	…reflect on my leadership strategies and how they are working with my paraeducator.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
8	…plan collaboratively as a team for student and classroom activities.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
9	…write lesson plans that my paraeducator can understand.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
10	…express my appreciation for my paraeducator.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	…show my paraeducator how to work with our students.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
12	…find out paraeducator preferences (likes/dislikes) for working with students.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
13	…delegate tasks/responsibilities to my paraeducator so our classroom runs efficiently.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
14	…talk to my paraeducator immediately when there is a problem/concern.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
15	…ask my paraeducator to contribute ideas for our classroom/students.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
16	…write down and review expectations with my paraeducator.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
17	…offer training when a new strategy is needed.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
18	…celebrate student progress as a team.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
19	…contribute information when my administrator evaluates my paraeducator.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
20	…design tracking sheets for my paraeducator to record student progress on goals.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

As the team leader for your paraeducator(s), what qualities/behaviors are most important to create an effective team?

If challenges prevent you from working with your paraeducator(s) the way you would like to, please list/describe the challenges.

226

APPENDIX E

TEACHER GROUP REFLECTION SURVEY (TGRS)

TEACHER GROUP REFLECTION SURVEY   Date: _____

(1) **Since our CoP group last met…**	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
…I feel like I am changing as a leader.				
…I have been trying some new strategies with my paraeducator(s).				
…I am noticing positive improvements for my paraeducator(s) team.				
…I think my paraeducator(s) notices improvements for our team.				
…I feel like our team is more effective working with students.				
…I tried an idea that we talked about during last CoP group.				
…I tried an idea from our Facebook group.				
…I tried an idea from the Sped Team Leadership wiki.				

(2) What are some changes* you have made since last group?
*procedures, training, feedback, communication, leadership strategies, etc.

Change	Why did you make a change?	How is it going?

(3) To continuously improve your team, what is your next goal or area(s) of focus?

(4) What challenges do you anticipate as you work toward that goal?

(5) POST-GROUP REFLECTION: What are you thinking about now? How do you plan to apply these new ideas?

APPENDIX F

FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

Team Leadership in Special Education CoP	
Moderators Guide: TEACHER PARTICIPANTS	
Distribute materials	Name cards, scratch paper
Moderator introduction, thank you, and purpose	Welcome everyone! My name is Jess Ledbetter. I want to start by thanking you for participating in our focus group today. We will be here for about an hour. The reason why we are here today is to discuss your perspectives about team leadership in special education and how our CoP group influenced your own leadership journey. I will be leading the discussion today as the moderator. I want to assure you that I am not seeking any specific answers, and I do not want to sway your opinion. You should be open and honest about your opinions and perspectives.
Ground rules	To allow our conversation to flow more freely, I would like to discuss some ground rules: (1) Please talk one at a time and avoid side conversations. (2) Everyone does not have to answer every question, but I would like to hear from everyone at some point during the discussion today. (3) Feel free to comment on each others' remarks. This is an open discussion. I provided some scratch paper in case you get an idea to share while someone else is talking. (4) There are no 'wrong answers' and different opinions are valuable. Share your own opinion and don't feel swayed by the opinions of others. However, let me know if your opinion honestly changes. (5) If you need a break, please let me know. We will break as a group. (6) Our discussion will be recorded but kept confidential. Please keep the information we discuss confidential to respect members of our group. Does anyone have questions about how the focus group will proceed?

General questions	How would you describe the time we spent together as a CoP? How was learning in our group different from more traditional professional development experiences?
Specific questions	How was it helpful to talk about team leadership within our CoP group? How did our discussions lead to solutions for team leadership challenges? How did the CoP group provide a place to share strategies and ideas (in person and online)? How did the conversations here affect your leadership perspectives when you went back to your classroom?
Closing questions	Were there any other important components of our group that we haven't talked about during this discussion?
Closing	Thank you so much for coming today to share your experiences. Your participation has provided multiple perspectives that are valuable to the research findings. Thank you for your time and contributions.
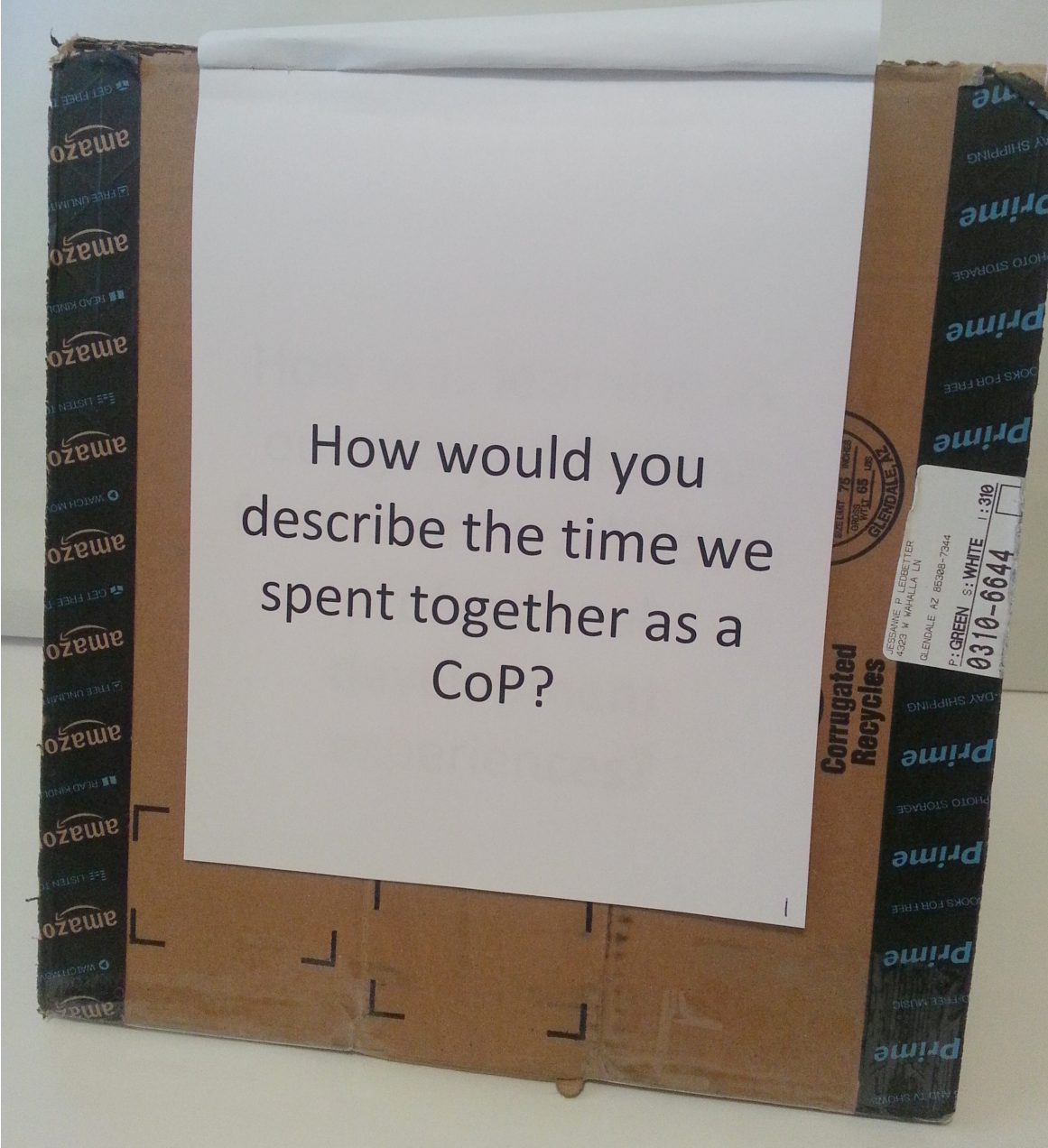
APPENDIX G

PRE-INNOVATION INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

<p style="text-align: center;">**PRE-INNOVATION INTERVIEW PROTOCOL**</p>

Introduction

I'd like to start by thanking you so much for agreeing to meet today and participate in this study. The purpose of this interview is to discuss your perspectives about team leadership in special education. Since we might need to talk about colleagues on your past or current team, you can choose to omit their names and use a general term like "an EA" or "a therapist." None of the information you share will be reported to administrators or evaluators. None of the information from this study is being used to evaluate the professional skills of any district employees.

- Do you have any questions about the purpose or use of the interview data?
- The interview should take about 30-45 minutes. If you agree, I would like to record our conversation so that I can create a transcript for analysis.
- For some of these questions, you might want to look back at the ILA-PO Survey you just completed.

Getting to know you

(1) Tell me a little bit about your classroom and the needs of your students.

(2) What are some routine situations for you and your EA team on a typical day in your classroom?

Construct 1: Current team leadership perspectives

The first section of this interview will focus on your current perspectives about team leadership.

(3) Looking at your responses to Part I (ILA-PO Survey), what are some things that stand out to you? *(If multiple EAs, refer to each survey separately)*

(4) What is it like being the team leader for EAs in your classroom?

(5) What types of challenges do you face as the team leader?

Construct 2: Future vision for your team

The second section of this interview will focus on your future goals.

(6) If you could wave a magic wand and make your team even better, what types of things would improve? *(Refer to ILA-PO Survey as needed)*

(7) Thinking about where you are now and where you want your team to be, how much can you do to make it happen?

(8) If you could have everything you needed as the leader, what strategies or supports would make your team the most successful?

Closing

(9) Is there anything else you would like to share?

APPENDIX H

POST-INNOVATION INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

POST-INNOVATION INTEVIEW PROTOCOL

Introduction

Thank you so much for participating in this interview. These questions will ask you to reflect on your current perspectives about team leadership in special education. Since you might need to share information about colleagues on your past or current team, you can choose to omit their names and use a general term like "an EA" or "a therapist." None of the information you share will be reported to administrators or evaluators. None of the information from this study is being used to evaluate the professional skills of any district employees.

- Do you have any questions about the purpose or use of the interview data?
- The interview should take about 45-60 minutes. If you agree, I would like to record our conversation so that I can create a transcript for analysis.

Construct 1: Reflection on leadership practices and artifacts

The first section of this interview will give you time to reflect on your leadership journey. I also brought compiled data from the TGRS and the ILA-PO Survey because I'm curious about your perspectives.

(1) Thinking about yourself as a leader before the CoP group and the leader you are now, how have your views about team leadership changed?

(2) Tell me about some leadership changes you made and how your team responded. I brought a list of some of things you wrote down on the TGRS. You can also talk about changes that aren't on this list. (*Provide compiled data from TGRS.)*

(3) How is your team different now? *(Share compiled data from the ILA-PO Survey.)*

(4) How did your leadership actions influence these changes?

Construct 2: Reflection on the CoP group

The second section of this interview will give you time to think about how the CoP affected you as a leader.

(5) How did the CoP group influence you as a leader in your classroom?

(6) How did the CoP problem-solving conversations affect your leadership decisions in your classroom?

(7) Did you think about leadership between CoP meetings?

Construct 3: Moving forward

The third section of this interview will ask about your future plans.

    (8) Going forward, what are three important things that will guide you as the team leader?

    (9) If you could wave your magic wand and control the future, what would your ideal team be like?

Closing

    (10) Is there anything else that you would like to share?

APPENDIX I

GUIDED RESEARCHER JOURNAL QUESTIONS

RESEARCHER JOURNAL QUESTIONS*

Date:

Event/Action:

• How did I intentionally cultivate the CoP through my actions as the coordinator?

• How did I contribute to the group as a CoP member?

• How did group members respond to my actions?

• What stood out to me from the event/experience?

• How did I change from the event/experience?

*to be completed after each group meeting or other significant actions/events

APPENDIX J

TEACHER SUMMARY SHEET - ILA PO SURVEY

Teacher Summary Sheet
ILA-PO Survey Data
Pre-Data (September) & Post-Data (December)

Teacher Name:

CONFIDENTIAL

HOW DID YOUR PARAEDUCATORS CHANGE?

To find out how much you agreed with each statement, I figured a percentage by measuring where you marked on the line compared to the overall length of the line available. Here, you can see how much you agreed with each statement in September compared to your agreement in December. The furthest right column shows the change (difference) between September and December.

PARAEDUCATOR 1

	Question Item	PERCENTAGE		
		Sept.	Dec.	Change
1	My paraeducator uses instructional strategies that are similar to my instructional strategies.			
2	My paraeducator uses behavior strategies that are similar to my behavior strategies.			
3	When I show my paraeducator how to complete a task, s/he completes it appropriately.			
4	When I tell my paraeducator to do something, s/he follows my directions.			
5	When I suggest a new idea, my paraeducator is supportive/willing to try the new idea.			
6	My paraeducator stays focused on tasks that benefit our classroom/students.			
7	When my paraeducator feels like there is nothing to do, s/he asks me what to do to help.			
8	My paraeducator follows the classroom schedule without reminders from me.			
9	My paraeducator follows professional rules (i.e. no cell phones, punctual, dress codes, attends campus duties as scheduled).			
10	When I give my paraeducator feedback, s/he listens and makes changes as needed.			
11	My paraeducator leads routine classroom activities (i.e. circle time, small groups, etc.) if I am busy.			
12	My paraeducator uses effective approaches while working with our students.			
13	My paraeducator maintains student confidentiality (does not talk to teachers outside our team).			
14	My paraeducator contributes ideas for the classroom.			
15	My paraeducator treats me with respect like I am the team leader.			
16	My paraeducator knows his/her role and responsibilities in the classroom.			
17	My paraeducator has a vision for our students that is similar to my vision.			
18	My paraeducator adjusts the instructional/behavior strategy when it's not working for a student.			

HOW DID YOUR PARAEDUCATORS CHANGE?

PARAEDUCATOR 2

	Question Item	PERCENTAGE		
		Sept.	Dec.	Change
1	My paraeducator uses instructional strategies that are similar to my instructional strategies.			
2	My paraeducator uses behavior strategies that are similar to my behavior strategies.			
3	When I show my paraeducator how to complete a task, s/he completes it appropriately.			
4	When I tell my paraeducator to do something, s/he follows my directions.			
5	When I suggest a new idea, my paraeducator is supportive/willing to try the new idea.			
6	My paraeducator stays focused on tasks that benefit our classroom/students.			
7	When my paraeducator feels like there is nothing to do, s/he asks me what to do to help.			
8	My paraeducator follows the classroom schedule without reminders from me.			
9	My paraeducator follows professional rules (i.e. no cell phones, punctual, dress codes, attends campus duties as scheduled).			
10	When I give my paraeducator feedback, s/he listens and makes changes as needed.			
11	My paraeducator leads routine classroom activities (i.e. circle time, small groups, etc.) if I am busy.			
12	My paraeducator uses effective approaches while working with our students.			
13	My paraeducator maintains student confidentiality (does not talk to teachers outside our team).			
14	My paraeducator contributes ideas for the classroom.			
15	My paraeducator treats me with respect like I am the team leader.			
16	My paraeducator knows his/her role and responsibilities in the classroom.			
17	My paraeducator has a vision for our students that is similar to my vision.			
18	My paraeducator adjusts the instructional/behavior strategy when it's not working for a student.			

HOW DID YOU CHANGE?

YOUR PERSPECTIVES ABOUT THE INFLUENCE OF LEADERSHIP BEHAVIORS

In Part II, you rated items to indicate opinions about how much you can do to influence team outcomes. Below are your responses in September and December. The furthest right column shows the change (difference) between September and December. Items used the following scale:

Nothing		Very little		Some influence		Quite a bit		A great deal	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

A. Influencing the Professional Behavior of Paraeducators

	How much can I do so that my paraeducator…	Sept.	Dec.	Change
1	…clocks in/out on time, including lunch break?			
2	…does not share confidential student information with inappropriate staff at school?			
3	…follows the times/activities in the classroom schedule?			
4	…uses his/her cell phone at appropriate times (per my discretion)?			
5	…knows what to do (responsibilities) during the school day?			
6	…has a positive attitude at work?			
7	…does not share inappropriate information with a parent/guardian?			

Overall Average	
Before	
After	
Change	

B. Influencing Instructional Practices of Paraeducators

	How much can I do to…	Sept.	Dec.	Change
8	…promote positive interactions between my paraeducator and students?			
9	…get a paraeducator to use effective instructional practices while working with students?			
10	…set the example for effective instructional practices when I work with students?			
11	…alter the strategies my paraeducator uses with students?			
12	…gain input from my paraeducator about student progress?			

Overall Average	
Before	
After	
Change	

C. Influencing the Team of Paraeducators

	How much can I do to…	Sept.	Dec.	Change
13	…have a common team vision (why we do the work we do with students)?			
14	…have common team goals (what we are working toward with students)?			
15	…have positive interpersonal relationships between team members (getting along)?			
16	…gain suggestions from paraeducator(s) to improve the classroom or student progress?			
17	…have regular opportunities to discuss team procedures for classroom/students?			
18	…encourage my paraeducator to grow professionally to reach personal goals?			

Overall Average	
Before	
After	
Change	

CHANGES YOU REPORTED

Each week, you completed a *Teacher Group Reflection Survey* at our COP group gathering. Here are the team leadership changes you reported since September:

OPEN-ENDED RESPONSES

Question 1: As the team leader for your paraeducators, what qualities/behaviors are most important to create an effective team?	
Before	**After**

Question 2: If challenges prevent you from working with your paraeducator(s) the way you would like to, please list/describe the challenges.	
Before	**After**

HOW DID YOU CHANGE?

YOUR OPINIONS ABOUT BENEFICIAL STRATEGIES FOR TEAM LEADERSHIP

In Part III, you rated items to indicate leadership behaviors that contribute to team success as your paraeducator(s) work with students or complete job responsibilities. Items used this scale:

1 "No influence" <-->10 "High influence"

Below are your responses in September and December. The furthest right column shows the change (difference), indicating if strategies are more (+) or less (-) important to you now.

	My paraeducator(s) and I are a successful team because I...	Sept.	Dec.	Change
1	...have formal team meetings (scheduled time each week).			
2	...have informal team chats (as needed daily).			
3	...lead by example, being a model for my paraeducator.			
4	...tell my paraeducator when s/he is successful with a student or task.			
5	...coach my paraeducator to improve areas of weakness.			
6	...get to know some personal details about my paraeducator (family life, interests, etc).			
7	...reflect on my leadership strategies and how they are working with my paraeducator.			
8	...plan collaboratively as a team for student and classroom activities.			
9	...write lesson plans that my paraeducator can understand.			
10	...express my appreciation for my paraeducator.			
11	...show my paraeducator how to work with our students.			
12	...find out paraeducator preferences (likes/dislikes) for working with students.			
13	...delegate tasks/responsibilities to my paraeducator so our classroom runs efficiently.			
14	...talk to my paraeducator immediately when there is a problem/concern.			
15	...ask my paraeducator to contribute ideas for our classroom/students.			
16	...write down and review expectations with my paraeducator.			
17	...offer training when a new strategy is needed.			
18	...celebrate student progress as a team.			
19	...contribute information when my administrator evaluates my paraeducator.			
20	...design tracking sheets for my paraeducator to record student progress on goals.			

HOW DID YOU CHANGE?

YOUR OPINIONS ABOUT BENEFICIAL STRATEGIES FOR TEAM LEADERSHIP
Here is how you rated strategies by importance, most to least important, in September & December.

	September	December
10		
9		
8		
7		
6		
5		
4		
3		
2		
1		

high influence-------------- Low influence----------

APPENDIX K

COP CONTENT LOG TEMPLATE

COP Date:
Members present:
General notes:

TEAM LEADERSHIP COP LOG

NOTES	SELF-REFLECTION/COMMENTS/NOTES
Prior to start of recording.	
0:00-5:00.	
5:00-10:00.	
10:00-15:00.	
15:00-20:00.	
20:00-25:00.	
25:00-30:00.	
30:00-35:00.	
35:00-40:00.	
40:00-45:00.	
45:00-50:00.	
50:00-55:00.	
55:00-60:00.	
60:00-65:00.	
65:00-70:00.	
70:00-75:00.	
75:00-80:00.	
80:00-85:00.	
85:00-90:00.	
90:00-95:00.	
95:00-100:00.	
Following end of recording.	

249

APPENDIX L

TGRS QUESTION 2 ANALYSIS TEMPLATE

TGRS Q2 Analysis

Teacher-participant:

Responses to: What are some changes* you have made since last group?
*procedures, training, feedback, communication, leadership strategies, etc.

Date	Change	Why did you make a change?	How is it going?

APPENDIX M

TGRS QUESTIONS 3 AND 4 ANALYSIS TEMPLATE

TGRS Q3 Q4 Analysis

Q3: To continuously improve your team, what is your next goal or area(s) of focus?
Q4: What challenges do you anticipate as you work toward that goal?

Teacher-participant:

Date	Q3 Response	Q4 Response	Date/Notes: Discussed during CoP group/online?	Date/Notes: Change reported on TGRS form?

253

APPENDIX N

TGRS QUESTION 5 ANALYSIS TEMPLATE

TGRS Q5Analysis   **POST-GROUP REFLECTION: What are you thinking about now? How do you plan to apply these new ideas?**

Teacher-participant:

Date	Q5 Response	Date/Notes: Change reported on TGRS form?

APPENDIX O

ALIGNMENT OF RESEARCH QUESTIONS WITH FINDINGS

Alignment of Research Questions with Findings

Themes that provided context about team leaders' circumstances:

- Participants felt overwhelmed by the complexities of team leadership
- Team leaders felt constrained by traditional leadership identities
- Perceived communication barriers influenced leadership actions

RQ1: To what extent did the CoP influence early career teachers' perceptions of their ability to lead paraeducators in their classrooms?

- Team leaders experienced individual reflection about team leadership
- The CoP influenced collaborative leadership approaches*
- Leadership actions improved the team and increased team leadership efficacy
- Team leaders experienced identity transformation*

RQ2: How and to what extent did the CoP engage in problem-solving dialogues about team leadership in special education?

- Team leaders sought alignment during CoP conversations
- Problem-posing conversations reflected Experiential Learning framework
- Team leaders experienced individual reflection about team leadership

RQ3: How and to what extent did CoP members identify leadership strategies or co-create resources together?

- Team leaders engaged in the CoP experience
- Team leaders talked about talking to paraeducators
- CoP conversations stretched imagination about team leadership
- Team leaders revised strategies to promote collaborative partnerships*

RQ4: How did I negotiate the duality of being both a CoP coordinator and member?

- Team leaders engaged in the CoP experience
  - ➢ As the CoP coordinator, I made intentional decisions to situate myself as an equal partner in the CoP without imposing my own research agenda
- Team leaders experienced individual reflection about team leadership
  - ➢ As a CoP member, I situated myself as an equal partner in the CoP and experienced individual reflection about my own team