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## Perspectives on the Roles of Teacher Leaders in Tertiary EFL Contexts in Japan

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### **【Abstract】**

*This paper outlines some preliminary research conducted on the topic of teacher leadership in university EFL programs in Japan. The aim of the research is to explore teacher leadership in terms of shared and differing perspectives regarding the role of teacher leaders in tertiary-level EFL contexts in Japan? Additionally, we are interested in the relationship between expectations and reality regarding the role of teacher leaders in these contexts? Quantitative and qualitative data were collected via an online survey, and findings are discussed within the following framework: (1) Why focus on teacher leadership? (2) How is teacher leadership defined? (3) What do teacher leaders do? (4) Who are teacher leaders? (5) What conditions influence teacher leadership? (6) How are teacher leaders prepared to lead? (7) What are the effects of teacher leadership? The conceptual framework for analyzing and interpreting findings includes both distributed leadership and change management, and many of the key variables from school settings were found to be important to teachers and teacher leaders in this study, namely school environment, communication and relationships.*

### **【Keywords】**

*Teacher Leaders; Shared Leadership; Distributed Leadership; Change Management; English as a Foreign Language (EFL)*

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*“Our business ought to be to promote profound levels of learning in school –  
and teacher leadership is one of our most powerful assets for doing so.”*

*Roland Barth (2013, p.16)*

### **Packing our Bags (Introduction)**

The topic of Teacher Leadership is now well established in educational circles, and a number of promising trends in both theory and practice have emerged (Barth, 2013). Despite this attention in wider educational contexts (mainly primary and secondary schools), limited published research can be found on the topic of teacher leaders or teacher leadership in tertiary settings (Bryman, 2007), let alone college or university English as a Foreign Language (EFL) programs in Japan. There is anecdotal evidence that some teachers in these contexts do take on leadership roles and responsibilities, but it is not clear when, why or how this occurs. It is also unclear what exactly is expected of teacher leaders in these contexts, and what kind of training they receive or should receive. With these concerns in mind, the aim of this paper is to begin exploring the topic of teacher leadership in tertiary EFL programs in Japan. An important first step in pursuing this line of inquiry would be to determine whether or not Teacher Leadership is a viable construct in these contexts. Thus, I have chosen to start with the following research questions:

Answers to these questions should help in conceptualizing the topic, and hopefully point us toward some useful theoretical frameworks, practical applications and promising areas for future research.

The idea for this line of inquiry came from the PhD dissertation of Jerry D. Kelly (2011) titled *Teachers' and Teacher Leaders' Perceptions of the Formal Role of Teacher Leadership*. In this study, the investigator researched perceptions regarding teacher leadership at three elementary schools in one county in northern Georgia in the United States. The initial stage of Kelly's research was the creation and administration of a questionnaire based on findings from an extensive literature review on the topic of teacher leadership conducted by York-Barr and Duke (2004). This questionnaire will be discussed further in the methods section.

Recognizing the important role of formal theory in focusing research questions, guiding inquiry, and interpreting findings (Smylie, 1995), I have chosen for my investigation to use the conceptual frameworks of distributed leadership and change management. Both of these

theories have a solid foothold in business settings, and are gaining attention in educational settings as well. Distributed leadership appears regularly in more recent literature on the topic of teacher leadership, and seems to support both theoretical perspectives and practical applications. Teacher leaders are also mentioned regularly in the literature as change agents. This combination of frameworks will hopefully provide some conceptual support for approaching the topic of teacher leadership.

It also deserves mention before setting out that the current investigation assumes both social-constructivist and transformative ontologies. I do not believe that there are any ultimate truths on the topic of teacher leadership. Instead, I hope this research adds to our collective understanding, plants some seeds for future investigations, and brings about some improvements for students, teachers and schools in Japan.

The investigation starts with a review of key studies on the topic of teacher leadership. I then outline the methods used to elicit data, follow this with findings, and then move on to an analysis and discussion of main findings. I conclude the paper with some thoughts on future direction for teacher leadership studies in EFL contexts.

### **Survey of the Terrain (Literature Review)**

Before proceeding to the particulars of the current study, I would like to outline some of the findings on the topic from previous research and highlight major areas for inquiry that have been pursued by other investigators. Two papers were especially helpful in identifying key concepts and influential publications on the topic of teacher leadership. The first one was the introduction to a special issue of *The Elementary School Journal* (Volume 96, Number 1) written by Mark A. Smylie (1995). In this paper, the author described how the topic of teacher leadership had matured at the time, with increased attention paid to the topic and increased opportunities for teacher leadership. Additionally, he called attention to the shortcomings of published findings, namely a lack of both empirical studies and formal theory, a predominance of descriptive accounts, a narrow view of teacher leadership, and absence of a cohesive or unified thrust to inquiries.

The second paper that helped me get my bearings was an extensive review of the literature on teacher leadership conducted ten years later by Jennifer York-Barr and Karen Duke (2004). The authors' stated purpose for their study of 140 published articles on teacher leadership and related

topics was to summarize findings on the topic and present a conceptual framework that can guide both current practice and future inquiry.

In reviewing studies on teacher leadership, we can find useful discussions on the who, what, when, where, why and how of teacher leadership. Before going further, it would help to understand what we are talking about.

### *Defining Teacher Leadership*

Several authors have noted the difficulty and confusion in defining teacher leadership (Muijs & Harris, 2003; Harris, 2010). These difficulties stem from the conceptual difficulties surrounding the topic (Harris, 2003; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). As an example, some authors approach this within traditional top-down frameworks of leadership while others come at the problem using emerging concepts of shared, distributed or parallel leadership (Harris, 2010). Setting aside this confusion, one definition that is often cited is that of Katzenmeyer and Moller (2009):

*teacher leaders lead within and beyond the classroom; identify with and contribute to a community of teacher learners and leaders; influence others toward improved educational practice; and accept responsibility for achieving the outcomes of their leadership. (p. 6)*

This definition highlights some of the perspectives on teacher leadership, namely that teacher leaders are active beyond the confines of their own classrooms, interact with and influence other adults at their schools, up the bar in terms of teaching, and are goal oriented. Drawing on range of international studies and reports on the topic, Frost and Harris (2003) point out that teachers who are leaders in the above definition can be interpreted in different ways, and thus look at how teachers are designated as leaders (formally and informally) and what types of activities they are engaged in. Their work categories are Lead Teachers, Middle Managers, Coordinators and Representatives, and Teacher Leadership, with this last category being the exercise of leadership by teachers regardless of position or designation. Frost & Durrant (2002) report on interviews with twelve teachers known to have initiated and sustained development activities in their schools, and concluded that the defining characteristic of a teacher leader is that they intentionally act strategically to contribute to the betterment of the school.

In further defining teacher leadership, Day and Harris (2003) identified four key dimensions of the teacher leadership role, namely translating principles of school improvement into the

practices of individual classrooms, a focus on participative leadership where all teachers feel empowered and have a sense of ownership, the mediating role played by teacher leaders, and strengthened relationships among teachers.

Based on their extensive review of studies on the topic, York-Barr and Duke (2004) define teacher leadership as a process:

*Teacher leadership is the process by which teachers, individually and collectively, influence their colleagues, principals, and other members of school communities to improve teaching and learning practices with the aim of increased student learning and achievement. (p. 287)*

#### *Who Are We Talking About?*

The difficulty in defining teacher leadership mentioned above also makes it difficult to pinpoint with any authority who we are talking about. The distinction between formal and informal teacher leadership roles is often commented on in the literature (Anderson, 2004). Although this formal/informal dichotomy has also been criticized as being unhelpful (Harris, 2010), we need to recognize that the type of teacher leadership that emerges will be influenced by the social context. In some situations, teacher leadership will be pursued only by formally-designated teacher leaders, in others informal arrangements will prevail, and in most there will be some combination.

The focus of studies on school leadership has historically been the upper hierarchy, but increasing attention is being shifted to leadership as spread over the social and situational context (Gronn, 2002; Muijs & Harris, 2006; Spillane, Halverson & Diamond, 2004). This noticeable trend in the literature is one reason I have chosen the conceptual framework of distributed leadership for the current study. In her comprehensive review of studies on headship and principalship, Harris (2003) investigated the relationship between teacher leadership and distributed leadership, with an emphasis on activity theory, and concluded that:

*we cannot continue to ignore, dismiss or devalue the notion of teacher leadership as a form of distributed leadership--to do so is to knowingly invest in forms of leadership theory and practice that make little, if any difference, to the achievement of young people. (p. 322)*

At the same time, the concept of distributed leadership is contested by some (see, for example, Hatcher, 2005) on the grounds that it can be leveraged as another form of managerialism with the ulterior motive of getting more work out of teachers.

Also mentioned in the literature on which teachers take on leadership roles is the observation that teacher leadership may not be for every teacher at all times in their career (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009). Teachers usually need to be at the right stage in their career to take on leadership roles and responsibilities (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). That is to say, teachers often mature into the role of teacher leader.

#### *When And Where Do We Find Teacher Leaders?*

Following up on the topic of school environment or culture mentioned above, we are beginning to see empirical findings to support the importance of social context in fostering teacher collaboration and expanded leadership roles for teachers. Akert and Martin (2012) surveyed fifteen principals and ninety-six teachers regarding the role of teacher leadership in school improvement. One of the key findings from this study was the gap in perceptions regarding how active a leadership role principals were allowing teachers to take. Principals believed they were allowing teachers to take an active role, while teachers did not feel they had much freedom in this area. Several other authors have also drawn attention to the important role of the principal in creating an environment or culture that breaks down some of the barriers between formal and informal teacher leadership (Andrews & Crowther, 2002; Frost & Harris, 2003; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009). At the same time, it seems that teachers themselves can create an environment that is either conducive or inhibitive to teacher leadership taking root. Barth (2013) identifies five obstacles as most inhibiting to teachers assuming serious leadership: (1) many principals need to control what goes on in school, (2) taboo against one teaching elevating herself above others, (3) teachers' plates are full, (4) adversarial relationship between teachers and principals, and (5) schools have been cooped by a business model over the years. Taken collectively, these obstacles make the road to teacher involvement in leadership quite rough (Barth, 2013). Working to overcome these five obstacles would be a good starting point for programs interested in promoting teacher leadership.

When discussing school environment, we should also recognize that it is possible to have collegial and open context where teacher leadership does not flourish (York-Barr & Duke, 2004).

### *How Can We Foster Teacher Leadership?*

The discussion so far has hinted at the importance of culture or social context as well as influence of principals and peers. Based on findings from a range of case studies, Muijs and Harris (2006) identified the following conditions or factors that help the emergence and maintenance of teacher leadership in schools: (1) Supportive culture, (2) Supportive structures, (3) Strong leadership and support, (4) Commitment to action enquiry and data richness, (5) Innovative forms of professional development, (6) Co-ordinated improvement efforts, (7) High levels of teacher participation and involvement, (8) Collective creativity, (9) Shared professional practice, and (10) Recognition and reward. Here, again, programs interested in promoting teacher leadership have a useful framework for pursuing such endeavors.

### *Why Is This Important?*

As Barth reminds us in the quote at the start of this paper, teacher leadership is “one of our most powerful assets for promoting profound levels of learning.” The ultimate reason for discussing teacher leadership needs to be improved learning outcomes for students. In existing literature, this issue is often approached in an indirect way, emphasizing the benefits of increased teacher morale, engagement and collaboration (Frost & Harris, 2003). Although there is still a shortage of empirical studies that show a clear link between teachers taking on leadership roles and improved student learning, Harris (2010) identifies several studies that together are beginning to show this link does exist.

One of the most often cited reasons for trying to unlock the leadership potential of teachers is to move some of the work off of the principal’s overflowing plate (Barth, 2013). With the increased demands on principals’ time and energy, utilizing the existing resource of teacher expertise and skill sets (broad ranging as they are) seems like a readily available solution.

Another reason cited for promoting teacher leadership and encouraging teachers to take on leadership roles and responsibilities is to boost motivation and a sense of agency among teachers. Teachers in Akert and Martin’s (2012) study reported that, “they felt motivated by their inner desire and sense of gratification when they shared their talents and abilities with their colleagues and their students” (p.295). Teacher leadership develops greater participation by colleagues, which results in increased ownership and commitment to goals (Akert & Martin, 2012; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Finally, acknowledging teachers’ expertise and contributions can support the objectives of recruiting, retaining, motivating and rewarding accomplished



teachers (York-Barr & Duke, 2004).

### **Plotting a Course (Methods)**

As mentioned in the introduction, a good starting point for inquiry into the topic of teacher leadership in tertiary-level EFL programs in Japan is to explore perceptions regarding teacher leadership and the perceived roles of teacher leaders. I chose to begin with a questionnaire developed by Kelly (2011) that draws on the findings of York-Barr and Duke (2004). In preparation for the study, I prepared a participation information sheet and consent form (available upon request). I then organized a focus group to scrutinize the survey questions in Kelly (2011) in terms of how applicable they were for college and university EFL programs in Japan. The focus group was conducted on June 24, 2014 with five teachers living and working in the Kansai region of Japan. Participants were identified as knowledgeable and experienced EFL teachers who would represent a range of ideas and opinions on the topic, and as having a range of backgrounds and years of teaching experience. The focus group lasted approximately forty-five minutes, and yielded insightful and useful opinions regarding individual survey questions as well as the topic of teacher leadership in our context.

Based on findings from the focus group, I prepared an online version of the revised questionnaire (Appendix 1) and solicited participation from among members of two language teaching organizations in Japan: the Japan Association for Language Teaching (JALT) and the Japan Association of College English Teachers (JACET). Normally, I would have piloted the survey before sending it out. However, the feedback from the focus group convinced me that the questionnaire would yield adequate results for answering the research questions. I e-mailed out an invitation to participate to my contacts in these two organizations ( $n = 46$ ), with a request to forward the invitation to other EFL teachers in Japan. I gathered responses from the first part of July until the middle of August. In total, I received 79 responses.

The first five questions on the survey provided quantitative data on teacher and teacher leader perspectives on the characteristics and benefits of teacher leadership, both ideal and observed realities. Without Likert-type rating scales, we cannot judge the strength of response. Instead, I analyzed this data using simple frequency counts and descriptive statistics.

For the open-ended questions (6 - 8), my approach to qualitative data analysis was based on advice outlined in Hatch (2002), who sees this pursuit as a systematic search for meaning. He

elaborates thus:

*It is a way to process qualitative data so that what has been learned can be communicated to others. Analysis means organizing and interrogating data in ways that allow researchers to see patterns, identify themes, discover relationships, develop explanations, make interpretations, mount critiques, or generate theories. (p. 148)*

Specifically, I adopted the typological analysis approach advocated by Hatch (2002, pg. 152), which I felt would best bring out the participants' perspectives on the topic. The typological groupings that I identified were (1) general impressions of teacher leadership as a construct, (2) distributed or shared leadership, (3) school/program culture, and (4) relationships. Key findings are outlined in the next section.

### **Appreciating the Scenery (Findings)**

So what did we find? First, a rough profile of our respondents is summarized in Tables 1 (Teaching Experience), 2 (Nationality) and 3 (Type of Institution).

**Table 1 - Teaching Experience**

Number of years . . .	1 – 5	6 – 10	11 – 15	15+	Total
. . . teaching	0	8	15	56	79
. . . teaching at the university level	8	26	17	27	78
. . . teaching at current institution	40	15	10	13	78
. . . living in Japan	2	14	17	45	78

**Table 2 – Nationality**

US	British	Japanese	Canadian	Australian	Romanian	New Zealand	Irish	No Answer	Total
37	13	8	7	3	3	2	1	4	79

**Table 3 - Type of Institution**

National	Prefectural	Municipal	Private	No Answer	Total
11	6	3	58	1	79

This data provides us with a general overview of the respondents. We see that the majority of respondents have over ten years of teaching experience, with much of this experience at the

university level. The high response rate for fewer number of years teaching at the current institution (n= 40) likely reflects the tendency in Japan for non-tenured faculty to be hired on limited-term contracts. This has resulted in what some observers call a “musical chairs” type environment (McCrostie & Spiri, 2008). We also see a predominance of North American and British among our respondents, with a fair number of native Japanese. Finally, we see a clear majority of respondents work at private institutions (n=58). In general, our respondents are fairly representative of the teaching population in these contexts (Amundrud, 2008).

Our first research question was, *what shared and differing perspectives do teachers and teacher leaders have regarding the role of teacher leaders in tertiary-level EFL contexts in Japan?* To answer this question, we need to know which respondents are teacher leaders and which are teachers. Survey question number seven asks if the respondent participates in formal or informal teacher leadership. We run into our first challenge here, as respondents’ interpretations or understanding of teacher leadership varied considerably (see discussion below). My workaround was to go through all data for each respondent (including open-ended questions), and code respondents as either a *Teacher Leader* (n = 35), *Somewhat Ambiguous* (n = 12), *Teacher* (n = 20), or *Not Discernable* (n = 12). Assignment to the *Somewhat Ambiguous* category was based on responses that indicated participation in leadership that was severely limited (e.g. only attending meetings). The *Not Discernable* category was used for respondents who did not answer question seven or include any indication of their role in leadership.

Question One of the survey asked participants to identify roles they believe should be included in a definition of teacher leader (*ideal*), while Question Two asked them to select the roles which were filled by teacher leaders in their program or department (*in reality*). For analysis, I tallied the number of times each role was identified as *ideal* or experienced *in reality*, and recorded the totals as a percentage of total respondents in each category (Appendix 2). I then coded the *ideal* and *in reality* totals as being strong (80% and above), moderate (55% - 79%) or weak (54% and below). To facilitate analysis, I coded the differences between *ideal* and *in reality* as being small (18% or less), moderate (19% - 32%) or large (33% or greater). I acknowledge that these designations are arbitrary, but judged them as helpful in categorizing each of the roles according to desirability and how often they are seen in practice. A more complete table of findings is included in Appendix 3, with percentages for each category (*Teacher Leader, Somewhat Ambiguous, Teacher, Not Discernable*).

Using the coding described above, we see that a high percentage of overall respondents perceive Teacher Leaders as ideally having the following roles:

- a. participates in program/department management and decision making (95%)*
- b. builds trust and rapport with peers (85%)*
- f. actively participates in formal professional development (85%)*
- i. understands how to interpret and use data concerning student abilities (81%)*
- k. develops and leads professional development programs (81%)*
- l. promotes colleagues' professional growth (e.g., research, presentations, publishing) (91%)*
- m. acts as a role model for professional growth (81%)*
- o. works collaboratively with peers (89%)*
- u. is organized and flexible (84%)*
- w. is a strong communicator (89%)*
- x. keeps up with current developments in their field (81%)*

Three roles were identified much less often as being ideal roles for Teacher Leaders:

- d. facilitates parent and school relationships (34%)*
- e. facilitates community and school relationships (47%)*
- g. is politically involved with issues concerning education at all levels (33%)*

Overall, teacher leaders (Category A) and teachers (Category C) had quite similar perspectives on the ideal roles of Teacher Leaders. The average difference was only .5%. Two marked exceptions were item *g. is politically involved with issues concerning education at all levels*, with a difference of 23% (43% compared to 20%), and item *r. has a strong understanding of his/her role as a leader*, with a difference of 27% (63% to 90%).

Although there were some similar perspectives on the actual role of Teacher Leaders in the respondents' departments/programs, the average difference was 7.5%. The greatest variance between the two groups were item *a. participates in program/department management and decision making*, with a difference of 26% (86% to 60%), item *b. builds trust and rapport with peers*, with a difference of 21% (51% to 30%), item *l. promotes colleagues' professional growth*, with a difference of 19% (49% to 30%), item *t. has a clearly developed philosophy of education*, with a difference of 36% (51% to 15%), and item *u. is organized and flexible*, with a difference of 18% (43% to 25%).

Question Three asks respondents to select the benefits they believe Teacher Leaders bring to a school, while Question Four asks them to select the benefits they feel Teacher Leaders actually bring to their department or program. Using the same categories as described for Questions One and Two, percentages were calculated for each category (Appendix 4).

The average difference between Teacher Leaders and Teachers concerning ideal benefits that Teacher Leaders bring to school was low at 6.6%, with three items showing a 12% difference: a. *contributing to the building of a culture that supports increased student learning* (97% compared to 85%), c. *bolstering school improvement efforts* (77% to 65%), and h. *improving the school's ranking and/or prestige* (57% to 45%). Item i. *gaining external funding for the program/department* showed an 11% difference (66% to 55%).

The average difference between Teacher Leaders and Teachers was greater concerning actual benefits perceived in their program/department at 14%. The four items showing the biggest differences were a. *contributing to the building of a culture that supports increased student learning* at 25% (60% compared to 35%), d. *increasing collaboration among faculty* at 21% (51% to 30%), e. *representing teachers in school wide decision making* at 19% (49% to 30%), and f. *supporting all teachers through coaching and instructional skill enhancement* at 19% (29% to 10%).

Question Five asked respondents what would happen at their school if teachers did not participate in leadership roles. Again, percentages were calculated and listed under the same categories as described above (Appendix 5). Comparing responses by *Teacher Leaders* (Group A) to the overall totals, we don't see much difference. It is important to note however that several respondents in two of the other groups believed that *the school would remain unchanged, student achievement would be unaffected* (Groups B = 42%, Group C = 35%).

Answering our second question (*What is the relationship between expectations and reality regarding the role of teacher leaders in tertiary-level EFL contexts in Japan?*) is a bit more challenging. A general finding here is that most respondents have high expectations of teacher leaders, while fewer respondents actually observe these roles being filled by teacher leaders in their programs or departments. At the same time, the open-ended questions on the survey yielded some extremely useful responses both for conceptualizing the topic of teacher leadership in this context and elucidating the relationship between expectations and perceived

reality. Responses were categorized by four types: (1) general impressions of teacher leadership as a construct, (2) distributed or shared leadership, (3) school/program culture, and (4) relationships.

#### *General impressions of teacher leadership as a construct*

Analysis of answers to the open-ended questions yielded somewhat conflicting findings. On the one hand, several respondents struggled with conceptualizing teacher leadership in their context.

*“I still don’t understand what you mean by teacher leaders even after reading the description. Is it my boss? Is it my colleagues? Is it decided by the status or by my personal feeling? If former, my "boss" does not have any of the qualities. If latter, I do not have anyone I can call as a leader at my work place.”* (Group B, in response to Q6))

*“I cannot answer well because I do not know what a teacher leader means in the context of a Japanese university such as mine.”* (Group C, in response to Q6))

*“This is actually a hard survey to complete. 1) This is the first time I've been introduced to the phrase "teacher leader" so it's hard to conceptualize without further thought or reading. 2) As a part-timer at four universities, it's hard to tell the difference between the full-time "teacher leaders" and just regular "teachers". So, I would say out of my four universities, I interact very minimally with teacher leaders at three of them and moderately interact with them at the fourth uni.”* (Group B, in response to Q6))

*“I’m assuming that teacher leaders are people who are formally in that role.If that is the case, the Japanese system seems to actively work against almost all the qualities you've listed.”* (Group A, in response to Q6))

*“This survey is very difficult to answer as all faculty are some kind of 'teacher leader' - it's a university in which jobs are rotated and so we are all TLs at some point.”* (Group A, in response to Q6)

*“To me the failure to identify what a teacher leader is in Japan makes it hard give any useful feedback.”* (Group C, in response to Q8)

Despite the confusion surrounding the term Teacher Leader for these respondents, the majority of respondents answered Questions Six and Seven with a clear Yes or No, indicating at least partial understanding or acceptance of the construct.

### *Distributed or shared leadership*

Although the questionnaire did not include any direct reference to distributed leadership, some responses hinted at/highlighted how leadership tasks were stretched over the situation.

*“I am close with the current head of dept and often offer to help him with his duties, giving advice if and when he solicits it.”* (Group A, in response to Q6)

*“I am a department chair; therefore, I interact most frequently with teachers who have volunteered for leadership posts as heads of committees. I also work to encourage faculty to take on these occasional opportunities to become acknowledged leaders within their teaching area.”* (Group A, in response to Q6)

*“Collaborate and assist with curriculum development, material procurement, and coordination of program.”* (Group A, in response to Q6)

*“We are small department , there is a great deal of collaborative leadership and decision making.”* (Group C, in response to Q6)

*“In the last three years I have run faculty development seminars at my place of work and taken responsibility designing and implementing curricula for summer intensive programs.”* (Group A, in response to Q7)

*“I’m in a Working Group that chooses textbooks and writes syllabi for most of the universities language courses. We also liaise with part-time teachers about syllabi, courses, working conditions etc.”* (Group A, in response to Q7)

*“As a full time worker in this program, I feel responsible and organize FD meetings and try to share ideas with other teachers to improve our instructions.”* (Group A, in response to Q7)

*“If someone really had all the skills and carried out all the roles in those first few questions they would like superwoman...! I think you need a team of people to carry out all these roles. Some focus on prestige and connections with the community, others on program development, others on staff management and support.”* (Group A, in response to Q8)

### *School/program culture*

As mentioned in the literature review, the environment or culture at a school strongly influences how teacher leadership manifests itself. Answers to all three open-ended questions lend support

for this in our context.

*“On a limited basis very informally. There are really no mechanisms in place for genuine collaboration, no leadership on offer except by people such as myself working informally with some other teachers.”* (Group C, in response to Q6)

*“There is no real system in place regarding teacher leadership.”* (Group C, in response to Q7)

*“I do all of the above, though at different times and to differing degrees based on opportunity. Rarely, am I supported by staff though I'm supported by my non-language department colleagues. I'm on several university-level committees who listen and even support my disagreement and proposals for change. However, only one other Japanese colleague in my immediate section of 10 people does the same.”* (Group A, in response to Q7)

*“This may have to do with culture as in Japan teachers who are older are seen as opinion leaders and young teachers may not be perceived as leaders regardless of their academic and non academic achievements.”* (Group C, in response to Q8)

*“To be honest I do not see many teachers leader in my department as contract teachers are treated like second class citizens with little input or say.”* (Group B, in response to Q8)

*“Referencing my first university experience in Japan (from 2003 - 2008), there were no avenues to gain formal leadership positions within the institution for non-Japanese. Likewise, there was little interest by the Japanese in encouraging the non-Japanese to have any role, formal or informal, in leadership. This ultimately encouraged me to leave the institution.”* (Group A, in response to Q8)

*“I tend to think that many of these points are culture bound, and I believe that Japanese education actively works against these points because of the structure of the curriculum.”* (Group A, in response to Q8)

The general impression here is that many of these programs or departments do not have the structures or processes to promote supportive environments for teacher leadership.

### *Relationships*

The reason for including this as a separate category is that the importance of relationships is often highlighted in the literature. There is obvious overlap with the previous category, but



having the additional category might tease out more nuanced meaning from the data. We see in the following responses examples where supportive relationships are valued and leveraged to create a supportive atmosphere as well as examples of the barriers created by non-supportive peers.

*“Both, but due to my title, I am most readily identified as a formal leader. I aspire, though, through interaction with the faculty and the encouragement of good teaching practices and the development of a culture of scholarship, to also be seen as an “informal” collegial leader who practices what he preaches.”* (Group A, in response to Q7)

*“My personal belief is more than just having a role of teacher leaders they should be available on a regular basis, for example eating lunch in the staffroom. Many of the best advice and discussions come for these informal conversations.”* (Group A, in response to Q8)

*“In the survey you also brought up, “work collaboratively with peers.” This is one of the worst things about being in higher education in Japan: if you are not tenured, you are not a peer.”* (Group A, in response to Q8)

The frustration hinted at in this last response was also evident in responses by a number of other participants.

The above is not intended as an exhaustive look at the findings from the questionnaire, but instead should be viewed as the broad strokes of what this study uncovered. In the following section, I will discuss some of these findings further.

### **Reflecting on the Excursion (Discussion)**

So, where does all of this lead us? To discuss the above findings and some of the implications, I have adopted the seven questions used by York-Barr and Duke (2004) in their review of teacher leadership: (1) Why focus on teacher leadership? (2) How is teacher leadership defined? (3) What do teacher leaders do? (4) Who are teacher leaders? (5) What conditions influence teacher leadership? (6) How are teacher leaders prepared to lead? (7) What are the effects of teacher leadership?

*Why focus on teacher leadership?*

The range of responses and (sometimes) passionate views indicate that the topic of teacher

leadership in the university EFL context in Japan deserves at least a little more attention. It is clear that many of the respondents in this study had never thought about the topic of teacher leadership in this context, and also that at least a few saw some merit in pursuing this line of inquiry. Starting a dialogue has potential to at least bring to light some of the perspectives that stakeholders have and get teachers and teacher leaders to reflect on their individual and collective actions. Several open-ended responses from the survey lend support to opening the agenda on the topic of teacher leadership in this context, and support the assumption that teacher leadership is being practiced in some programs. It is also clear that some individuals feel marginalized in their programs and have doubts about the quality of leadership there. Discussing these issues within a distributed leadership framework and/or change management framework should help empower teachers to demand and exercise individual and collective agency for improved work environments and student learning outcomes. The distributed leadership framework seems especially relevant in this context in that the breadth and complexity of responsibilities necessitate input and effort from individuals with a range of knowledge and skills. The lone-wolf leader simply cannot manage the range of responsibilities in such contexts. A move toward more distributed forms of leadership could be facilitated by a change management approach. The status quo is a powerful force at most universities in Japan, and overcoming resistance to change necessitates a structured, persistent plan. One helpful framework for bringing about sustainable change was developed by John Kotter (Kotter, 1996; Kotter & Cohen, 2002).

#### *How is teacher leadership defined?*

As commented on in the findings section, several respondents had trouble conceptualizing teacher leadership in this context and a broad range of interpretations were found. It was obvious that several respondents struggled with this. Looking through all of the responses to open-ended questions, we see quite a bit of overlap with the broader literature on teacher leadership. For example, we see reference to formal and informal collaboration, working on the curriculum, involvement in professional development, offering advice and encouragement (for peers and formal leaders), promoting school improvement (at the classroom, program, department, and school-wide levels), advocacy, mentoring, advancing the profession, role modeling, community outreach, problem solving, navigating the bureaucracy, and acting as opinion leader or change agent. I think it is also safe to define teacher leadership in this context as being stretched over the social context, and again a distributed leadership provides both a theoretical and practical framework for gaining valuable input and effort from a range of

individuals.

This study did not uncover any indications that a definition for this context would differ greatly from those in the broader teacher leadership literature discussed above.

#### *What do teacher leaders do?*

We see many of the actions of teacher leaders mentioned in the previous section. Two of the activities that were repeatedly mentioned in this study were the offering of support for peers and working on program improvements. Again, the first question of the survey asked participants to choose roles that they see as ideally being included in the definition of teacher leader. Although we cannot judge how strongly each respondent feels about each role, we see a generally high expectation. Taking just the four roles selected most often (*a. participates in program/department management and decision making [95%]; l. promotes colleagues' professional growth [91%], o. works collaboratively with peers (89%), w. is a strong communicator [89%]*), we see an emphasis on interpersonal skills. This lends further support to the use of distributed leadership as a framework for looking at teacher leadership.

At the same time, participants in the current study were less convinced of the following roles: *d. facilitates parent and school relationships (34%), e. facilitates community and school relationships (47%), g. is politically involved with issues concerning education at all levels (33%)*. The lower frequencies for these items suggest some differences with school contexts, and may indicate that these extra-curricular activities may not be valued as highly among teachers and teacher leaders in university EFL programs in Japan.

#### *Who are teacher leaders?*

Looking at the data provides some answers to this question. It appears that teacher leaders are individuals who take on responsibility beyond their own classroom and offer advice or help to their peers. In some programs, teachers are valued for their leadership skills and involved in decision-making and school improvement efforts. In other programs, teacher leaders are limited to those who are formally designated or recognized. The change management framework mentioned above provides a structured approach to move these programs toward more democratic and shared forms of leadership, and thus better utilize the knowledge and skills of more teachers in school leadership.

As mentioned in the literature review, teacher leaders are likely at a stage in their careers where they are prepared for and comfortable with taking on leadership responsibilities. Our findings support this claim for our context as well.

*What conditions influence teacher leadership?*

As discussed above, the social context can support or hinder attempts at teacher leadership. Key conditions identified by York-Barr and Duke (2004) that influence teacher leadership are school culture and context, roles and responsibilities, and structures. Our findings support this view, with examples of programs where teacher leadership is working and where it is not. We see hints of distributed leadership and examples of teams of teachers and teacher leaders working on change management initiatives. York-Barr and Duke (2004) highlight that effective teacher leadership work involves individual development, collaboration or team development, and organizational development.

*How are teacher leaders prepared to lead?*

Our initial impression is that very little is done to prepare teacher leaders to lead. The few exceptions seem to be programs where time and energy is dedicated to professional development.

Ladyshevsy and Flavell (2011) studied the transfer of leadership development programs on formal teacher leaders at universities in Australia. Their findings lend support for investment in such programs, specifically in terms of increased confidence and improved efficacy in communication. At the same time, they identified factors such as workload, succession planning and orientation that impact on leadership development. Attention to preparing teachers for leadership seems well warranted, and this too can be approached via the change management framework. Kotter and Rathgeber (2006) offer a creative approach to implementing Kotter's (1996) Eight Step Process of Successful Change (Appendix 6).

*What are the effects of teacher leadership?*

There are no clear indications from this limited investigation of direct links between teacher leadership and student learning outcomes. As with the general tendency in studies to date, most of what we can say about the effects of teacher leadership are anecdotal, and refer more to improved teacher moral or increased agency. It appears from our responses that a more supportive or collaborative atmosphere is linked to teacher leadership.

This question can be approached from the negative side, i.e. what are the effects of a lack of teacher leadership? Several respondents commented on their frustration at the lack of peer support and collaborative structures. We see in responses several hints at teacher isolation and lack of collective efficacy. Increased collective efficacy has been described as increasing motivation to work hard for the team, persistence in the face of adversity, and increased willingness to accept more difficult tasks (Zaccaro, Rittman & Marks, 2001). Albert Bandura (cited in Zaccaro et al, 2001) also writes about the power of collective efficacy. The limited glimpse achieved in this study appears to support these claims, again with several examples of the lack of collective efficacy where teachers are isolated or treated as commodities.

Akert and Martin (2012) describe the benefits of teacher leadership as including greater participation, increased ownership, commitment and self-efficacy, improved morale, strengthened professionalism, empowerment and teaching quality. Our initial impression is that this holds true for our context as well.

In closing, I would like to suggest several areas for further study. First, to further clarify the relationship between expectations and reality, I would like to rework the Teacher Leadership Perceptions Survey for Likert Scale responses to the first four questions. Additionally, cases studies (Yin, 1989) of university EFL programs in Japan where teacher leadership is thriving would provide some empirical support for promoting teacher leadership in these contexts.

Casual, informal encounters among teachers and between teachers and teacher leaders surfaced as an important venue for discussing pedagogical issues. Exploring the dynamics of these encounters seems like a promising area for future research.

Also, I did not ask about gender, but this is another area of teacher leadership that needs to be explored in this context.

Finally, the research agenda for teacher leadership outlined by Frost and Harris (2003) seems just as relevant for EFL contexts, namely:

- exploring the variety of forms of teacher leadership in their different contexts
- assessing the extent to which and in what ways teacher leadership contributes to school improvement
- examining the factors that inhibit or support the exercise of leadership on the part of

the teachers

-identifying and evaluating strategies for encouraging and ‘scaffolding’ teacher leadership

It would appear that there is no shortage of areas for research in these contexts.

### **Returning Home (Conclusion)**

In this paper, I have reported on some exploratory research into the topic of teacher leaders in university-level English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts in Japan. Although much has been written on the topic of teacher leadership, most of the existing empirical research and academic literature has focused on primary and secondary settings in Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States. This research was aimed at opening the discussion of the topic of teacher leadership in tertiary-level EFL contexts in Japan.

Despite the various shortcomings of the current study, I believe there is sufficient evidence that teacher leadership can and should be discussed in this new context. The distributed leadership and change management frameworks have also proved helpful in theorizing the topic of teacher leadership in this new context and are likely candidates for pushing forward with investigations on the topic of teacher leadership. I was especially encouraged to pursue this line of research by the following response:

*“This is a good topic as there is almost a complete lack of leadership in Japanese higher education. When there is leadership at all it is usually very poorly executed and often has a detrimental effect on student learning. This is rarely talked about as most teachers do not have the standing to challenge the status quo. If we look at how many industries are looking at human resources in the global economy Japanese education is a disaster. It is way behind the times and going backward with little indication it can turn it around.”* (Group A, in response to Q8)

In terms of implications, this limited study highlights the need for the same conditions identified by Muijs and Harris (2006) as promoting the emergence and maintenance of teacher leadership: (1) Supportive culture, (2) Supportive structures, (3) Strong leadership and support, (4) Commitment to action enquiry and data richness, (5) Innovative forms of professional development, (6) Co-ordinated improvement efforts, (7) High levels of teacher participation and

involvement, (8) Collective creativity, (9) Shared professional practice, and (10) Recognition and reward.

Although limited in terms of both breadth and depth, the current study identified several areas for future research. As mentioned above, Smylie (1995) called attention early on to the shortcomings of published findings on teacher leadership, namely a lack of both empirical studies and formal theory, a predominance of descriptive accounts, a narrow view of teacher leadership, and absence of a cohesive or unified thrust to inquiries. Working at correcting these shortcomings can also be our agenda in this new context.

As teachers, we need to be committed to putting our own teaching under the microscope and testing pedagogical theories in practice (Stenhouse, 1975). This pursuit seems just as important in the area of teacher leadership.

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## **Appendix 1 – Teacher Leadership Perceptions Questionnaire**

### Teacher Leadership Perceptions

Thank you for time and effort in completing the following survey, which is part of a study being conducted by Professor Brent A. Jones at Konan University, Hirao School of Management. The aim of the project is to explore the roles of teacher leaders in university English as a Foreign Language (EFL) programs in Japan, and hopefully gain insight into what is expected of teacher leaders as well as the type of training and support they receive. If you have any questions about this research before deciding to take part please email Brent A. Jones (bjones@center.konan-u.ac.jp).

By completing this survey, you indicate your consent for your responses to be used for the purposes of research, including any subsequent publications.

### Teacher Leadership Perceptions Electronic Survey

For purposes of this study, the term Teacher Leadership is defined as “Teachers who are leaders lead within and beyond the classroom, identify with and contribute to a community of teacher learners and leaders, and influence others toward improved educational practice” (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001, p.5), and are members and or chairs of formally recognized committees. Please consider this definition while focusing your thoughts on individuals who fulfill formal teacher leadership roles within your school. Your participation is greatly appreciated. Please be aware that you are not required to answer any questions should you choose not to.

1. Ideally, which of the following do you believe should be included in a definition of the role

of teacher leader? Check all that apply.

A teacher leader . . .

- participates in program/department management and decision making
- builds trust and rapport with peers
- confronts and challenges the status quo in a school's culture
- facilitates parent and school relationships
- facilitates community and school relationships
- actively participates in formal professional development
- is politically involved with issues concerning education at all levels
- monitors school improvement efforts
- understands how to interpret and use data concerning student abilities
- works to enhance school wide learning
- develops and leads professional development programs
- promotes colleagues' professional growth (e.g., research, presentations, publishing)
- acts as a role model for professional growth
- leads program/department wide Learning Communities
- works collaboratively with peers
- guides colleagues in improving instruction
- views him/herself as a positive role model
- has a strong understanding of his/her role as a leader
- has excellent teaching skills
- has a clearly developed philosophy of education
- is organized and flexible
- willingly takes on extra responsibilities
- is a strong communicator
- keeps up with current developments in their field

2. In reality, which of the following do you believe characterizes persons acting in the role of teacher leader in your program/department? Check all that apply.

In my program/department formal teacher leaders . . .

- participate in program/department management and decision making
- build trust and rapport with peers
- confront and challenge the status quo in a school's culture
- facilitate parent and school relationships
- facilitate community and school relationships

- actively participate in formal professional development
- are politically involved with issues concerning education at all levels
- monitor school improvement efforts
- understand how to interpret and use data concerning student abilities
- work to enhance school wide learning
- develop and lead professional development programs
- promote colleagues' professional growth (e.g., research, presentations, publishing)
- act as role models for professional growth
- lead program/department wide Learning Communities
- work collaboratively with peers
- guide colleagues in improving instruction
- view themselves as positive role models
- have a strong understanding of their role as a leader
- have excellent teaching skills
- have a clearly developed philosophy of education
- are organized and flexible
- willingly take on extra responsibilities
- are strong communicators
- keep up with current developments in their field

3. Ideally, what benefit can teacher leaders bring to a school? Check all that apply.

Teacher leaders can benefit a school by ...

- contributing to the building of a culture that supports increased student learning
- developing and interpreting curricular goals of the program/department
- bolstering school improvement efforts
- increasing collaboration among faculty
- representing teachers in school wide decision making
- supporting all teachers through coaching and instructional skill enhancement
- being positive role models and demonstrating best practices
- improving the school's ranking and/or prestige
- gaining external funding for the program/department

4. In reality, how do teacher leaders benefit your program/department? Check all that apply.

Teacher leaders benefit my program/department by ...

- contributing to the building of a culture that supports increased student learning
- developing and interpreting curricular goals of the program/department

- bolstering school improvement efforts
- increasing collaboration among faculty
- representing teachers in school wide decision making
- supporting all teachers through coaching and instructional skill enhancement
- being positive role models and demonstrating best practices
- improving the school's ranking and/or prestige
- gaining external funding for the program/department

5. What do you believe would happen to your school if teachers did not participate in leadership roles? Mark only one.

If teachers did not participate in leadership roles at my school...

- The school would experience great improvement, student achievement would increase.
- The school would remain unchanged, student achievement would be unaffected.
- The school would experience moderate changes, student achievement would fluctuate.
- The school would suffer, student achievement would lower.

6. Do you interact with any teacher leaders at your school? If yes, in what ways do you interact?

7. Do you participate in formal or informal teacher leadership? If so please explain.

8. Please feel free to add any comments you would like based on this survey.

9. How long have you been teaching? Mark only one.

- 1 - 5 years
- 6 - 10 years
- 11 - 15 years
- 15 + years

10. How long have you been teaching at the university level? Mark only one.

- 1 - 5 years
- 6 - 10 years
- 11 - 15 years
- 15 + years

11. How long have you been teaching at your current institution? Mark only one.

- 1 - 5 years
- 6 - 10 years
- 11 - 15 years
- 15 + years

12. How long have you been in Japan? Mark only one.

- 1 - 5 years
- 6 - 10 years
- 11 - 15 years
- 15 + years

13. What is your nationality?

14. What type of institution are you working at? Mark only one.

- National University
- Prefectural University
- Municipal University
- Private University

## Appendix 2 - The Roles of Teacher Leaders (Ideal & In Reality)

A teacher leader . . . / In my program/department formal teacher leaders . . .	Ideally	In Reality	Difference
a. participates in program/department management and decision making	75	63	12
b. builds trust and rapport with peers	67	37	30
c. confronts and challenges the status quo in a school's culture	44	23	21
d. facilitates parent and school relationships	27	9	18
e. facilitates community and school relationships	37	20	17
f. actively participates in formal professional development	67	38	29
g. is politically involved with issues concerning education at all levels	26	13	13
h. monitors school improvement efforts	56	36	20
i. understands how to interpret and use data concerning student abilities	64	36	28
j. works to enhance school wide learning	54	28	26
k. develops and leads professional development programs	64	18	46
l. promotes colleagues' professional growth (e.g. research, presentations, publishing)	72	40	32
m. acts as a role model for professional growth	64	26	38
n. leads program/department wide Learning Communities	44	10	34
o. works collaboratively with peers	70	38	32
p. guides colleagues in improving instruction	59	23	36
q. views him/herself as a positive role model	52	29	23
r. has a strong understanding of his/her role as a leader	54	22	32
s. has excellent teaching skills	55	29	26
t. has a clearly developed philosophy of education	57	30	27
u. is organized and flexible	66	30	36
v. willingly takes on extra responsibilities	44	30	14
w. is a strong communicator	70	26	44
w. keeps up with current developments in their field	64	32	32

(n = 79)

Appendix 3 – The Roles of Teacher Leaders (Complete)

Item	*A (%) n = 35		Diff:	*B (%) n = 12		Diff:	*C (%) n = 20		Diff:	*D (%) n = 12		Diff:	Total (%) n=79		Diff:
	Ideally/Reality	Ideally/Reality		Ideally/Reality	Ideally/Reality		Ideally/Reality	Ideally/Reality		Ideally/Reality	Ideally/Reality				
a.	0.97	0.86	0.11	0.83	0.75	0.08	0.95	0.6	0.35	1	1	0	0.95	0.8	0.15
b.	0.86	0.51	0.35	0.83	0.58	0.25	0.85	0.3	0.55	0.83	0.5	0.33	0.85	0.47	0.38
c.	0.57	0.31	0.26	0.33	0.42	-0.09	0.6	0.2	0.4	0.67	0.25	0.42	0.56	0.29	0.27
d.	0.34	0.11	0.23	0.08	0.08	0	0.45	0.15	0.3	0.42	0.08	0.34	0.34	0.11	0.23
e.	0.46	0.29	0.17	0.17	0.08	0.09	0.55	0.2	0.35	0.67	0.42	0.25	0.47	0.25	0.22
f.	0.91	0.4	0.51	0.67	0.42	0.25	0.8	0.5	0.3	0.92	0.75	0.17	0.85	0.48	0.37
g.	0.43	0.17	0.26	0.25	0.17	0.08	0.2	0.15	0.05	0.33	0.17	0.16	0.33	0.16	0.17
h.	0.8	0.4	0.4	0.5	0.58	-0.08	0.7	0.4	0.3	0.67	0.58	0.09	0.71	0.46	0.25
i.	0.8	0.46	0.34	0.67	0.42	0.25	0.85	0.45	0.4	0.92	0.5	0.42	0.81	0.46	0.35
j.	0.74	0.43	0.31	0.67	0.25	0.42	0.65	0.3	0.35	0.58	0.33	0.25	0.68	0.35	0.33
k.	0.89	0.17	0.72	0.75	0.25	0.5	0.9	0.2	0.7	0.5	0.42	0.08	0.81	0.23	0.58
l.	0.94	0.49	0.45	0.75	0.58	0.17	0.9	0.3	0.6	0.75	0.67	0.08	0.91	0.51	0.4
m.	0.89	0.37	0.52	0.58	0.25	0.33	0.85	0.25	0.6	0.75	0.42	0.33	0.81	0.33	0.48
n.	0.6	0.09	0.51	0.58	0.08	0.5	0.6	0.2	0.4	0.33	0.17	0.16	0.56	0.13	0.43
o.	0.89	0.46	0.43	0.83	0.25	0.58	0.9	0.5	0.4	0.83	0.67	0.16	0.89	0.48	0.41
p.	0.77	0.37	0.4	0.67	0.17	0.5	0.7	0.2	0.5	0.75	0.25	0.5	0.75	0.29	0.46
q.	0.63	0.31	0.32	0.58	0.42	0.16	0.75	0.3	0.45	0.67	0.58	0.09	0.66	0.37	0.29
r.	0.63	0.29	0.34	0.58	0.33	0.25	0.9	0.3	0.6	0.58	0.17	0.41	0.68	0.28	0.4
s.	0.74	0.34	0.4	0.67	0.5	0.17	0.75	0.35	0.4	0.5	0.33	0.17	0.7	0.37	0.33
t.	0.74	0.51	0.23	0.5	0.33	0.17	0.85	0.15	0.7	0.67	0.42	0.25	0.72	0.38	0.34
u.	0.86	0.43	0.43	0.67	0.5	0.17	0.85	0.25	0.6	0.92	0.33	0.59	0.84	0.38	0.46
v.	0.57	0.46	0.11	0.25	0.17	0.08	0.65	0.4	0.25	0.67	0.33	0.34	0.56	0.38	0.18
w.	0.91	0.34	0.57	0.75	0.25	0.5	0.85	0.3	0.55	1	0.42	0.58	0.89	0.33	0.56
x.	0.77	0.43	0.34	0.92	0.42	0.5	0.8	0.25	0.55	0.83	0.58	0.25	0.81	0.41	0.4

**Appendix 4 – Benefits (Ideal & In Reality)**

	Expectation	Reality	Difference
contributing to the building of a culture that supports increased student learning	73	39	34
developing and interpreting curricular goals of the program/department	64	46	18
bolstering school improvement efforts	56	32	24
increasing collaboration among faculty	71	34	37
representing teachers in school wide decision making	59	36	23
supporting all teachers through coaching and instructional skill enhancement	56	14	42
being positive role models and demonstrating best practices	58	19	39
improving the school's ranking and/or prestige	43	13	30
gaining external funding for the program/department	51	18	33

(n = 79)

**Appendix 5 - What would happen?**

The school would experience great improvement, student achievement would increase.	2
The school would remain unchanged, student achievement would be unaffected.	20
The school would experience moderate changes, student achievement would fluctuate.	17
The school would suffer, student achievement would lower.	39

(n = 79)

**Appendix 6 - 8 Step Process of Successful Change (Kotter, 1996)**

- Create a Sense of Urgency
- Pull Together the Guiding Team
- Develop the Change Vision and Strategy
- Communicate for Understanding and Buy In
- Empower Others to Act
- Produce Short-Term Wins
- Don't Let Up
- Create a New Culture