Distributed Leadership Practices of Elementary and Secondary School Administrators in the State of Washington

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Distributed Leadership Practices of Elementary and Secondary School Administrators in the State of Washington

By
Kelly A. Raymond

Accepted in Partial Completion of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Education

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Distributed Leadership Practices of Elementary and Secondary School Administrators in the State of Washington

A Dissertation
Presented to
the Faculty of
Western Washington University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

by
Kelly A. Raymond
April 2024
Abstract

The positive impact of an effective school administrator cannot be understated. Research on leadership practices highlights the efficacy of distributed leadership for positive student outcomes and teacher satisfaction especially after the challenges of the pandemic. However, further research is required to understand how principals implement distributed leadership practices and the differences across school levels. The purpose of the study was to examine the engagement of elementary and secondary school administrators in the State of Washington in distributed leadership practices. Utilizing the Distributed Leadership Readiness Scale, perceptions of distributed leadership engagement were assessed across four dimensions: mission, vision, and culture; leadership practices; shared responsibility; and school culture. Findings indicate that administrators in Washington State perceive themselves as highly engaged in distributed leadership. The dimension with the highest engagement was school culture and the dimension with the lowest engagement was leadership practices. Significant differences in engagement were observed between elementary and middle schools in the dimensions of mission, vision, and goals and shared responsibility as well as between elementary and high schools in the dimension of shared responsibility. Effect sizes for these differences were small, suggesting relatively modest variations in engagement levels across school levels. The study offers valuable insights into the readiness of administrators in Washington State to engage in distributed leadership practices, emphasizing the importance of understanding and addressing potential differences in engagement across various school contexts.
Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Dr. Wayne Robertson for his guidance as the chairman of my dissertation committee. I also extend my appreciation to Dr. Don Larsen and Dr. Carl Bruner for dedicating their time and providing support as committee members.

Thank you to my in-laws, Bill and Patsy Williams, my fellow educators, and friends for their support, and to Dr. Karen Dickinson for her exceptional mentorship.

I extend my deepest gratitude to my wife, Maren Williams, whose unwavering support and love sustained me through this learning process and my career. I am forever grateful for her encouragement and love. I also extend my heartfelt thanks to my parents, James and Valerie, who recognized the transformative power of the education system despite their unfamiliarity with navigating it. Their unfaltering commitment to my success, along with their rich storytelling, imparted to me invaluable lessons about life and the world. I am forever indebted to them for their wisdom and guidance.

Additionally, I am grateful to my older siblings, Kay and Kim, for blazing the trail before me, and to my dear departed brother, Tony, whose legacy of leading with equity and celebrating individual uniqueness continues to inspire me. His memory serves as a constant reminder of the importance of embracing diversity and inclusion in all aspects of life.
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Chapter I: Background of the Study

Introduction

With a 30-year career spanning three countries and five K–12 school districts, I have held various leadership positions as a teacher, high school principal, district office administrator, and superintendent. These experiences have helped shape my perception of effective leadership practices. Moreover, I have learned that leadership is not embodied in one person or a singular role; rather, it is through interactions with others in any given situation that leadership practice occurs. An effective leader serves others and earns high levels of trust for empowerment over time. Leaders implement a shared vision and develop others through motivation, delegation, and transparent communication for risk-taking. Moreover, a good leader models the way and distributes leadership.

As an educator, regardless of my position, it is a pleasure being part of a high-functioning team focused on student growth and achievement. Learning alongside students, with them at the center of our work, has sustained me throughout my career in education. When I assumed the role of high school principal at a highly diverse school with a history of frequent turnover in principal leadership and students entering high school from a state-supported low-performing middle school, I quickly realized that systems and structures for teamwork and leadership were crucial for the success of our students.

Elmore (2000) asserted that shared leadership is significant because of the standards-based reform, which explicitly localized school leaders and teachers as the accountability agents for student learning. Given my leadership role in a standards-based system, I focused on distributing leadership practices. Consequently, I initiated the development of a shared vision and mission with teachers and implemented a shared decision-making process for school
improvement strategies. In the second year of my tenure as principal, as I gained a deeper understanding of the school culture, I refined and introduced various team structures based on my observations of educators’ strengths and expertise. According to Spillane et al. (2018), recent studies have shown that organizational factors, such as team structures, play a more significant role in facilitating teacher interactions than individual factors. Moreover, the perception of expertise tends to encourage collaboration among colleagues.

Considering my interest in shared leadership, Dickinson (2016), a literacy coach and principal advisor assigned to my school, proposed a case study of my leadership initiatives. Dickinson also examined the following question: “To what extent does a principal’s leadership style affect the closing of the achievement gap in reading and writing at the high school level” (p. 8). Dickinson concluded that my servant and distributed leadership styles “could be inferred to have positively affected student achievement to the extent that it contributed to the closing of the achievement gap in reading and writing at the high school level” (p. 128).

My interest in studying distributed leadership continues as the district for which I work embarks on implementing a new strategic plan to increase student learning and educator retention. This plan comes on the heels of a global pandemic when many educators left the profession and there are growing gaps in student learning. Effective leadership practices can positively impact school culture and student outcomes especially when leadership is distributed.

**Statement of Problem**

In this era characterized by high accountability, high pressure on school leaders to enhance student outcomes is inevitable. This pressure, compounded by the challenges of the pandemic, has led to low morale and an increased exodus of teachers from the profession, with levels of teacher dissatisfaction ranking at their highest (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond,
2017). According to Darling-Hammond et al. (2022), the actions of teachers and their retention significantly impact student outcomes. Current research on leadership behaviors highlights the efficacy of distributed leadership, which includes shared decision-making, in fostering positive student outcomes and boosting teacher satisfaction (Darling-Hammond et al., 2022).

Schools’ interest in distributed leadership has increased rapidly since 2000. However, this is common primarily in the United Kingdom school system (Bolden, 2011); distributed leadership is less common in the United States, where shared or collaborative leadership prevails. Shared or collaborative leadership is related to the participation of many (Spillane, 2005).

In US schools, distributed leadership is less commonly used or understood than shared, collaborative, or democratic leadership (Bolden, 2011; Spillane, 2005). Additionally, Spillane (2005) explained that a distributed perspective may allow shared or collaborative leadership that may or may not be democratic. Furthermore, Uhl-Bien (2006) asserted that distributed leadership is not about one individual’s leadership attributes and skills, but rather a systematic and social process involving interactions among multiple people. Distributed leadership also encompasses the “how” of leadership and the way of thinking about leadership practice (Spillane et al., 2001).

Research indicates the need to further explore the leadership practices of school administrators. A recent study by the Wallace Foundation synthesized two decades of research on how principals affect students and school culture. It concluded that the impact of an effective principal has likely been understated. The effects are greater on student achievement and broader in essential areas such as teacher satisfaction (Grissom et al., 2021).

Further research is required to understand how principals can implement distributed leadership practices, such as setting a clear vision and direction, engaging with teachers in
focused instructional interactions that attend to the needs of diverse learners, building a productive school climate, facilitating collaboration, and managing school improvement (Darling-Hammond et al., 2022; Grissom et al., 2021). In this regard, Lizotte (2013) recommended further study on distributed leadership and teachers’ perceptions of school administrators’ practices that influence distributed leadership.

Moreover, considering the complexity of the principalship, Grissom et al. (2021) concluded that “Research on school principals is highly variable and the field requires new investment in a rigorous, cohesive body of research” (p. 93). Consequently, future studies should explore elements of constructing leadership, such as influencing others to lead, fostering collective engagement, and challenging traditional forms of organizational development (Bolden, 2011).

Scope of the Study

This study examines the readiness for distributed leadership in elementary and secondary schools in Washington State. The aim of this study is to investigate the engagement level of Washington State elementary and secondary school administrators in distributed leadership practices across the dimensions outlined by Gordon (2005).

Study Limitations and Delimitations

Limitations and delimitations of the study are as follows:

- The study is limited to one state and the settings of elementary and secondary schools within that state. Therefore, its generalizability to schools in other states with differing grade configurations, demographics, and education systems may be limited.
- This study focuses exclusively on public schools and may not be applicable to private or charter schools.
• The low response rate to the survey may have affected the outcomes of this study.
• The respondents may have had different definitions of distributed leadership, which may have affected responses to the survey.
• The length of service and experience of an administrator may have affected responses to the survey.
• Each school’s established culture and student demographics vary, which may have affected administrators’ responses to the survey.
• Although the data collected were anonymous, and participating elementary and secondary schools did not identify themselves, the researcher may have established relationships with administrators emailed to participate in this study, which may have resulted in bias.

Rationale and Significance of the Study

Existing research supports the claim that distributed leadership results in positive outcomes for students and organizations. Specifically, these benefits include improvement in student learning and well-being, school culture, and teacher commitment, satisfaction, and self-efficacy. However, multiple definitions for distributed leadership can lead to varying interpretations among researchers, potentially leading to misconceptions. Thus, given its crucial influence on national education policies and its necessity as a leadership practice amid the disruptive effects of the pandemic, now is the time to expand the knowledge of distributed leadership (Harris & Jones, 2020; Hickey et al., 2022). Leithwood et al. (2020) concurred, stating that future studies should provide in-depth information on how leaders implement successful practices such as distributed leadership. Additionally, more knowledge about how school administrators in Washington State are implementing distributed leadership practices is needed because they are evaluated by the AWSP Leadership Framework, that incorporates a distributed
leadership component (1.4) under Criterion 1: Creating a Culture (Washington State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, n.d. [WA OSPI]).

In this regard, Modeste and Kelley (2020) noted the concept of distributed leadership in schools. However, there is limited information about implementing distributed leadership practices, particularly across school levels, such as secondary vs. elementary schools. The significance of this study for leaders in education is to gain an understanding of areas where distributed leadership is challenging to implement at the elementary and secondary levels. Furthermore, it highlights the differences in distributed leadership practices among elementary, middle, and high schools where research is limited.

Elmore (2000) outlined five dimensions of distributed leadership practices which schools need to follow. Based on Elmore’s work, the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) developed the Distributed Leadership Readiness Scale (DLRS), which Gordon (2005) deemed valid and reliable. Based on factor analysis, Gordon consolidated the five dimensions identified in Elmore’s research into four dimensions: mission, vision, and goals; school culture; leadership practices; and shared responsibility. Shared responsibility encompasses shared decision-making, evaluation, and professional development from the original five dimensions. The DLRS measures a school’s readiness to engage in distributed leadership practices and serves as the foundation for the research instrument used in this study.

The following subsections elaborate on the survey constructs:

**Mission, Vision, and Goals**

The first construct pertains to the school’s mission, vision, and goals. Variations within a school can often hinder positive student outcomes. Therefore, schools must mitigate such variances. Research suggests that highly effective schools that significantly improve student
achievement reduce differences in practice by defining and implementing common goals (Day et al., 2020; Stringfield et al., 2008). Hence, an essential educational leadership practice involves collectively developing the organization’s mission, vision, and goals.

Mission, vision, and goals are essential elements of distributed leadership. A vision statement represents the school’s future goals, while the mission outlines the actions required to achieve that vision. According to Gordon (2005), a shared vision and mission foster a school community with organizational and behavioral agreements. Setting directions and a vision serves to motivate and inspire a shared sense of purpose across the faculty. Doing so establishes expectations for all, enhancing the improvement of student outcomes (Day et al., 2020). Hence, it is imperative that staff and school community members understand and share the goals for distributed leadership.

School Culture

Another requirement for distributed leadership is a common culture, which constitutes the second dimension. Harris (2005) elucidated, “Distributed leadership means multiple sources of guidance and direction, following the contours of expertise in an organization, made coherent through a common culture” (p. 67). Shared values and routines form the cornerstones of distributed leadership, and schools need to focus on the features of their culture because they influence student achievement (Elmore, 2000). Therefore, leaders must prioritize fostering a school culture with a whole child approach (Modeste & Kelley, 2020). One effective way to ensure a positive school culture is through open leadership and shared learning. According to Donley et al. (2020), distributive leadership will be more effective in schools that support a climate of transparency, trust, shared knowledge, preparation, and support. Research has demonstrated the effectiveness of distributed leadership in school improvement efforts, leading
to its incorporation into the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders. Consequently, there is a growing emphasis on leadership teams that focus on building teacher leadership capacity in schools (Donley et al., 2020).

**Shared Responsibility**

Distributed leadership practice encourages shared responsibility among staff. As Elmore (2000) stated,

> In a knowledge-intensive enterprise like teaching and learning, there is no way to perform these complex tasks without widely distributing the responsibility for leadership among roles in the organization, and without working hard at creating a common culture or set of values, symbols, and rituals. (p. 25)

Sharing responsibility highlights the idea that there is no single leader. However, when organizing teams for a shared purpose, it is essential to consider educators’ strengths, interests, skills, and areas of expertise (Elmore, 2000).

**Leadership Practice**

In a distributed model, the organization of staff to execute leadership practices is carefully designed. Organizing staff for enhanced productivity is a crucial leadership practice. According to Spillane et al. (2004), the interactions of leaders with others and the associated practices are connected to the leader’s intentions, ideas, and influence. This encompasses the routines within the school and acquiring necessary knowledge and skills outside the organization, if required. Donley et al. (2020), highlighted that implementing a distributed leadership model unites teachers and leaders in influencing effective school practices. Distributed leadership places learning at the center, with principals and teachers being responsible for instruction and learning outcomes. However, thoughtful planning in determining
the roles and responsibilities of teacher leaders and utilizing teachers’ strengths and expertise in specific areas are crucial facets of the model (Donley et al., 2020).

Variables

**Independent Variables**

The following independent variables were used in this study to explore potential differences in administrators’ leadership practices with respect to the DLRS dimensions: elementary, middle, and high school levels and demographic parameters such as administrators’ gender, highest degree attained, and years of experience as an educator and administrator.

**Dependent Variable**

The dependent variable was administrators’ engagement on the DLRS. This scale was developed by the CSDE and utilized by Gordon (2005) for distributed leadership readiness. It is based in part on Elmore’s (2000) research on effective schools.

**Research Questions**

Based on the literature review, two research questions were developed:

**RQ1**: What is the engagement level of elementary and secondary school administrators in the State of Washington with respect to the four dimensions of distributed leadership?

**RQ2**: What is the difference in the distributed leadership practices of elementary, middle, and high school administrators in the State of Washington?

**Hypotheses**

RQ1 is descriptive in nature and not designed to test a hypothesis. RQ2 is explored in this study using a cross-sectional survey design. The hypotheses for RQ2 are as follows:

**H20**: There is no difference beyond chance in the distributed leadership practices of elementary, middle, and high school administrators.
**H2a:** There is a significant difference beyond chance in the distributed leadership practices of elementary, middle, and high school administrators, and it is in favor of elementary school administrators.

**Definition of Terms**

**Distributed leadership:** Distributed leadership is a system of practices that focuses on interactions among leaders, followers, and situations. In this type of leadership, leadership actions are spread across multiple leaders within the same context and extend beyond the delegation of tasks (Gronn, 2002; Spillane et al., 2004). A primary aspect of distributed leadership is to enhance others’ knowledge and skills through common goals and shared responsibilities (Elmore, 2000). Furthermore, distributed leadership is a system wherein people work together based on their strengths, competencies, or specializations, and it relies on their knowledge, skills, experience, or values (Elmore, 2004).

**Instructional leadership:** Instructional leadership focuses on learning and “increases the school’s capacity for improving teachers’ instructional capacity” (Heck & Hallinger, 2014, p. 658).

**Transformative leadership:** Transformative leadership often involves inspiring a shared vision and providing direction for stakeholders by implementing, monitoring, and adjusting systems and creating supportive conditions (Toh et al., 2014).

**School leadership:** School leadership is defined as “the identification, acquisition, allocation, coordination, and use of the social, material, and cultural resources necessary to establish the conditions for the possibility of innovation in teaching and learning” (Spillane et al., 2003, p. 535).
Elementary school: An elementary school is a school that serves students in Grades K–5.

Middle school: A middle school is a school that serves students in Grades 6–8.

High school: A high school is a school that serves students in Grades 9–12.

Overview of the Study

The study is structured into five chapters. Chapter I comprises the background, introduction, theoretical basis for the study, statement of the problem, scope of the study, rationale and significance of the study, limitations and delimitations, research questions, hypotheses, and definition of terms. Chapter II presents the literature review of distributed leadership. Chapter III describes the methodology used in this study. Chapter IV analyzes the data, and Chapter V contains the conclusion summarizing the study findings.
Chapter II: Literature Review

This chapter reviews recent literature on the historical context of the multiple meanings of distributed leadership, theoretical frameworks, the connection of distributed leadership to two models of school leadership, the use of expertise and trust to empower teacher leadership capacity, and the benefits and barriers of distributed leadership practices.

In the first part of this review, I explore the understanding of distributed leadership as a concept in educational leadership based on early research and theories as well as contemporary views informed by current research. In the second part, I highlight the impact on student outcomes when distributed leadership practices are connected to the following two types of educational leadership: instructional and transformational.

The third section reviews the benefits of distributed leadership practices on student learning and organizational commitment as well as the existing barriers, highlighting the crucial roles of expertise, trust, empowerment, and teacher leadership capacity in distributed leadership practice. The review concludes with a theoretical framework grounded in distributed leadership theory.

Distributed Leadership

Distributed leadership has stood the test of time since the works of Elmore (2000), Spillane et al. (2001), and Gronn (2002). This leadership practice experienced resurgence during the pandemic, when leadership was distributed amid virtual and distance learning. According to Harris et al. (2022), “Distributed leadership theory implied a fundamental re-conceptualization of leader as practice and challenged much of the conventional wisdom about leadership defined as discreet leadership roles or functions” (p. 439). The literature from the early 2000s Gronn (2002), and Spillane et al. (2001) argued that distributed leadership as a practice was
instrumental in fostering organizational improvement, a notion further reinforced by later research, as illustrated in the following paragraphs.

Distributed leadership continues to be adopted into educational policies. Although research was still emerging after 2001, the concept had already been adopted in educational policies in the United Kingdom, Australia, the United States, New Zealand, and Europe (Harris & Jones, 2020; Harris et al., 2022). However, distributed leadership in fields other than education is limited to this day. According to Harris et al. (2022), studies conducted within different contexts may offer educational researchers new perspectives on overcoming challenges in implementing distributed practices.

There are multiple meanings and interpretations of the term “distributed leadership.” Although it is a leadership concept often referenced in educational leadership, its understanding is broadly applied and interpreted. Early research attempted to establish theories and definitions of distributed leadership and applied them to the context of schools. According to Gronn (2002) the term was coined while studying processes that impacted formal and informal groups with leaders and followers exchanging roles. Later, Gronn (2008) asserted that in 1948 the concept of leadership was introduced as being diffused among groups.

Although distributed leadership is prevalent in principal leadership standards, including the leadership framework in Washington State, and is thus a recommended practice, depending on the researcher, the definition varies. The misconceptions surrounding distributed leadership often lead researchers to interpret its meaning differently.

Therefore, it is essential to catalog the definitions, especially if researchers aim to demonstrate the connection to school improvement (Harris, 2008; Mayrowetz, 2008). The various interpretations of the concept have led to a lack of consensus on the definition of
distributed leadership. The notion that the concept was associated with delegation and opposed to top-down leadership styles resulted in misconceptions about it (Harris et al., 2022; Hickey et al., 2022). Researchers agree on the need for more clarity regarding the definition. The existing ambiguity often makes this leadership concept appealing and fosters critique (Hairon & Goh, 2015; Spillane & Diamond, 2007). More clarity may be attained through additional research on how the practice is implemented in schools.

In my literature review, I note that distributed leadership is often used interchangeably with words such as shared, participative, or democratic, which may add to the complexities of how principals view it as a practice. Although these practices are similar to distributed leadership, they are not identical. Due to these competing and conflicting interpretations of the term, the definition and understanding of this leadership practice vary (Leithwood et al., 2008). However, Hairon and Goh (2015) highlight Harris’s (2008) research to clarify the term by outlining the following characteristics of distributed leadership:

- is broad-based leadership;
- requires multiple levels of involvement in decision-making;
- focuses primarily on improving classroom practice or instruction;
- encompasses both formal and informal leaders;
- links vertical and lateral leadership structures;
- extends to students and encourages students’ voices;
- is flexible and versatile (non-permanent groupings);
- is fluid and interchangeable;
- is ultimately concerned with improving leadership practice. (p. 694)
The aforementioned facets align with aspects of distributed leadership theories proposed by researchers such as Spillane (2005) and Elmore (2000), which are linked to two successful leadership models: instructional and transformative.

**Distributed Leadership Within Instructional and Transformational Leadership Models**

There is no single definition of leadership. This is because leadership is complex and dynamic, encompassing different roles, styles, practices, and behaviors (Ingram & Cangemi, 2012). However, in the realm of leadership, there are two interdependent team members: leaders and followers. Leadership occurs when leaders influence followers to meet organizational goals (Bush & Glover, 2014; Kouzes & Posner, 2006). Ingram and Cangemi (2012) stated, “If leaders cannot develop a genuine desire on the part of others to follow them, team and organization goals will be at risk of failure” (p. 772). Distributed leadership occurs with the interaction of leaders and followers, termed the “leader plus” (Spillane et al., 2004).

The pandemic has rendered school leadership more demanding, given the constantly changing landscape and the loss of connections for staff, students, and the community, which adds relentless pressure (Harris & Jones, 2020). The expectations from within and outside the system affect leaders personally and professionally. Harris and Jones (2020) claimed that due to the pandemic, distributed leadership is necessary and has become the default leadership practice. Thus, they proposed the following leadership considerations for responding to the pandemic while research is pending:

- Apply evidence-based principles of good leadership consistently and responsively, such as having a clear vision, building capacity, and developing others.
- Foster high levels of collaboration with staff and implement self-care practices to build trust for crisis and change management.
• Employ distributed practices for connection, creativity, and collaboration. (Harris & Jones, 2020, pp. 245–246)

A collaborative culture is vital for bolstering distributed leadership. Day et al. (2020) endorse the perspective that distributed leadership comprises a series of practices within both the transformational and instructional leadership frameworks. This perspective is also echoed by Heck and Hallinger (2009), who observe that distributed leadership is intricately connected to instructional leadership.

A body of research has demonstrated that two primary leadership models with distributed practices are linked to high-performing schools. The concept of principals as instructional leaders has gained prevalence both in the United States and globally (Hallinger, 2011). Instructional leadership relies on clear educational goals, planning, and evaluating teaching and learning, with a focus on implementing evidence-based instructional strategies. This model is centered on supporting teachers to enhance student achievement through a continuous improvement approach. In addition, recruitment and retention through professional development, coaching, and modeling of the value of quality teaching and learning are essential aspects of instructional leadership (Heck & Hallinger, 2014). These processes can be distributed among formal and informal instructional leaders working together as a team or in a professional learning community. Doing so will foster a positive culture for learning.

Transformational leadership often involves inspiring a shared vision and direction with stakeholders and building staff expertise in a collaborative environment. Furthermore, transformational leadership focuses on school improvement by implementing, monitoring, and adjusting systems and creating conditions of support that may not be directly related to teaching and learning (Toh et al., 2014). However, transformational leaders also lead aspects of the
teaching and learning program (Day et al., 2020; Hallinger & Heck, 2010). Leithwood et al. (2020) shared findings that transformational leaders influence teaching and learning by establishing shared goals and vision, modeling high expectations with support, and encouraging innovation to build a positive culture and coherence. According to Diaz-Saenz (2011), transformational leaders can often implement significant change because they successfully promote distributed leadership.

A combination of strategies can be instrumental in achieving successful student outcomes by supporting and enhancing conditions for teaching and learning, directly impacting teachers and their work. Day et al. (2020) concluded that the three concepts of instructional leadership, transformational leadership, and distributed leadership are not mutually exclusive. Moreover, the authors found that a combination of leadership strategies aligned with organizational goals and context is more likely to produce positive outcomes for student learning and well-being than leadership practices not aligned with the strategic direction.

**Principal’s Role in Fostering Distributed Leadership**

The principal plays a vital role in fostering distributed leadership practices within the school. As formal leaders, they are accountable for school improvement. According to Harris (2008), overall school improvement is achieved through distributed practices such as shared vision, decision-making, and collaboration. Additionally, the influence of the administrator is a crucial component in supporting school improvement efforts. However, their influence extends beyond those informal leaders with expertise. This is because administrators who implement distributed leadership practices foster leadership by developing the skills and knowledge of informal leaders (Elmore, 2006; Kouzes & Posner, 2016).
Additionally, for distributed leadership to occur, the principal is seeking opportunities to foster potential leaders in meaningful ways. Principals are responsible for developing leaders throughout the school. By establishing and sustaining a learning culture, more leaders are supported (Kouzes & Posner, 2016).

Morillo-Shone (2014) identified the following five mindsets for leaders to promote and nurture a learning culture:

- Lead with equity and integrity to build trust.
- Build leadership capacity through inquiry, coaching, and feedback for reflection.
- Model lifelong learning for professional growth.
- Inspire others through actions to foster a culture of continuous learning, high expectations, inquiry, and accountability.
- Sustain change by sharing the ideal state, considering individual strengths, and providing intellectual curiosity and inspiration to motivate others (p. 35).

**Benefits of Distributed Leadership**

Distributed leadership practices by administrators yield numerous benefits, particularly in student learning, school culture, organizational structures, educator commitment and retention, and self-efficacy. Day et al. (2020) emphasized the heightened visibility of principals and schools to demonstrate their impact on student learning and performance. In their examination of recent studies on distributed leadership, the authors found that “a consensus has emerged among leadership researchers that school leadership can have an especially positive influence on school and student outcomes when it is distributed” (Day et al., 2020, p. 21).

Distributed leadership practices have demonstrated a positive relationship with teachers’ confidence in students’ academic achievement. A longitudinal study by Chen (2018) involving
109 elementary schools across 15 states in the United States supported this perspective. Furthermore, following a review of recent empirical evidence, Leithwood et al. (2020) moderately revised their original assertion, Claim 5 from 2008, as distributed leadership has been extensively examined since then. Claim 5 in 2008 stated, “School leadership has a greater influence on schools and pupils when it is widely distributed” (Leithwood et al., 2008, p. 34). The new claim by Leithwood et al. (2020) is that “School Leadership can have an especially positive influence on school and student outcomes when distributed” (p. 13). However, flexibility in decision-making by those leading is imperative for positive student outcomes. According to Leithwood et al. (2020), new compelling evidence shows that the patterns of distributed leadership are influenced by school context and the “organizational needs and the level of expertise within the organization” (pp. 13–14).

A principal’s emphasis on instructional leadership within a distributed model, where teachers learn together with shared decision-making, supports both student and teacher learning. Day et al. (2020) concluded that the primary role of school administrators is to create and sustain collaboration among staff while supporting and fostering growth in staff with a focus on enhancing student achievement and well-being. Therefore, school administrators must bolster instructional skills through collaboration with teachers, rather than focusing solely on administrative tasks. Bellibas and Liu (2018) conducted a joint study to investigate the perceived relationship between instructional and distributed leadership within a positive school climate characterized by mutual respect and safety. They utilized a principal dataset from the 2013 Teaching and Learning International Survey, comprising 32 countries and over 6,000 schools. The study underscored the significance of principals implementing leadership practices that
foster collaborative work, shared decision-making, and accountability for both instruction and student achievement (Bellibas & Liu, 2018).

Organizational change is crucial for student learning. Findings from a 5-year longitudinal study by Harris and DeFlaminis (2016) on distributed leadership proffered positive organizational change. This can be extended to innovation within an organization. Çoban and Atasoy (2020) affirmed that distributed leadership, facilitated through teacher collaboration resulted in organizational innovativeness. This occurred when principals implemented distributed practices that supported openness and risk-taking in teaching.

Teacher retention is critical for student learning and fostering a positive staff culture. This importance is particularly evident given that the pandemic prompted many teachers to leave the profession (Sulit, 2020). Results from a study conducted in a large Arizona school district on distributive leadership in elementary and middle schools described a distributed leadership framework as a potential model for positively influencing teacher retention, owing to its success in transforming schools. This study identified characteristics of distributive leadership that supported teacher retention. The author also highlighted the necessity for policy or policy revisions to support a distributed leadership framework (Sulit, 2020).

Principals also play a critical role in the recruitment and retention of teachers. Hulpia and Devos (2010) found that teachers’ commitment was influenced by how distributed leadership practices were enacted by the principal, particularly in the areas of decision-making and collaboration with their team members. In his study, Ucar (2021) also determined that a principal’s distributed leadership practices predict organizational commitment from educators.

Empowering teachers’ voices also supports a commitment to the organization. According to Liu and Du (2022), teachers working in schools with distributed leadership practices reveal a
more substantial commitment to the school and are motivated to collaborate on challenging
tasks. One reason is that teachers appreciate being valued as professionals and feel their voices
are essential in meeting the strategic direction for positive student outcomes.

There is power in combining expertise within a school or an organization. Utilizing
expertise is one reason Bush (2013) claimed that distributed leadership is the preferred
leadership model in the 21st century. Commitment to a school is increased when expertise is a
pattern used in informal leadership practices. Although context plays a role in the patterns of
distributed leadership, Leithwood et al. (2020) suggested that recent research provides evidence
that distributed leadership is a positive predictor of organizational performance. Given that
distributed leadership is based on interactions, the pattern depends on assessing school needs and
the expertise within the school or organization (Leithwood et al., 2020). In 2008, Harris
suggested that distributed leadership practices utilize individual strengths to cultivate teamwork,
thereby benefiting the organization through interdependence and collaboration within and across
school districts.

Empowering informal leaders is a benefit of distributed leadership. Spillane et al. (2004)
suggested that the leader-plus aspect of distributed leadership practices encompasses those not in
formal leadership positions. Additionally, an important aspect of broad leadership is making
decisions. Decision-making occurs within the collaboration and interactions of informal leaders
(Hairon & Goh, 2015; Harris, 2008). This aspect of shared decision-making promotes leadership
at multiple levels.

A formal leader’s influence on decision-making expands when empowerment occurs.
This is because, as a group of informal leaders work together, decisions become multidirectional,
as they could originate from anyone in the group (Hairon & Goh, 2015). This interactivity has
also been described as a principle of distributed leadership by Harris (2008), as manifested in flexible grouping. However, for effective decisions to occur, planning and organizational coherence are needed. Coordination for decision-making in distributed leadership is essential (Gronn, 2002). Spillane (2005) claimed that three types of distribution are associated with decision-making when group members have fluid interactions: collective effort, collaboration, and coordination.

Without empowering others, leadership practices are not distributed. Heck and Hallinger (2009) emphasized that empowerment, as part of school governance “encourages commitment, broad participation, and shared accountability for student learning” (p. 670). Additionally, empowerment was identified in teacher leadership discourse when leadership is distributed (Muijs & Harris, 2003).

The result of empowerment is often associated with an increase in self-efficacy. According to Harris et al. (2022), studies by Hallinger and Heck (2010) and Leithwood et al. (2009) revealed that distributed leadership practices had a positive impact on teachers’ confidence and competence. A study conducted in 2023 on the effects of distributed leadership on teacher self-efficacy, job satisfaction, and career well-being involved over 3,500 secondary teachers in Shanghai. The researchers stated, “Although teacher self-efficacy has been identified as a critical factor in relating to distributed leadership and teacher wellbeing, few studies have attempted to investigate their inter-linked relationship in conjunction” (Liu et al., 2023, p. 6). The study concluded that distributed leadership is positively associated with teacher self-efficacy, job well-being, and career well-being. Additionally, this new evidence revealed that teacher self-efficacy mediates the link between distributed leadership and job well-being but not career well-being.
The self-efficacy of teachers often translates to students. This was supported by a study in England that demonstrated the correlation between teacher involvement in decision-making and student self-efficacy and motivation (Harris et al., 2022; Muijs & Harris, 2003). Research conducted by Day et al. (2020) also supported the view that distributed leadership increases staff morale, leading to positive student learning and behavior.

A product of distributed leadership practices is the development of leaders. Given the associated skills and knowledge development, Hairon and Goh (2015) asserted that it would be difficult to argue that leadership development is separate from distributed leadership practices. Spillane et al. (2001) found that in distributed approaches, an individual’s leadership potential is inherent within a given activity and from their interactions collectively across the organization. The formal leader identifies and utilizes others’ expertise, capacity, and competence in distributing tasks. Moreover, when supported by the principal, teacher leaders significantly influence school culture and instructional practices (Harris, 2008). This is not delegation, as the administrator grants authority and agency while supporting the growth of others.

Building leadership capacity occurs when instructional leadership is distributed. Further, various network configurations support teacher leaders in increasing their knowledge and skills for student achievement (Gronn, 2002; Harris, 2008; Wieczorek & Lear, 2018). Skill-building and leadership development are enhanced when a successful instructional leader, such as the principal, serves as the central facilitator among teams or distributed configurations (Wieczorek & Lear, 2018). The authors noted empirical evidence indicating that capacity building to improve instructional practice is emerging, and there is evidence that building teacher leadership capacity fosters a positive school culture.
Trust is a vital element if peers are to collaborate effectively. According to Bush and Glover (2012), distributed leadership is essential for leveraging all team members’ collective talents, knowledge, and skills. Part-time formal leaders, such as instructional coaches, play a crucial role in distributed leadership. This may be attributed to the close peer-to-peer relationships build on trust and thought partnerships they foster (Spillane & Kim, 2012). The authors discovered that part-time formal leaders in a distributed model are more likely to be perceived by teacher colleagues as credible sources of instructional advice due to their ongoing connection to classroom teaching. One reason for this is that they are still actively teaching, thereby providing opportunities to engage in discussions about instruction. Spillane and Kim (2012) noted that an educator in a full-time role as a formal leader is often perceived differently from their peers. In this structure and situation, formal leaders will need to build trust. It is essential for the principal not to compromise such a relationship with actions that impede confidence (Spillane & Kim, 2012).

Trust is an essential element of positive school culture and learning networks. Bush and Glover (2012) noted, “Case studies show that distributed leadership is more likely where there are high levels of trust and shared values” (p. 34). Furthermore, trust often begins with confidentiality for facilitating risk-taking and collaboration. Spillane and Kim (2012) found that lead teachers emphasized the significance of trust when distributing leadership and empowering staff and teams. The authors expanded on this by shaping organizational agreements and structures, such as professional learning time. Additionally, principals can influence teacher interactions by building trust over time (Spillane & Kim, 2012). Therefore, principals must know their team members well and display confidence in their abilities to co-lead.

**Barriers to Implementing Distributed Leadership**
Evidence suggests positive student and organizational outcomes with a distributed leadership approach. However, variations in understanding distributed leadership within a school context and a lack of research on its practical implementation often lead to challenges in its execution (Tahir et al., 2016). However, research has also highlighted additional barriers to implementing distributed leadership (Harris, 2008; Tian et al., 2016). Harris (2004, 2008) identified several obstacles to implementing distributed leadership:

- The shift from a traditional “top-down” leadership model, where power and authority reside with one person, is a hurdle.
- The formal leader may struggle to let go of control, and they may also feel threatened.
- The structural design of the school includes the silos that exist, particularly at the secondary level, with departmental divisions.
- The misguided interpretation that distributing leadership is delegation.

The redistribution of power stands as a crucial concept in distributed leadership. However, much of the literature on distributed leadership practice fails to delve deeply into the critical issue of power. Moreover, structural barriers of leadership, including experience, race, and gender, which hinder inclusion in leadership roles, are often overlooked by researchers (Lumby, 2013). According to Harris (2005), a significant factor enabling distributed leadership is the principal relinquishing power and control. This challenge is notable for some leaders due to personal traits such as ego, vulnerability, and a lack of control over activities and processes. Harris (2004) stated, “There are inherent threats to status and the status quo in all that distributed leadership implies” (p. 20).

Harris (2008) indicated that administrators must examine systems and processes that promote collaboration and cohesion. She also emphasized that large organizations need to
explore multiple forms of communication for teams to learn together. It is somewhat challenging for educators throughout the organization to recognize that leadership can be optimized to benefit from finding solutions through the interaction and sharing of expertise among individuals and teams.

Contemporary literature also points out obstacles and challenges regarding distributed leadership in the context of implementing practices in schools. The complexities for administrators in understanding the facets of this leadership concept and putting it into practice are not easy for leaders. According to Tahir et al. (2016), empirical research has highlighted and documented the challenges of implementing distributed leadership practices such as power structures within formal leadership roles, teacher readiness, and willingness, and the understanding of the why and how of distributed leadership by the team. This includes possible risks associated with distributed leadership practices, such as using struggling teachers in leadership roles that may result in a lack of skills and perceived credibility to lead (Timperley, 2005).

Shared decision-making is a critical element in distributed leadership. In a study conducted by Tahir et al. (2016) on the challenges in distributed leadership experienced by school administrators in Malaysia, the authors discovered that even when empowered by a formal leader, teacher leaders lacked the confidence and belief that they could make their own decisions. This is because of “hierarchically defined and status-orientated roles” (Tahir et al., 2016, p. 851). Hierarchical structures and status may still exist, making implementation difficult (Muijs & Harris, 2003; Tahir et al., 2016). Administrators confirmed that the willingness and expertise of the team were significant issues in implementing distributed leadership practices.
When utilizing expertise within a group of educators for a given task, it is often challenging to involve multiple informal leaders.

**Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework for this study will be grounded in Distributed Leadership Theory. My research will primarily focus on distributed leadership theories as defined by Richard Elmore, James P. Spillane, and Peter Gronn. Distributed Leadership Theory provides a framework for understanding leadership within an organization and how that leadership influences and is influenced by the development of its members.

**Elmore**

Elmore (2000) asserted that school leadership must focus on instructional improvement. His research on the impact of leadership on student achievement highlighted the standards-based reform movement and the concept of loose coupling. Standards-based reform requires a shift in our thinking about the purpose and role of school leaders if we aim to improve student outcomes on a large scale. This is because student achievement requires a collective effort and cannot be attained through working in silos or isolation (Elmore, 2000).

According to Elmore (2000), “loose coupling” began in the early development of public schools, where teachers, mostly female, worked in isolation and independently from their administrators, who were mostly male and had expertise in managing structures and processes rather than instruction (p. 5). This “loose coupling” leads to a lack of coherence and alignment within the school or organization (Elmore, 2000). Coupling also hampers teachers’ ability to learn together and implement evidence-based practices that enhance student outcomes. When coupling occurs, educators collaborate, sharing their practices with reciprocal accountability as they endeavor to meet expected and agreed-upon goals to improve student learning. The
standards-based reform movement was envisioned as the impetus to tackle the issues of loose coupling in the education system.

Elmore (2000) challenged our traditional view of role-based conceptions of leadership by proposing a distributed perspective. “It is the problem of the distribution of knowledge required for large-scale improvement that creates the imperative for the development of distributed leadership” (Elmore, 2000, p. 14). Through distributed leadership practices, instructional leadership can optimally occur (Elmore, 2004). Elmore (2000) defined distributed leadership as a system where people work together based on their strengths, competencies, or specializations, and depend on their knowledge, skills, experience, or values. Given the complexity of teaching and learning, leadership responsibility must be distributed with various modes of guidance and direction. Elmore also argues that the principles of distributed leadership are more critical than restructuring roles.

The five foundational principles of distributed leadership suggested by Elmore are as follows:

- the purpose of administration is the improvement of instructional practice and performance, regardless of role,
- instructional improvement requires continuous learning,
- learning requires modeling,
- the role and activities of leadership flow from the expertise required for learning and improvement, not from the formal dictates of the institution, and
- the exercise of authority requires reciprocity of accountability and capacity (Elmore, 2000, pp. 20–21).
In his longitudinal research study on distributed leadership, Elmore noted five dimensions influencing student achievement: mission, vision, goals, school culture, decision-making, evaluation, professional development, and leadership practices (Gordon, 2005).

**Spillane**

The National Science Foundation and the Spencer Foundation supported the work of Spillane et al. (2001, 2004) on distributed leadership. The study utilized Spillane’s framework to examine distributed leadership practice within the social and situational contexts of schools. According to Spillane et al. (2004), distributed leadership focuses on leadership practices encompassing both thinking and activity. Furthermore, distributed leadership is not focused on one person, as it involves multiple formal and informal leaders depending on the routine, where leadership is “stretched over various facets of the situation” (Spillane et al., 2004, p. 21). The authors highlighted the concept that the product of distributed leadership is the interaction of leaders and followers in each situation. Therefore, “leader plus” is often used to describe distributed leadership, where expertise arises not just from one individual but from the contributions of multiple participants. Additionally, the situation defines the leadership practice, where tools and artifacts play a central role in various tasks. Therefore, distributed leadership is a system of practices focusing on interactions among leaders, followers, and situations (Spillane et al., 2004). Given this, Spillane et al. (2004) suggested that knowledge and skills need to be fostered in both formal and informal leaders so that expertise is distributed. The four components of distributed leadership, according to Spillane et al. (2004), are:

- leadership and task functions to create a shared school vision,
- putting the school vision into practice,
• leadership and tasks are distributed among informal and formal leaders, as well as followers,
• situationally distributed leadership practices are employed by individuals working collectively and collaboratively in a coordinated manner. (pp. 189–213)

Spillane’s research outlined how distributed leadership is used and described the associated benefits within the context of a school setting. Spillane (2005) acknowledged the need for more empirical evidence on distributed leadership effects on instructional improvements or student outcomes.

**Gronn**

Gronn’s (2002) theory challenges the hierarchical leadership model and promotes collaboration. Leadership is not merely a position or title; rather, it is a process involving various individuals within an organization. Distributed leadership recognizes that people possess different strengths, skills, expertise, and knowledge. Thus, leadership can emerge from anyone regardless of their position within the organization because what matters is the how and why of leadership, which depend on the release of human potential (Day et al., 2020; Gronn, 2002). Through collaboration, individuals influence and agree on a shared vision, goals, and the strategic direction of an organization. As a result, empowerment is created through organizational members’ shared decision-making and active engagement. Gronn (2002) pointed out that for this to occur, there is a need to build trust and a culture of respect through ongoing communication.

Gronn (2002) also introduced “concertive action” into the conversation on distributed leadership theory. This concept entails people working together by pooling their initiatives and expertise to achieve their goals with a cumulative effect greater than individual actions. He
described three forms of “concertive action”: spontaneous collaboration, intuitive working relationships, and institutionalized practices.

In the following table, I have compared the essential elements of the three key researchers and their complementary work on distributed leadership.

Table 1

*Dimensions of Distributed Leadership by Elmore, Spillane, and Gronn*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Element</th>
<th>Elmore</th>
<th>Spillane</th>
<th>Gronn</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leadership as a collective process</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School vision</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School culture</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School organization</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artifacts</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spontaneous collaboration</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intuitive working relationships</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutionalize practices</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student outcomes</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructional program</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Summary

As evidenced by the literature, there exists no singular “blueprint” for distributive leadership due to the wide variance in school contexts. Furthermore, this leadership practice is not prescriptive. Implementing distributed leadership practices relies on cohesion through a shared vision and goals, along with interpersonal relationships. Therefore, the principal must balance when to act independently and when to delegate leadership responsibilities (Gronn, 2008).

Understanding the theoretical framework for distributed leadership helps provide clarity and will support administrators in implementing the practice of distributed leadership. My review has provided validated empirical studies and relevant literature to indicate that leadership
matters for student and organizational outcomes. The next step for future studies should be for
researchers to provide in-depth information on how leaders implement successful practices such
as distributed leadership. This is particularly important after the pandemic.
Chapter III: Methodology

Introduction

While there has been a rapid increase in interest in distributed leadership in schools since 2000, it is less common in the United States compared to other settings. Distributed leadership is less commonly used or understood in US schools than shared, collaborative, or democratic leadership (Bolden, 2011; Spillane, 2005). Distributed leadership also encompasses the “how” of leadership and the manner of thinking about leadership practices (Spillane et al., 2001). Gordon (2005) conducted research on distributed leadership, employing Elmore’s (2000) five dimensions of distributed leadership: mission, vision, and goals; decision-making; evaluation and professional development; leadership practices; and school culture within the DLRS. In Gordon (2005), a modification of Elmore’s conceptual framework of distributed leadership was conducted through factor analysis, resulting in the identification of four dimensions: mission, vision, and goals; school culture; leadership practices; and shared responsibility.

This study employed a cross-sectional survey design to investigate the level of engagement of elementary and secondary administrators in Washington State in distributed leadership practices, as measured by the dimensions on the DLRS. Additionally, it aimed to provide insight into any differences in engagement within the four dimensions of distributed leadership practices between elementary, middle, and high school administrators. The demographics of the respondents, such as gender, degree, years of experience as an educator, and years of experience as an administrator, will also be examined. This chapter will describe the research questions, design, hypotheses, participants, instrumentation, data collection, and analysis.

Research Questions
The data pertaining to the research questions below was examined using both descriptive and inferential quantitative methods with the goal of contributing to the development of an understanding of elementary and secondary school administrators’ perceptions of their engagement in the four dimensions of distributed leadership as measured by the DLRS. Survey data was disaggregated to compare differences in schools’ readiness and level of implementing distributed leadership practices.

Based on the stated problems in Chapter I, the following primary research questions will guide this study:

**RQ1:** What is the engagement level of elementary and secondary school administrators in the State of Washington with respect to the four dimensions of distributed leadership?

**RQ2:** What is the difference in the distributed leadership practices of elementary, middle, and high school administrators in the State of Washington?

**Research Design**

The research design of this study combines descriptive, survey, and correlational quantitative methods. The definition of quantitative research methods by Aliaga and Gunderson (2000) describes quantitative methods as “Explaining phenomena by collecting numerical data that are analyzed using mathematically based methods (in particular statistics)” (p. 12).

Researchers can obtain large amounts of data using a survey. According to Muijs (2022), a survey method is appropriate in descriptive studies where researchers want to explore the relationships between variables in real-life contexts. A quantitative design was appropriate for this study because it helped to explain the engagement of elementary and secondary administrators in Washington State in distributed leadership practices. For this study, the DLRS, developed by the CSDE to measure engagement and readiness for distributed leadership
practices, was used along with a demographic survey. The study also compared the number of administrators engaged in distributed leadership at the middle and high school levels.

**Population and Sample**

A purposeful, random sampling method was used to select a representative sample. The target population for this study consisted of principals and assistant principals in elementary and secondary public schools in Washington State, utilizing the Education Directory (WA OSPI, n.d.) at the time of the study. A random sample of 100 per grade level band was identified as followed:

1. Three groups were formed by disaggregating the elementary, middle, and high school levels.
2. A randomizer tool was used to select a random sample for each group.
3. A spreadsheet was saved for each group in the event that additional names needed to be selected at random to fill in for those who did not respond to the email inviting them to participate in the study.

**Instrument**

The DLRS (2005) instrument was utilized in this study. It comprised of a 40-item survey developed by the CSDE and utilized by Gordon (2005) to gauge engagement and readiness in distributed leadership practices. Alongside the 40-item DLRS survey, there was a demographic questionnaire. This questionnaire inquired about administrators’ ethnicity or race, gender, highest degree obtained, total years in education, total years working as an administrator, and the level of their school. The DLRS employs a five-point Likert scale with responses ranging from A=continually, B=frequently, C=sometimes, D=rarely/never to E=insufficient information. Questions are grouped into four dimensions of distributed leadership: mission, vision, and goals;
school culture; shared responsibility; and leadership practices. Scores on each of these
dimensions were analyzed, serving as the dependent variable.

The CSDE utilized focus groups comprising teachers and administrators to develop the
DLRS. Gordon (2005) initially employed the original instrument in a study involving 36 schools
and a total of 1,257 educators. The results indicated that nearly half of the schools showed
improvement. Gordon conducted a factor analysis to ascertain the construct validity and
reliability of the survey. Elmore’s research reorganized the five dimensions into four: mission,
vision, and goals; school culture; leadership practices; and shared responsibility. Shared
responsibility now encompasses shared decision-making, evaluation, and professional
development from the original five dimensions (Gordon, 2005). The internal consistency and
reliability were tested using Cronbach’s alpha correlation, and it was reported that all the
dimensions have a reliability coefficient of .84 or higher. These values surpassed the
recommended .7 reliability coefficient. All items exhibited a factor loading of .35 or higher,
establishing strong construct validity and reliability (Gordon, 2005). This DLRS was also
utilized in recent studies by Pierro (2020) and Riddle (2015).

The DLRS measures the readiness of distributed leadership in a school within four
dimensions, with a minimum of eight questions per dimension. Forty-item questions on a five-
point Likert scale are identified in the chart (see Table 2). The chart, using item analysis from
Gordon’s research, identifies the questions within each dimension (see Table 3).
Table 2

Four Dimensions of Elmore’s Conceptual Frame of Distributed Leadership Mapped to the 40 Items on the DLRS (Gordon, 2005)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mission, vision, and goals</th>
<th>School culture</th>
<th>Leadership practices</th>
<th>Shared responsibility</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8</td>
<td>13, 14, 15, 16, 23, 24, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 32, 33</td>
<td>25, 31, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40</td>
<td>9, 10, 11, 12, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3

Number of Items for Each Dimension (Gordon, 2005)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Number of items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mission, vision, and goals</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School culture</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared responsibility</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership practices</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. N=40

Procedures

I distributed the DLRS survey to all participants using the digital tool Qualtrics. The online survey, which is available to Western Washington University students, collected participants’ responses on a five-point Likert scale. Participation was voluntary and anonymous. Completion of the survey took approximately 10 minutes.

Participants were recruited through an introductory email sent to those identified via the random sampling process. This email described the purpose of the research, the eligibility criteria, and included a statement clarifying that the research will be used in a dissertation. The email also contained an active electronic link to the informed consent form for participant
consent to participate in the study. Consent was obtained before participants received the directions for the DLRS and the active electronic link to the survey.

**Data Collection and Analysis**

Survey results were available on demand after the participants completed the survey. In addition, all data collected will be permanently deleted three years after the study is complete. The data from the 40-item DLRS survey was analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software program version 29.0. The study employed descriptive analysis, applying several non-parametric statistical tests to analyze trends, frequency distributions, central tendency, correlation, and significance. I used univariate analysis to describe the frequency distribution for RQ1: What is the engagement level of elementary and secondary school administrators in the State of Washington with respect to the four dimensions of distributed leadership? The data was also examined by investigating clustering trends based on participants’ identity markers. The analysis included non-parametric tests of statistical significance and power. These tests helped determine whether the data provide support for my alternative hypotheses at the \( \alpha \leq 0.05 \) level (i.e., the 95% confidence level).

In this study, principals, and assistant principals from elementary and secondary public schools in Washington State were invited to complete the electronic version of the DLRS and a demographic questionnaire. The random sample of school administrators was purposely established using an online randomizer to ensure that results obtained from the sample will approximate the entire population of the state’s elementary and secondary schools.
Chapter IV: Results

The purpose of this quantitative study was to investigate the engagement level of administrators in Washington State in distributed leadership practices, as outlined by Elmore (2000). The study examined the engagement levels of elementary and secondary administrators across four dimensions of distributed leadership and explored distinctions between the elementary, middle, and high school levels. This study utilized quantitative data to address the following two research questions:

RQ1: What is the engagement level of elementary and secondary school administrators in the State of Washington with respect to the four dimensions of distributed leadership?

RQ2: What is the difference in the distributed leadership practices of elementary, middle, and high school administrators in the State of Washington?

The median for each item was calculated using the software SPSS 29.0. Additionally, the data from all four dimensions were combined for an overall median for each dimension. Cronbach’s alpha correlation was reported, indicating that all the dimensions have a reliability coefficient of .84 (Gordon, 2005). A Kruskal–Wallis test was conducted using the combined median from each dimension to answer RQ2: What is the difference in distributed leadership practices among elementary, middle, and high school administrators in the State of Washington? These results were utilized to determine whether to retain or reject the null hypothesis.

Chapter IV provides a description and analysis of the data collected using the DLRS. This chapter includes the sampling and return rate, demographics, data addressing the two research questions, and a summary of the results.

Sampling and Return Rate
The online DLRS developed by the CSDE, was utilized by Gordon (2005) to assess the engagement and readiness of school administrators in distributed leadership practices. The questionnaire was distributed to 2,860 email addresses obtained from the OSPI Directory on the OSPI website for Washington State principals. The total number of completed responses was 341, resulting in a return rate of 12%. The targeted sample size was 100 respondents per school level. Specifically, there were 114 completed responses each from elementary and high school administrators and 113 from middle school administrators. The target sample size was met.

Demographics

Evaluating descriptive information first helps in understanding potential patterns within the data before testing for differences. The demographics of respondents were summarized using tables and bar graphs for multiple categorical variables.

The DLRS collected demographic data from administrators to provide answers regarding the demographic characteristics influencing an elementary and secondary administrator’s engagement score in the State of Washington. The demographic questions asked about gender, race, and ethnicity, highest degree obtained, years of experience in education, years of experience as an administrator, and years of experience at their school and school level.

The gender of the administrators who participated in the study gender can be found in Table 4.

Table 1

Administrators’ Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>39.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>60.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender X</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>341</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The completed sample included 341 participants (n=341, 100%). The majority of respondents were female administrators (n=207, 60.7%). Administrators identified their race and ethnicity, which can be found in Table 5.

Table 5

Administrators’ Race/Ethnicity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>295</td>
<td>86.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two or more races</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black/African American</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic/Latino of any race(s)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian/Alaskan Native</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>341</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The majority of administrators identified as White (n=295, 86.5%). Administrators who identified as Two or More Races constituted the next largest demographic (n=18, 5.3%). The school level of each administrator was recorded (see Table 6).

Table 6

Administrators’ School Level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School level</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>33.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle school</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>33.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>33.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>341</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The number of completed responses from each school level was similar. The school level of each administrator was an important data point as it was also utilized to help answer RQ2. Administrators were asked about the highest level of degree they had obtained (see Table 7).
Table 7

Administrators’ Highest Degree

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MA/MS</td>
<td>295</td>
<td>86.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PhD/EdD</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other advanced</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>degree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>341</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Administrators held varied levels of degrees, with most (n=295, 86.5%) obtaining a master’s level degree.

The administrators in this sample had over seven years of experience as educators. All the respondents indicated they had been educators for seven or more years (n=341, 100%). Figure 1 shows the years of administrative experience.

Figure 1

Total Years of Administrative Experience

![Bar chart showing total years of administrative experience](attachment:bar_chart.png)
The respondents had varying years of experience as administrators. Most had been administrators for seven or more years ($n=246$). Five respondents were in their first year as administrators.

The administrators in this sample had been in their schools for a varying number of years (see Figure 2).

**Figure 2**

*Administrators’ Total Years in Their School*

Most administrators ($n=145$, 42.5%) had been at their school for at least seven years, while the next most common group ($n=114$, 33.4%) had been there for within their first three years.

**Engagement in the Four Dimensions of Distributed Leadership**

**RQ1**: What is the engagement level of elementary and secondary school administrators in the State of Washington with respect to the four dimensions of distributed leadership?
The DLRS is a frequency Likert scale survey with ordinal data. Skewness and test of normality were calculated for each DLRS dimension.

The skewness statistic (-.744) for mission, vision, and goals indicates a negatively skewed data distribution. The Shapiro–Wilk test of Normality was conducted to confirm this finding. The results ($w=.88, p<.001$) indicate that the distribution for the mission, vision, and goals variable significantly departs from normality. The skewness statistic (-.627) for the school culture indicates a negatively skewed data distribution. The Shapiro–Wilk test of Normality was calculated to confirm this finding. The results ($w=.72, p<.001$) indicated that the distribution for the school culture variable departed significantly from normality. The skewness statistic (.006) for leadership practices indicates a positively skewed data distribution. The Shapiro–Wilk test of Normality was conducted to confirm this finding. The results ($w=.83, p<.001$) indicated that the distribution for the leadership practices variable departed significantly from normality. The skewness statistic (-.194) indicates a negatively skewed data distribution. The Shapiro–Wilk test of Normality was also performed to confirm this finding for the shared responsibility variable. The results ($w=.83, p<.001$) similarly indicated that the distribution for this variable departed significantly from normality.

In addition to being ordinal, the data for each dimension were not normally distributed, as confirmed by the Shapiro–Wilk test of normality. The fact that, in the test, the statistic for each DLRS dimension is significant at the $p=<.001$ means that these four distributions do not follow a normal distribution. The Detrended Normal Q-Q Plot also indicates whether the distribution of data is normal (Fiddler, n.d.). The Detrended Normal Q-Q Plots for each DLRS dimension showed that the data points were not clustered around the horizontal line as they would be in a
normal distribution. Therefore, the median \((mdn)\), along with the interquartile range \((IQR)\) was used to summarize the variables.

The central tendency was calculated and analyzed for the four dimensions of the DLRS. The median and interquartile range were calculated for each dimension (see Table 8).

**Table 8**

*Medians and Interquartile Range Percentiles for Each DLRS Dimension*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Mission, vision, and goals</th>
<th>School culture</th>
<th>Leadership practices</th>
<th>Shared responsibility</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(N)</td>
<td>Valid 341</td>
<td>341</td>
<td>341</td>
<td>341</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Missing 0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median Percentile</td>
<td>25 3.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>50 3.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>75 4.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The dimension with the highest median of 4.0 \((IQR=1.00)\) was school culture. The dimensions of mission, vision, and goals as well as leadership practices all had a median of 3.0 \((IQR=1.0)\). The shared responsibility dimension had a median of 3.0 \((IQR=.50)\).

The analysis for RQ1 included frequencies for each of the four DLRS dimensions. Figures 3, 4, 5, and 6 display the frequency graphs for mission, vision, and goals; school culture; leadership practices; and shared responsibility, respectively.

Figure 3 illustrates the frequency graph for the mission, vision, and goals dimension.
Figure 3

Frequencies for the DLRS Mission, Vision, and Goals Dimension

Figure 4 illustrates the frequency graph for the school culture dimension.

Figure 4

Frequencies for the DLRS School Culture Dimension

Figure 5 illustrates the frequency graph for the leadership practices dimension.
Figure 5

*Frequencies for the DLRS Leadership Practices Dimension*

![Graph showing frequencies for the DLRS Leadership Practices Dimension.]

Figure 6 illustrates the frequency graph for the shared responsibility dimension.

Figure 6

*Frequencies for the DLRS Shared Responsibility Dimension*

![Graph showing frequencies for the DLRS Shared Responsibility Dimension.]

The response options on the DLRS were as follows: 4=continually: this practice is well-established as a “standard operating procedure” in the school; 3=frequently: this practice is often observed in the school; 2=sometimes: this practice is intermittently observed in the school; 1=rarely/never: this practice is rarely or never observed in the school and N/A=Insufficient Information to respond to the statement.

**Dimension 1: Mission, Vision, and Goals**

Eight DLRS survey items measured administrators’ engagement in the mission, vision, and goals dimension: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8 (see Table 9).

**Table 9**

*Administrators’ Levels of Engagement in DLRS Dimension Mission, Vision, and Goals*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The school has clearly written vision and mission statements.</td>
<td>158 (46.3)</td>
<td>120 (35.2)</td>
<td>47 (13.8)</td>
<td>15 (4.4)</td>
<td>1 (0.3)</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Teachers and administrators understand and support a common mission for the school and can describe it clearly.</td>
<td>80 (23.5)</td>
<td>183 (53.7)</td>
<td>62 (18.2)</td>
<td>15 (4.4)</td>
<td>1 (0.3)</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. If parents are to describe the school’s mission, most would be able to describe the mission clearly.</td>
<td>8 (2.3)</td>
<td>56 (16.4)</td>
<td>162 (47.5)</td>
<td>103 (30.2)</td>
<td>12 (3.5)</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. If students are asked to describe the school’s mission, most would be able to describe the mission generally.</td>
<td>16 (4.7)</td>
<td>68 (19.9)</td>
<td>140 (41.1)</td>
<td>108 (31.7)</td>
<td>9 (2.6)</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. School goals are aligned with its mission statement.</td>
<td>172 (50.4)</td>
<td>118 (34.6)</td>
<td>36 (10.6)</td>
<td>14 (4.1)</td>
<td>1 (0.3)</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. The school uses a school improvement plan as a basis to evaluate the progress it is making in attaining its goals.</td>
<td>201 (58.9)</td>
<td>102 (29.9)</td>
<td>32 (9.4)</td>
<td>4 (1.2)</td>
<td>2 (0.6)</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Teachers and administrators collectively establish school goals and revise goals annually.</td>
<td>207 (61.0)</td>
<td>97 (28.4)</td>
<td>28 (8.2)</td>
<td>7 (2.1)</td>
<td>1 (0.3)</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. The school’s curriculum is aligned with the state’s academic standards</td>
<td>217 (63.6)</td>
<td>98 (28.7)</td>
<td>24 (7.0)</td>
<td>2 (0.6)</td>
<td>0 (0.0)</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>341</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Administrators responded that they are highly engaged in and have a standard operating procedure within the school in four of the eight items (5, 6, 7, and 8) of the mission, vision, and
goals dimension. The median response on these items was 4.0. Administrators responded to Item 1, stating that their school has clearly written vision and mission statements that are standard operating procedures and are often observed in the school \((n=278, 81.5\%)\), with 77.2% of administrators and teachers supporting and understanding the vision and mission statements. However, principals believe that parents and students are not consistently able to describe the school’s mission clearly or generally (Items 3, 4), with a continual (4) response rate of \((n=8, 2.3\%)\) and \((n=16, 4.7\%)\) respectively, and medians of 3.00.

**Dimension 2: School Culture**

Within the dimension of school culture, 13 DLRS survey items measured administrators’ engagement: Items 13, 14, 15, 16, 23, 24, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 32, and 33 (see Table 10).
Table 10

*Administrators’ Levels of Engagement in DLRS Dimension School Culture*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(%)</td>
<td>(%)</td>
<td>(%)</td>
<td>(%)</td>
<td>(%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. There is a high level of mutual respect and trust among the teachers and other professional staff in the school.</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(38.1)</td>
<td>(46.9)</td>
<td>(14.1)</td>
<td>(0.9)</td>
<td>(0.0)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. There is mutual respect and trust between the school administration and professional staff.</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(40.5)</td>
<td>(48.7)</td>
<td>(10.3)</td>
<td>(0.3)</td>
<td>(0.3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. The school administrator(s) welcome professional staff members input on issues related to curriculum, instruction, and improving student performance.</td>
<td>226</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(66.3)</td>
<td>(28.4)</td>
<td>(4.7)</td>
<td>(0.0)</td>
<td>(0.6)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. The school supports using new instructional ideas and innovations.</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(40.8)</td>
<td>(40.5)</td>
<td>(17.0)</td>
<td>(0.9)</td>
<td>(0.9)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. The principal actively encourages teachers and other staff members to participate in instructional decision-making.</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(58.4)</td>
<td>(32.8)</td>
<td>(7.3)</td>
<td>(0.6)</td>
<td>(0.9)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. Professional staff members in the school have the responsibility to make decisions that affect meeting school goals.</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(41.6)</td>
<td>(45.7)</td>
<td>(11.4)</td>
<td>(0.0)</td>
<td>(1.2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26. Administrators participate alongside teachers in the school’s professional development activities.</td>
<td>215</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(63.0)</td>
<td>(29.3)</td>
<td>(5.9)</td>
<td>(1.5)</td>
<td>(0.3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27. The principal actively participates in his/her own professional development activities to improve leadership in the school.</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(55.7)</td>
<td>(35.5)</td>
<td>(6.7)</td>
<td>(1.2)</td>
<td>(0.9)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28. My supervisor and I jointly develop my annual professional development plan.</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(38.1)</td>
<td>(25.5)</td>
<td>(21.4)</td>
<td>(13.2)</td>
<td>(1.8)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29. My professional development plan includes activities that are based on my individual professional needs and school needs.</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(46.3)</td>
<td>(34.3)</td>
<td>(12.6)</td>
<td>(4.7)</td>
<td>(2.1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30. Teachers actively participate in instructional decision-making.</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(47.5)</td>
<td>(39.9)</td>
<td>(12.0)</td>
<td>(0.3)</td>
<td>(0.3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32. The principal is knowledgeable about current instructional issues.</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(55.7)</td>
<td>(38.1)</td>
<td>(5.6)</td>
<td>(0.6)</td>
<td>(0.0)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33. My principal’s practices are consistent with his/her words.</td>
<td>194</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(56.9)</td>
<td>(39.0)</td>
<td>(3.5)</td>
<td>(0.6)</td>
<td>(0.0)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>341</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Over 60% of administrators responded continually (4) to Item 15 (n=226, 66.3%), indicating that administrators welcome professional staff input on issues related to curriculum and instruction, as well as improving student performance. Additionally, 63% of administrators responded continually to Item 26, indicating that participating alongside teachers in the school’s
professional development activities is a well-established practice. The medians for Items 15 and 26 were both 4.0. For Item 13 \( (n=130, 38.1\%) \) and Item 14 \( (n=138, 40.5\%) \), the practice regarding mutual respect and trust between teachers and other professional staff, as well as between teachers and administrators, was not well-established as a standard operating procedure. However, for Items 13 \( (n=160, 49\%) \) and 14 \( (n=166, 48.7\%) \), respondents indicated that these practices were often observed in the school. Less than 50% \( (n=130, 38.1\%) \) of administrators responded that the practice of administrators and teachers jointly developing a professional development plan was well-established as a standard operating procedure (Item 28). The median was 3.0.

**Dimension 3: Leadership Practices**

Nine DLRS survey items measured the administrators’ engagement within leadership practices: 25, 31, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, and 40 (see Table 11).
Table 11

**Administrators’ Levels of Engagement in DLRS Dimension Leadership Practices**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(%)</td>
<td>(%)</td>
<td>(%)</td>
<td>(%)</td>
<td>(%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. The school provides teachers with professional development aligned with the school’s mission and goals.</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(41.9)</td>
<td>(40.2)</td>
<td>(15.2)</td>
<td>(2.1)</td>
<td>(0.6)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31. Central office and school administrators work together to determine the professional development activities.</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(17.3)</td>
<td>(32.0)</td>
<td>(38.7)</td>
<td>(11.4)</td>
<td>(0.6)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34. Informal school leaders play an important role in the school in improving the performance of professionals and the achievement of students.</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(41.3)</td>
<td>(40.2)</td>
<td>(13.5)</td>
<td>(1.8)</td>
<td>(3.2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35. The school has expanded its capacity by providing professional staff formal opportunities to take on leadership roles.</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(40.2)</td>
<td>(38.4)</td>
<td>(18.2)</td>
<td>(1.8)</td>
<td>(1.5)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36. Teachers who assume leadership roles in the school have sufficient school time to permit them to make meaningful contributions to the school.</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(22.9)</td>
<td>(40.2)</td>
<td>(30.5)</td>
<td>(6.2)</td>
<td>(0.3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37. Teachers who assume leadership roles in the school have sufficient resources to be able to make meaningful contributions to the school.</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(21.4)</td>
<td>(41.3)</td>
<td>(32.6)</td>
<td>(3.8)</td>
<td>(0.9)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38. Veteran teachers fill most leadership roles in the school.</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(6.7)</td>
<td>(33.7)</td>
<td>(54.5)</td>
<td>(3.8)</td>
<td>(1.2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39. New teachers are provided opportunities to fill some leadership roles.</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(15.2)</td>
<td>(46.0)</td>
<td>(32.8)</td>
<td>(3.2)</td>
<td>(2.6)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40. Teachers are interested in participating in school leadership roles.</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(12.0)</td>
<td>(41.3)</td>
<td>(42.5)</td>
<td>(3.8)</td>
<td>(0.3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>341</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Regarding leadership roles in the school, over half (54.5%) of administrators responded that the practice of veteran teachers filling most leadership roles was intermittently observed in the school, with a median of 2.0. Additionally, over half (52.2%) of administrators responded that the opportunity for new teachers to fill some school leadership roles was well-established as a standard operating procedure. However, 12% of administrators (Item 40) responded continually (4) that teachers are interested in participating in school leadership roles. The median was 3.0.
**Dimension 4: Shared Responsibility**

Ten DLRS survey items measured administrators’ engagement within shared responsibility: 9, 10, 11, 12, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, and 22 (see Table 12).

**Table 12**

*Administrators’ Levels of Engagement in DLRS Dimension Shared Responsibility*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9. Teachers and administrators have high expectations for students’ academic performance.</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Teachers and administrators share accountability for students’ academic performance.</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. School and district resources are directed to those areas in which student learning needs to improve most.</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. The school is a learning community that continually improves its effectiveness, learning from both successes and failures.</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. The school’s daily and weekly schedules provide time for teachers to collaborate on instructional issues.</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. School professionals and parents agree on the most effective roles parents can play in their child’s education.</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. The school clearly communicates the ‘chain of contact’ between home and school so parents know who to contact when they have questions and concerns.</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. The school makes available a variety of data (e.g., student performance) for teachers to use to improve student achievement.</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. Decisions to change curriculum and instructional programs are based on assessment data.</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. There is a formal structure in place in the school (e.g., curriculum committee) to provide teachers and professional staff opportunities to participate in school-level instructional decision-making.</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>341</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Over half (58.4%) of the respondents indicated that the school’s daily and weekly schedules provided time for teachers to collaborate on instructional issues (Item 17), but less
than half (43.4%) indicated that a formal structure to provide teachers and other professional staff opportunities to participate in school-level instructional decision-making (Item 22) was well-established as a standard operating procedure. Administrators responded “continually” (4) and “frequently” (3) at the same rate (n=157, 46%) to the statement, “Teachers and administrators have high expectations for students’ academic performance” (Item 9).

Testing Hypotheses: Inferential Results

School-Level Differences in the Distributed Leadership Practices

While the first research question (What is the engagement level of elementary and secondary school administrators in the State of Washington with respect to the four dimensions of distributed leadership?) was investigated using descriptive statistics. An inferential approach was applied to the second research question (What is the difference in the distributed leadership practices of elementary, middle, and high school administrators in the State of Washington?)

The null and alternative hypotheses for this question were as follows:

$H_{20}$: There is no difference beyond chance in the distributed leadership practices of elementary, middle, and high school administrators.

$H_{2a}$: There is a significant difference beyond chance in the distributed leadership practices among elementary, middle, and high school administrators, favoring elementary schools.

Based on the outcomes of the Shapiro–Wilk test for Normality for all variables, a non-parametric test was selected to test the hypothesis. This supported my decision to analyze the data using non-parametric tests. The non-parametric Kruskal–Wallis test and post-hoc Mann–Whitney U test were used to determine if there were any significant differences between the DLRS dimensions (mission, vision, and goals; school culture; leadership practices; and shared
responsibility) and school levels (elementary school, middle school, and high school.) This test is typically employed to compare ordinal data from three or more unmatched groups. The data are rank-ordered and compared. A $p \leq 0.05$ was used to determine statistically significant findings.

When a significant difference is found, the Kruskal–Wallis test signifies that a difference exists. When more than two groups were compared, the Kruskal–Wallis test does not specify the groups with a significant difference. Thus, a post hoc Mann–Whitney U test was run to determine the groups with significant differences.

For the school-level groups, the median, mean rank, and Kruskal–Wallis and Mann–Whitney U tests for the four DLRS dimensions are presented. Tables 13 and 14 show the median and mean ranks per the four DLRS dimensions by elementary school, middle school, and high school.

**Table 13**

*Medians per the Four DLRS Dimensions by School Level*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School level</th>
<th>Mission, vision, and goals</th>
<th>School culture</th>
<th>Leadership practice</th>
<th>Shared responsibility</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>N 114</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Median 3.25</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle school</td>
<td>N 113</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Median 3.00</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school</td>
<td>N 114</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Median 3.00</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>N 341</td>
<td>341</td>
<td>341</td>
<td>341</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Median 3.00</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 14

Mean Rank Results for the Four DLRS Dimensions by School Level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>School level</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mission, vision, and goals</td>
<td>Elementary school</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>189.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Middle school</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>151.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High school</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>171.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>341</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School culture</td>
<td>Elementary school</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>180.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Middle school</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>161.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High school</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>171.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>341</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership practice</td>
<td>Elementary school</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>173.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Middle school</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>162.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High school</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>176.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>341</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared responsibility</td>
<td>Elementary school</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>196.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Middle school</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>157.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High school</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>158.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>341</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The dimensions of leadership practice and shared responsibility both had a median of 3.0. The Mission, vision, and goals had a median of 3.25 for the elementary level, while the middle and high school levels had a median of 3.0. There was a difference in medians for school culture at the middle school level (Mdn=3.0). The scores for each school level were converted to ranks, and the mean rank for each group was compared (see Table 15). The larger the difference in the mean rank, the better the chance of significance. The greatest disparity in mean rank within the mission, vision, and goals dimension was observed between elementary and middle school.
levels. Similarly, the School Responsibility dimension exhibited a substantial mean rank difference between elementary school and middle and high school levels.

The Kruskal–Wallis test results for each dimension are presented in Table 15, indicating the significance of the DLRS dimensions. The Mann–Whitney U test is utilized for pairwise comparisons and to determine effect size, as shown in Tables 16 and 17.

**Table 15**

*Kruskal–Wallis Results*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mission, vision, and goals</th>
<th>School culture</th>
<th>Leadership practice</th>
<th>Shared responsibility</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kruskal–Wallis</td>
<td>8.907</td>
<td>2.767</td>
<td>1.510</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>df</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asymp. sig.</td>
<td>.012</td>
<td>.251</td>
<td>.470</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


**Table 16**

*Mann–Whitney U Test Results for Elementary and Middle School Levels*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mission, vision, and goals</th>
<th>School culture</th>
<th>Leadership practice</th>
<th>Shared responsibility</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mann–Whitney U</td>
<td>5056.500</td>
<td>5711.000</td>
<td>6013.500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wilcoxon W</td>
<td>11497.500</td>
<td>12152.000</td>
<td>12454.500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Z</td>
<td>-2.905</td>
<td>-1.676</td>
<td>-.953</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asymp. sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.004</td>
<td>.094</td>
<td>.341</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


**Table 17**

*Mann–Whitney U Test Results for Elementary and High School Levels*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mission, vision, and goals</th>
<th>School culture</th>
<th>Leadership practice</th>
<th>Shared responsibility</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mann–Whitney U</td>
<td>5787.000</td>
<td>6151.000</td>
<td>6393.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wilcoxon W</td>
<td>12342.000</td>
<td>12706.000</td>
<td>12948.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Z</td>
<td>-1.495</td>
<td>-.796</td>
<td>-.233</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asymp. sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.135</td>
<td>.426</td>
<td>.816</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Kruskal–Wallis test revealed statistically significant differences at the $p \leq .05$ level. There were significant differences in two dimensions and between school levels in those dimensions. The mission, vision, and goals dimension had a significance value of $p = .012$, and shared responsibility had a significance value of $p = <.001$. Within the mission, vision, and goals dimension, there was a significant difference between school levels (elementary school, $n = 114$; middle school, $n = 113$) $p = .003$. In the shared responsibility dimension, there were significant differences between school levels (elementary school: $n = 114$; middle school: $n = 113$), $p = <.001$ and (elementary school: $n = 114$; high school: $n = 114$) $p = <.001$.

The effect sizes were calculated for school levels with significant differences in the mission, vision, and goals and shared responsibility dimensions using the formula $R = Z / \sqrt{N}$ as a way of calculating correlation from the Wilcoxon Rank Sum test. Effect size calculations range between small ($<0.3$), moderate ($0.3 – <0.5$), and large ($>0.5$). The effect size for the mission, vision, and goals dimension between (elementary school: $n = 114$; middle school: $n = 113$) was $(Z / \sqrt{227}) r = .34$. The effect size for the shared responsibility dimension between elementary school ($n = 114$) and middle school ($n = 113$) was $(Z / \sqrt{227}) r = .22$. The effect size for the shared responsibility dimension between elementary school ($n = 114$) and high school ($n = 114$) was $(Z / \sqrt{228}) r = .22$. The effect sizes for school levels with significant differences were small.

Summary of Results
This study sought to determine if there was a readiness among Washington State elementary and secondary administrators to engage in distributed leadership practices, and if there were differences in engagement across school levels. The first research question found that Washington State administrators have a high perception of their readiness for distributed engagement. The median and interquartile range for the DLRS dimensions were as follows:
mission, vision, and goals ($\text{Mdn}=3$, $\text{IQR}=1$); leadership practices ($\text{Mdn}=3$, $\text{IQR}=1$); shared responsibility ($\text{Mdn}=3$, $\text{IQR}=.5$); and school culture ($\text{Mdn}=4$, $\text{IQR}=1$).

To determine if administrators’ perceived level of distributed leadership engagement was different across school levels, non-parametric tests were used to determine the significant differences and the effect size of any significant differences. The DLRS dimension for mission, vision, and goals showed a significant difference between elementary and middle school levels ($p=.003$). There were also significant differences in the DLRS dimension of shared responsibility between elementary and middle schools ($p=<.001$) and elementary and high school levels ($p=<.001$). The effect size for the DLRS dimension mission, vision, and goals between elementary and middle school levels was small ($r=.34$). The effect size was also small for the DLRS dimension shared responsibility between elementary and middle school levels ($r=.22$) and elementary and high school levels ($r=.22$).
Chapter V: Conclusions and Recommendations

This chapter comprises a summary, discussion of the findings, conclusions, implications, and recommendations.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the engagement level of administrators in Washington State in distributed leadership practices as outlined by Gordon (2005). The study examined the engagement levels of elementary and secondary administrators within the four dimensions of distributed leadership and explored distinctions between elementary, middle, and high school levels. This study addressed the need for further research on distributed leadership practices, particularly across school levels such as elementary, middle, and high schools, and addressed the following research questions:

**RQ1**: What is the engagement level of elementary and secondary school administrators in the State of Washington with respect to the four dimensions of distributed leadership?

**RQ2**: What is the difference in the distributed leadership practices of elementary, middle, and high school administrators in the State of Washington?

Data in this study were analyzed to determine whether to accept or reject the null hypothesis for RQ2.

**H20**: There is no difference beyond chance in the distributed leadership practices of elementary, middle, and high school administrators.

The alternative hypothesis proposes a significant difference beyond chance in the distributed leadership practices of elementary, middle, and high school administrators, favoring elementary administrators.

The sample for this study consisted of Washington State administrators from elementary, middle, and high school levels. Links to the online survey, along with a description of the study,
were emailed to all 2,860 known school administrators within the 295 public school districts in Washington State, utilizing the directory published by the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction. A total of 341 participants completed the survey, the DLRS. Of these, 114 were elementary administrators, 113 were middle school administrators, and 114 were high school administrators. These respondents constituted the research sample.

The design of the research study involved data collection using a single instrument with two parts: a pre-survey and the DLRS survey. The pre-survey comprised demographic questions alongside inquiries about school leadership and characteristics. The DLRS consisted of 40 questions organized into four dimensions of distributed leadership. Responses to each item were gathered using a five-point Likert scale, with choices encompassing four levels of frequency. The scale ranged from 1=rarely/never 2=sometimes, 3=frequently, to 4=continually. An insufficient option was provided and was reported separately from the data analysis. Administrators were asked to indicate the frequency at which they engaged in a specific practice. Gordon (2005) tested the DLRS and found it to be valid and reliable, with a reliability coefficient of .84. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, the Kruskal–Wallis test for an overall test of significance, and the Mann–Whitney U test for pairwise comparisons and effect size.

**Summary of Results**

This study aimed to assess the readiness of elementary and secondary administrators in Washington State to engage in distributed leadership practices and to explore potential differences in engagement across school levels. The findings revealed that administrators perceive themselves as highly ready for distributed leadership across four dimensions: mission, vision, and goals; leadership practices; shared responsibility; and school culture.
To determine whether perceptions of distributed leadership engagement differed across school levels, non-parametric tests were conducted. Significant differences were found in the dimensions of mission, vision, and goals, as well as shared responsibility, between elementary and middle schools and between elementary and high schools. The effect sizes for these differences were small, indicating relatively modest differences in engagement levels across school levels.

The study overall suggests that administrators in Washington State demonstrate readiness for engagement in distributed leadership, with some variations observed across different school levels. These findings offer valuable insights into the current state of distributed leadership practices in Washington State and emphasize areas for further exploration and development.

**Discussion and Implications**

Distributed leadership is a component incorporated into the AWSP Leadership Framework for School Leader Evaluation for Washington State school administrators. However, there is limited information and few studies related to the implementation of distributed leadership practices in schools and across different school levels (Elmore, 2000; Modeste & Kelley, 2020;). Gordon (2005) modified Elmore’s (2000) five dimensions in her study to propose the following dimensions: mission, vision, and goals; school culture; leadership practices; and shared responsibility. The DLRS assesses the following four dimensions.

1. Mission, vision, and goals: Mission, vision, and goals are essential components of distributed leadership. The practice of setting direction and vision aims to motivate and inspire a shared sense of purpose across the faculty, ultimately enhancing student learning (Day et al., 2020). Therefore, staff and members of the school community must be aware of and share the vision, mission, and goals for distributed leadership.
2. School culture: Shared values and routines serve as the cornerstones of distributed leadership, and schools must prioritize the features of their culture because they influence student achievement (Elmore, 2000).

3. Shared responsibility: Distributed leadership practice encourages shared responsibility among staff, highlighting the idea that there is no single leader. Educators’ strengths, interests, skills, and areas of expertise are essential factors when organizing teams for a shared purpose (Elmore, 2000).

4. Leadership practice: The organization of staff to carry out leadership practices is well-thought-out in a distributed model. This model brings together teachers and leaders to influence effective school practices that are linked to the leader’s intentions, ideas, and influence (Spillane et al. 2004).

The engagement of Washington State administrators within the four dimensions of distributed leadership practices was analyzed from the 341 respondents to the survey. The analysis of these data using DLRS provided insight into understanding the engagement of administrators in the four dimensions of distributed leadership practices.

**Engagement in the Four Dimensions of Distributed Leadership**

Overall, the results suggest that administrators are engaged in all four dimensions of distributed leadership. I found that for the dimension of mission, vision, and goals, most administrators believe their school’s mission and vision are well-established and that teachers and administrators support and understand the mission. Consistent with the distributed leadership theories of Elmore (2000), Gronn (2002), and Spillane et al. (2004), the element of creating and implementing a shared understanding of a school’s vision and mission is an essential first leadership task. However, in my analysis, most administrators believe that parents’ and students’
ability to describe the mission of the school is moderate. The literature on distributed leadership emphasizes the importance of a shared vision and mission in creating a school community with organizational and behavioral agreements (Gordon, 2005). As Hallinger (2009) shares, empowerment for school governance encourages broad participation if there is to be a shared commitment from stakeholders to improve student learning. I speculate that administrators value community involvement, yet lack the data to gauge students’ and families’ understanding of the school’s mission. These results bear implications for how administrators and teachers collaborate with stakeholders to develop a shared mission and vision at both district and school levels. Another implication of the findings could be systematic barriers hindering ongoing two-way communication for students and families to provide input and comprehend the school’s mission, vision, and goals.

The DLRS dimension of school culture emerged as the dimension where the results suggest most administrators were engaged. I found that most administrators believe there is a level of trust and mutual respect between the administrator and the professional staff. Having trust in teams of leaders is critical. As posited by Bush and Glover (2012), case studies on distributed leadership practices are more likely to occur if there are high levels of trust. Additionally, principals can influence teacher interactions by building trust over time (Spillane & Kim, 2012). I found most administrators also welcomed and encouraged staff input on curriculum and instruction to improve student performance and decision-making, consistent with Gronn (2002). Shared decision-making creates empowerment if trust is built through ongoing communication. One implication of the findings is the importance of administrators prioritizing the cultivation of trust and mutual respect with leadership teams. This can be achieved by knowing their team members’ strengths and displaying confidence in their abilities to co-lead
and take risks. The culture of trust serves as the foundation for effectively implementing distributed leadership practices. Another implication of the findings is that administrators tend to perceive teachers’ input on curriculum and instruction through shared decision-making as valuable. By valuing collective expertise and incorporating diverse perspectives, leaders can promote a sense of belonging and ownership, thereby enhancing the quality of decisions that lead to equitable outcomes for students.

Overall, it was found that administrators were least engaged in the leadership practices dimension. Although the results suggest that most administrators believe teachers are provided with formal leadership opportunities and roles and that veteran teachers do not fill most leadership roles in the school, over one-third of the administrators believe that teachers in leadership roles do not have sufficient time or resources to make meaningful contributions to the school. Spillane et al. (2004) acknowledged that an important factor in instructional leadership is providing resources and time to teachers, including those who share responsibility for making instructional decisions. This could be related to why administrators reported that teachers interested in participating in school leadership roles were only moderately observed. For teachers to engage in leadership practices, they must be given the time and resources to make thoughtful, data-based decisions (Gordon, 2005). As Harris (2008, 2004) identified, the structural design of the school may promote silos that impede collaboration, which is why administrators need to examine systems and processes to eliminate such barriers. I posit that while principals may be supportive of providing leadership opportunities and roles to teachers, their perception of distributed leadership may focus on roles outside of the classroom.

A key area emerging from the results is that most administrators believe the practice of central office and school administrators working together to determine professional development
activities is not well-established. A possible explanation for this lack of engagement may align with Harris’s (2008) notion of agency and authority in distributive leadership needed to support leaders; otherwise, it is delegation. One implication of the findings is that administrators may have focused on one aspect of their perceptions of distributed leadership or may have different definitions of distributed leadership, particularly regarding how it is applied to the central office leader’s support. Another implication of the findings is the administrators’ perceived lack of sufficient time and resources for teachers to make meaningful contributions, highlighting the importance for administrators to prioritize support and advocacy for additional resources to facilitate teacher leadership initiatives.

In the shared responsibility DLRS dimension, I found that most administrators believe that a school is a learning community that continually improves learning from both successes and failures, which is well-established. Administrators also believe there are high expectations for student academic performance. Instructional improvement requires continuous learning (Elmore, 2000). Administrators also believe schedules provide time for teachers to collaborate on instructional issues. Consistent with Gordon (2005), shared responsibility requires intentional time for teachers to collaborate. According to Elmore (2000) and Spillane et al. (2004), distributed leadership is a system in which people collaborate based on their strengths and competencies, relying on their knowledge and skills to enhance student learning. Administrators perceive that school professionals and parents moderately agree on the most effective roles parents can play as partners in their child’s education. However, administrators believe that parents are aware of whom to contact when they have questions or concerns. One implication of the findings is the potential for administrators to compartmentalize their role, focusing on student behavior when assisting parents, rather than aligning support with the student’s specific learning
improvement goals. Structural barriers may need examination and addressing to promote collaboration.

**School-Level Differences in the Distributed Leadership Practices**

The research hypothesis posited that there is no difference beyond chance in the distributed leadership practices among elementary, middle, and high school administrators. The alternative hypothesis suggested that there is a significant difference beyond chance in the distributed leadership practices of elementary, middle, and high school administrators, favoring elementary administrators. The null hypothesis was retained in two dimensions. However, the results suggest a significant difference beyond chance in the engagement of administrators in distributed leadership practices across two of the four DLRS dimensions. These findings were observed in the dimensions of mission, vision, and goals between elementary and middle school levels, and in the dimension of shared responsibility between elementary and middle school levels, as well as between elementary and high school levels. As Modeste and Kelley (2020) indicate, there is limited information regarding the implementation of distributed leadership practices, especially across different school levels such as secondary and elementary schools. These findings suggest that the implementation of distributed leadership practices, particularly in the dimensions of mission, vision, and goals and shared responsibility, may vary depending on the school level, specifically between elementary and secondary levels.

**Implications of the Results for Practice**

Administrators reported engaging in distributed leadership practices across four dimensions. Although this study was limited, several factors impacted participation in distributed leadership, and the findings have implications for educational practice. Thus, the following considerations should be made:
• Administrators should remove barriers and devise means for soliciting stakeholder input on the mission and vision, ensuring that all stakeholders comprehend the school’s mission.

• Administrators should collect input and continuously review data, incorporating feedback loops to engage the community in shaping the school’s mission, vision, and goals.

• The importance of resource allocation strategies that prioritize the support and empowerment of teacher leaders is paramount. School leaders may need to advocate for additional resources or reallocate existing resources to facilitate teacher leadership initiatives.

• Organizational reforms that promote collaboration and distributed leadership are essential. School leaders should assess and address structural impediments to distributed leadership, such as hierarchical structures or departmental silos, to create a more conducive environment for shared decision-making and collaboration.

• Professional development programs should focus on enhancing administrators’ understanding of distributed leadership principles and practices. This focus would provide administrators with the skills and knowledge necessary to effectively implement and support distributed leadership initiatives within their schools. Moreover, it would enable central office leaders to enhance their capacity to promote distributed leadership at both the school and district levels.

• Educational institutions should invest in professional learning for administrators to cultivate the essential qualities of trust and mutual respect, fostering a positive school culture and learning organization.

**Recommendations for Future Research**
The results of this study have provided additional quantitative research regarding engagement in distributed leadership practices and differences in engagement across elementary, middle, and high school levels. While the study revealed data on perceptions of distributed leadership engagement, caution should be exercised in generalizing these results to other populations. The following recommendations are offered for related research in the field of education:

- More quantitative studies are needed on the implementation of distributed leadership practices beyond administrators’ self-descriptions and the actual practices enacted, including across different school levels.
- Replicate this study to include instructional staff at the elementary, middle, and high school levels from across the country. A larger sample size is necessary to generalize across larger populations.
- Replicate this study to enable a comparative analysis between administrator and teacher perceptions. Research could examine how factors such as school size, urbanicity, and socioeconomic status influence the implementation of distributed leadership.
- Explore teachers’ perspectives on distributed leadership and their experiences with leadership opportunities within schools. Understanding teachers’ perceptions and experiences can provide valuable insights into the factors that facilitate or hinder their involvement in distributed leadership initiatives.
- Examine how administrators partner with parents and guardians using applicable distributed leadership practices, particularly with the families of students furthest from educational justice.
• Explore what may be necessary to change administrators’ perceptions of how to partner with parents to support student learning.

• Explore the role and responsibilities of central office leaders in promoting and modeling distributed leadership practices. This may involve investigating the impact of central office policies and initiatives on distributed leadership practices at the school level.

• Longitudinal studies could track changes in distributed leadership practices over time to assess the impact of interventions and policy reforms.

**Conclusion**

The objective of this research study was to assess the engagement levels of elementary and secondary administrators in the State of Washington across the four dimensions of distributed leadership, while also investigating potential discrepancies between different school levels. Distributed leadership, as established by seminal works such as Elmore (2000), Spillane et al. (2001), and Gronn (2002), has endured over time despite its inherent complexity, partly due to its multifaceted interpretations.

The findings of this study, indicate a notable level of engagement among Washington State administrators in distributed leadership practices. Specifically, administrators demonstrated high involvement in cultivating a school culture conducive to distributed leadership, acknowledging the crucial role of shared values and routines as foundational elements in this endeavor (Elmore, 2000). Moreover, administrators exhibited proficiency in instructional affairs and enthusiastically promoted staff participation in collaborative decision-making processes, such as curriculum development and professional learning initiatives geared toward enhancing student outcomes.
However, the study identified a relative lack of engagement in the leadership practices dimension, highlighting challenges in organizing staff to execute leadership practices effectively within a distributed model. Despite efforts to encourage teachers to assume leadership roles, the perceived dearth of time and resources may contribute to limited interest and participation among educators. This underscores the importance of addressing systemic barriers to facilitate meaningful contributions from all stakeholders.

Furthermore, significant disparities in engagement levels across elementary, middle, and high school settings were observed in two dimensions of distributed leadership, albeit with a small effect size. These findings underscore the necessity for tailored approaches to implementing distributed leadership that take into account the unique contexts and challenges present at each school level.

Overall, the insights gleaned from this study lay a foundation for further exploration of distributed leadership practices within educational institutions. By expanding upon this research, future endeavors can continue refining our understanding of distributed leadership and its impact on school effectiveness across diverse contexts.
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