Secondary School Department Heads as Teacher Leaders:
A Study in Suburban Ontario

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This study focused on the leadership perceptions of 6 department heads, the conditions for their leadership role and their strategies, and supports for navigating their role. Research participants engaged in 2 sets of semistructured interviews; this resulted in a wealth of richly detailed data. It is clear that department heads do act as teacher leaders, even if they do not use this language to discuss their roles. Five elements of the role of the department head as teacher leader unfolded. The research participants perceived their leadership role to be rooted in teaching. They noted their management and leadership roles. They recognized the importance of support for their work and the support that they provide to others. In addition, they provided an overview of key strategies that they implement to lead in their individualized contexts. Department heads also noted the difficulties associated with their position and the effects that these challenges have on them as individuals. This research has resulted in a number of key recommendations for stakeholders. Department heads themselves need to openly discuss their leadership role with their colleagues and their administrators. In turn, administrators need to develop a deeper understanding of the role along with the potential for balkanization in schools. In addition, unions, school districts, and professional bodies need to develop a system of support for department heads and other teacher leaders. With ongoing meaningful communication and professional development, department heads will be more fully recognized as teacher leaders.
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

This study investigated the complex and varied nature of the leadership role of the secondary school department head (DH) in suburban Ontario in order to identify elements of teacher leadership that have developed as a result of the evolution of the position. In particular, I presented the current literature addressing department heads from Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom to develop an understanding of the vastness and variety in this role. It must be noted that the literature on Canadian department heads is limited and, as such, research from other countries must be reviewed in order to present a more complete view of this leadership role.

A department head is a teacher who takes on additional, formal responsibility in a secondary school in Ontario. His or her role may be subject specific (e.g., head of science, cross-curricular, e.g., assessment and evaluation head, or pastoral, e.g., guidance head). Alternative titles for this role may include curriculum leader, team leader, or subject head. The role varies greatly from one school to the next, and its definition is amorphous of the lack of accurate job descriptions and regulations. For most department heads, their role is rooted in classroom teaching and focuses on improving student learning. A department head's role can include mentoring teachers, providing instructional and/or curricular support, acting as a liaison between the teachers and administrators, and performing many other administrative duties and tasks. Department heads are remunerated with some time release from teaching and/or supervisory duties and additional pay. They may or may not have whole school responsibilities.

Next, I outlined the more extensive literature that existed pertaining to teacher leadership. A teacher leader can be defined as a classroom teacher who has a depth and
breadth of curricular and pedagogical knowledge along with skills that facilitate leading others to improved student success. These skills are largely interpersonal but also encompass organizational skills, problem solving, and a commitment to learning (Harris, 1998).

I then used constructivist inquiry (Guba, 1978; Guba & Lincoln, 1985) as my research methodology. I used qualitative research methods in the form of semistructured interviews with 6 department heads in suburban Ontario. From their comments, I obtained data around the three focus questions for this research. Information was gathered from the department heads regarding their own perceptions of their leadership role. Data also included details about the external and internal factors and conditions that impact their leadership work. External conditions include access to time, policy, school and department culture and/or structure, and relationships with colleagues. Internal factors include role ambiguity and role conflict, feelings of frustration, powerlessness, and stress, limitations of personal skill set, and positive feelings toward the role. Finally, I also explored how department heads navigate these conditions and the strategies that they use to effect positive change.

The interview data detailed how department heads act as teacher leaders and the conditions that are conducive and nonconducive to their leadership role. It also provided insight into how department heads were affected by their leadership roles and how they navigated various challenging situations. A framework of teacher leadership for department heads in suburban Ontario was then developed and used to analyze the data and present the findings.
Background of the Problem

The organization of secondary schools into departments and the use of exemplary teachers to lead these teams is an old tradition, so embedded in our schools' structures and cultures that few question its existence. Secondary school department heads, whether they are subject specific or cross curricular, play a significant role in the management and leadership in schools (Brown, Rutherford, & Boyle, 2000). Initially their role was to assist the principal in his or her management of the school. However, more recently the role has evolved into a teacher leadership position that collaboratively supports the principal in the development of the whole school vision (Brown & Rutherford, 1998). Pounder (2006) stated that teacher leadership positions are now considered to involve a process. Fullan (2002) added that this process leads teachers through change. Aubrey-Hopkins and James (2002) contended that this change leads to improved student success. Notwithstanding this focus on teacher leadership, the role of a secondary school department head is complex (Ackerman & Mackenzie, 2006) and at times ambiguous (Aubrey-Hopkins & James; Mayers & Zepeda, 2002; Schmidt, 2000). The individuals who take on these leadership roles have an immense job, which is at times stressful, yet ultimately rewarding. Much has recently been written about teacher leadership (Donaldson, 2007; Fitzgerald & Gunter, 2006; Francis, 2007; Muijs & Harris, 2007; York-Barr & Duke, 2004), but little continues to be written about department heads.

This study investigated the perceptions of department heads in suburban Ontario with regard to their own leadership role. It was the aim of this research to give a voice to department heads and to identify their leadership role through an examination of the types and focus of their work, the conditions that impact their role, and how they navigate
these challenging contexts. In addition, this research aims to fill a gap that exists due to the limited research in this area in Canada.

Statement of the Problem Context

The transformation of the secondary school department headship in Ontario has resulted in an ambiguous and amorphous role. This leadership role has been changing and expanding in responsibilities while at the same time remaining trapped by the confines of limited time, professional development, autonomy, and resources.

There are four issues that lead to this topic as an area of research. First, department heads have little collective voice in Ontario. They do not have a governing body which specifically and solely responds to their interests and hears their concerns as department heads. Furthermore, unlike other employee groups or other official district or school-sanctioned positions of responsibility, such as administrators, department heads do not have an association to which they can subscribe for professional development, new initiatives, or current research.

Department heads fall under the remit of the Ontario Secondary School Teachers Federation (OSSTF). However, the OSSTF does not have a clear stand on the role of the department head and provides only recommendations or policy statements to local bargaining authorities regarding the positions (OSSTF, 2008). After contacting the OSSTF on several occasions to obtain a clearer understanding of their stance on the department head role, I was no further ahead than I was after an initial review of their website and a google search resulting in local collective agreements between school districts and the union.
Although school districts and subject associations do have some bodies that are comprised primarily of department heads, these associations tend to be more concerned with the subject or content area being addressed and not the overall leadership and managerial concerns of department heads. As a result, these organizations often lack professional development with a leadership focus. It must also be noted that collectively, in a school, a committee of department heads, sometimes referred to colloquially as the “heads” or more formally as the school success team, school leadership team, or school management team, may have some voice as to the vision and goals of the school. Nevertheless, department heads have only the OSSTF and their administration to turn to if an issue arises regarding their leadership role and responsibilities, and neither of these two bodies are fully focused on department heads’ best interests. The administration is focused on compliance with district and ministry policy as a means to ensure student success. This may not include a focus on teacher leadership to reach these goals. Alternatively, the OSSTF is concerned with the collective well-being of all secondary school teachers and not on a small group of department heads.

Second, there is little written about subject-specific secondary school department heads and even less concerning cross-curricular department heads in Ontario. Although research conducted by Hannay, Smeltzer-Erb, and Ross (2001) addressed how department heads deal with change, this research is now outdated, and it is no longer wholly applicable to the current situation in schools because of the more recent changes to the Ontario curriculum and the change in provincial government. There has been some research into specific departments and their roles, such as Melville and Wallace’s (2007) work on science departments; however, again, this work is limited in scope and the
findings do not address how all department heads act as teacher leaders and their responsibilities beyond their own classrooms. Furthermore, there is little research addressing the stress and isolation surrounding the departmental headship position. Schmidt (2000) conducted research on role ambiguity of department heads; however, she did not address their extensive leadership responsibility beyond their classrooms and departments. The absence of research into the department heads' leadership role indicates a possible disregard for their ability and influence in the education system or a misunderstanding of their potential to effect positive change in secondary schools.

Third, there is great variety in the leadership role of department head, and the responsibilities are extensive, resulting in role ambiguity and role confusion (Schmidt, 2000). There are considerable differences in the ways departments operate both within the same school and among the same subjects in different schools (Brown, Rutherford, et al., 2000). Subject-specific, large multisubject departments, guidance or special education departments, and goal-driven headships such as student success or assessment and evaluation can all exist in one school. Variety and confusion in the role is compounded by administrators who are unclear themselves about the leadership roles of department heads and what administrators can do to maximize their input and responsibility into whole school decision-making (Glover, Gleeson, Gough, & Johnson, 1998). As a result, accurate job descriptions are a rarity, as is clarity of the departmental headship.

Furthermore, the department head's role is often ill defined and widely variable (Hannay & Denby, 1994). Nevertheless, some department heads want to extend their wider school leadership role and are willing to work with senior teachers to improve their departments (Poultney, 2007). Department heads have been asked formally by
administrators and informally, due to circumstance, to take on many additional leadership responsibilities (Brown, Rutherford, et al., 2000). Because of these additional tasks, there is now a blurring of the lines between middle management and senior management (Bush & Harris, 1999). Administrators have distributed some of their responsibilities to department heads because of the expansion of the administrator’s leadership position (Lambert, 2002). In turn, department heads have downloaded some of their duties onto teachers, causing tension and pressure (Glover et al., 1998). Turner (2003a) stated that “subject leaders have had an ever-expanding portfolio of responsibilities placed upon them” (p. 210), and Poultney (2007) contended that the department head position is one with an increased breadth, but without authority. The increase in duties, lack of clarity in the role, and blurring of areas of responsibility have resulted in feelings of isolation and frustration by department heads who are encountering role ambiguity and role confusion (Adduci, Woods-Houston, & Webb, 1990; Mayers & Zepeda, 2002; Schmidt, 2000).

Last, as school structures and organizations change toward more distributive forms of leadership and as the use of professional learning communities increases, the role of department head is changing drastically. The role was initially established to help the principal manage the various subject areas. Now, the role encompasses interdepartmental collaborations, whole school focus, and attention to policies from districts and the Ministry of Education that were beyond the remit of the position as it was initially instituted. This coincides with insufficient financial compensation and release time for department heads. In addition, administrative support has been diminished due to the reallocation or removal of assistant heads and office support. This change has not been addressed in any literature to date. This study investigated the nature
of secondary school department heads’ leadership role and the perceived nature of their leadership work. For these four reasons, this research is important to our need for a more complete understanding of department heads as teacher leaders.

Purpose and Rationale of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceived nature of the leadership role of secondary school department heads. Department heads are considered to be teacher leaders, yet this concept, like the departmental headship, is an evolving and complex leadership construct. An exploration of their own perceptions of their leadership work is relevant to department heads’ understanding and enactment of their role and our understanding of teacher leadership. This research is guided by three main questions.

1. What is the perceived nature of the department head’s leadership role?
Department heads undoubtedly have leadership roles, which include numerous tasks and duties that they must complete. Some of these tasks may be managerial and involve administrative and bureaucratic duties, such as acting as a liaison between the department and the school administration. Other tasks may be more complex and leadership oriented. The department heads’ responsibilities can be led by school goals and can include the provision of professional development to colleague and peers. Leadership work includes tasks that demonstrate an ability to support colleagues while focusing on improving student success. I investigated the two types of department head work to understand their leadership role; these two types of work were organized into leadership and managerial.

2. What conditions and factors impact the department head’s leadership role?
Every school has its own set of factors that affect leadership, which department heads must effectively navigate to improve student success. These individualized contexts have
been organized to include both external and internal conditions and factors. External factors include those areas that are outside of the department head's control. Some examples of these areas are access to resources, policy, school and departmental structure, relationships with colleagues, and leadership approaches of administration.

Internal conditions that exist for the department head can be discussed by examining the effect of role ambiguity and role confusion, negative and positive feelings regarding the role, and department heads' own personal skill set.

3. How do department heads navigate the condition and factors that impact their role?

A department head's leadership role undoubtedly has an effect on many aspects of the school. In particular, the role affects the department head's relationships with colleagues both within and outside the department and the school as a whole along with their own self-concept as a teacher, a leader, and as an individual. However, to a large extent, these impacts are predicated on the way secondary schools have been organized into departments or teams. An examination of the strategies that department heads use to maneuver through the political climate of education, along with the challenges of relationships will be a focus for questioning in this section. In addition, the supports that the department head receives will also be included in the discussion of how they navigate their leadership role.

Need for Clarity in the Role

The primary rationale for this study was to provide clarity around the perceived nature of the leadership role of the department head and to explore the conditions that exist for the individuals who work toward teacher leadership. The role of the secondary
school department head in Ontario is varied and challenging. This research recognized
the diversity in the role of department head and gave a voice to the department heads who
take on these roles. It provided much needed information related to their perceptions of
the work that they do, the factors that impact their work, and how they navigate these
conditions. This research highlighted how department heads act as teacher leaders and
what is needed to continue their efforts in a positive and effective way. Many teachers do
not fully understand the extent of the responsibilities that a department head holds. In
turn, many department heads themselves do not understand their leadership role because
of the lack of clarity in job descriptions and the ever-changing educational environment
that requires department heads to adjust and move forward. In addition, many
administrators are not cognizant of the extent of the leadership role that department heads
can play and as a result the role is highly undervalued and underutilized (Weller, 2001).
The leadership role that a department head plays in his or her school affects the learning
that goes on there and the quality of teaching that ensues. With increased emphasis being
placed on student success and accountability, administrators and school districts should
be aware of the potential of this leadership role and the power that it can wield in
effecting change. As a result, learning how to maximize the role of the department head
would push schools and departments toward improved student success.

Assistance for Stakeholders to Maximize the Role of Department Head

School districts will be interested in this research as it provides a framework from
which they can move toward improving their understanding of teacher leadership and the
department headship. It illustrates how school districts can provide support for
department heads and other teacher leaders along with developing transparency for the
role. Administrators can use this research to develop more clearly outlined job
descriptions and expectations for department heads. Teachers and aspiring department
heads can use this research to understand the leadership role that one takes on when one
becomes a secondary school department head. Last, the Ontario Secondary School
Teachers Federation and the Ontario College of Teachers (OCT) will be interested in this
research as it outlines the leadership aspect and the additional duties that current
department heads experience in suburban Ontario. This will allow a better understanding
of how the role of teacher leader and department head is evolving and possibly result in a
more effective and appropriate description of duties and evaluation of the roles. In
addition, it could lead to the development of a body to support department heads or one
which could provide appropriate professional development.

Department heads occupy an ambiguous organizational role between teachers and
administrators. A more thorough understanding of the role of the department head could
be helpful in developing an accurate evaluation process or set standards for department
heads, thus reducing role ambiguity. Currently, in the province of Ontario, the OSSTF
provides guidelines for local bargaining units to use with regard to the role of the
department head. Every school district negotiates its own contract with the teachers in the
district. However, department heads do not have a collective voice in the negotiations and
are represented simply as teachers. Their voice is not heard through the union. By
highlighting the voice of department heads, this research provides a deeper understanding
of the unique challenges of their leadership role.
Extend Body of Research on Department Heads and Teacher Leaders

It is important to add to the fairly sparse body of knowledge that exists for Canadian department heads as teacher leaders and to possibly entice new teachers into the positions. This work will demonstrate the multiple settings in which department heads work and illustrate a suburban sample of teacher leadership and what that means in this area. With more transparency regarding the construct of the role, aspiring department heads will be able to see the leadership opportunities that emerge from a departmental headship.

Conceptual Framework

This study used a constructivist lens to examine the perceived nature of the department heads' leadership role, the factors that impact their work, and the strategies and supports they use to navigate this role. Constructivism informs educational researchers in the way in which educators and researchers interpret meaning from what goes on in schools. It has "emerged as an important educational perspective that is changing how educational researchers, writers, and practitioners view the world of teaching and learning" (Lambert, 1995a, p. 28). Furthermore, Null (2004) stated that because many new reforms claim to use constructivist learning theory, it must be "studied, analyzed, and discussed as it becomes more widespread in the language of educators" (p. 180) so that its foundational elements can be clearly understood.

Constructivist learning theory has been informed by many theories and ideas both from within the field of education and outside. Walker and Lambert (1995) identified how John Dewey's ideas of learning and leading lead into elements of our modern understanding of constructivism. With regard to student learning, they foreground
Dewey’s beliefs in the importance of learning co-operatively, developing an understanding based on personal insight and authentic experiences. With regard to leading, they noted his belief in shared decision making, the notion of a school as a community of learners, and the importance of involving teachers in the organization of the school. Walker and Lambert also identified the works of Piaget, Bruner, Vygotsky, and, more recently, Feuerstein as greatly influential to the development of constructivist theory. These contributions included an emphasis on the process of learning, student involvement in the learning process, the relevance of prior experience, the idea that intelligence and knowledge are socially constructed, and the belief that children can “self-construct themselves as learners” (Walker & Lambert, pp. 20-21). In addition to the aforementioned work, Walker and Lambert also stated, “the recent research by cognitive psychologists regarding how students learn has further clarified and supported constructivist learning theory” (p. 21). As a result, constructivist learning theory has a depth and breadth of contributing thought, resulting in educators and theorists alike continuing to develop and expand this theory.

Constructivist learning is based on eight principles, which extend beyond other learning theories by recognizing that first, “knowledge and beliefs are formed within the learner” and that second, “learners personally imbue experiences with meaning” (Lambert, 2003. p. 59). Additional principles of constructivism include the idea that “learning activities should cause learners to gain access to their experiences, knowledge, and beliefs” and that “culture, race, and economic status affect student learning individually and collectively” (p. 59). Furthermore, Lambert contended that “learning is a social activity that is enhanced by shared inquiry” and that “reflection and metacognition
are essential to the construction of knowledge and meaning” (p. 59). Last, she also stated that “learners play a critical role in assessing their own learning” and that “the outcomes of the learning process are varied and often unpredictable” (p. 59). These eight principles are the basis for constructivist learning and are also foundational for constructivist leading. Constructivism presents a way to understand the way that children learn, and it also informs the way that adults should lead.

In her work on leadership capacity and school improvement, Lambert (2003) asserts that teacher leadership does not follow the traditional hierarchical nature of school organization; teacher leadership empowers teachers who could seemingly be conceived to be at the bottom of the school organizational pyramid. Furthermore, she stated that “leading and learning are deeply intertwined, and that leading is fundamental to the nature and mission of teaching” (Lambert, p. 33). Constructivist leadership is defined as “the reciprocal processes that enable … participants in an educational community to construct meanings … that lead toward a common purpose of schooling” (Lambert, 1995a, p. 32). Covert (2006) reported successful implementation of a constructivist pathway to teacher leadership which was implemented during a 2 year professional development program designed to facilitate teacher implementation of best practices as a result of reform policies. Therefore, constructivist leadership practices are underway and are beginning to be examined and assessed.

With constructivism in mind as the overarching framework, the work of department heads as teacher leaders will be analyzed by examining the following elements.
• The perceived nature of department heads' leadership work: The type of work is organized under the categories of leadership work and managerial work. The interchangeability of these two types of leadership work must be noted and recognized as an additional aspect of the department head's leadership role. This duality in the role can lead to factors and conditions that affect the role.

• Factors and conditions that impact the department head’s leadership role: First, the conditions for department heads’ work explored external factors and conditions that exist. These external factors vary in degree for each department head but exist for all. Next, the internal conditions are explored.

• How department heads navigate the factors and conditions affecting their leadership role: This includes the strategies that department heads implement to move toward improved student success. In addition, the supports that department heads have access to are also presented.

Scope and Limitations of the Study

Research into the perceived leadership role and processes involved in teacher leadership by department heads is important in our educational culture as there is a significant lack of literature regarding this topic (Aubrey-Hopkins & James, 2002). However, due to time and financial constraints, this research has some limitations. It should be noted that this is a study investigating 6 secondary school department heads in suburban Ontario and, because of this, it is limited in scope to the perceptions and opinions of a small number of department heads. Their opinions and ideas may neither reflect those of all the department heads in the province of Ontario nor may they reflect the opinions and ideas of those in urban or rural areas. Those who participated in this
study represented a variety of ages, gender, ethnic background, areas of responsibility, number of years in the position, and type of school in a suburban area. Additional future research would benefit from a larger sample that included urban and rural groups. This future research could be conducted over a longer period of time and include departmental colleagues and administrators in the school, whose opinions could add to a more detailed construct of the leadership role of department heads.

Last, the final analysis will be my own, and I have preconceptions around the role of the department head. As a former department head, I recognized the ambiguity of the role and the limitations of time, autonomy in decision-making, and resources that also exist. In addition, department heads often feel isolated because of the in-between status of their work; they may feel to be neither a full teacher nor a full administrator. This, at times, leads to trust issues with colleagues. Although these perceptions of the role are my own, they are also supported in the literature as common experiences for department heads in a teacher leadership role. To ensure that biases were controlled in this study, research participants were interviewed twice, asked to complete member checks of not only their interview transcripts but also the development of preliminary categories and ideas that evolved from the ongoing memo writing process that I engaged in as a part of data collection and analysis. There was insufficient time to interview principals or members of the department to conduct a triangulation, which could yield a more detailed framework of teacher leadership for department heads. In addition, this research was limited to the department heads' own perceptions of their leadership role.
Outline of Remainder of the Study

Chapter Two examines the research on both department heads and teacher leadership. Although there remain numerous departmental headships that are strictly focused on one subject area, the leadership role is beginning to move away from the idea of a traditional position of responsibility for one subject area to more goal-oriented positions and those with multiple curricular responsibilities. With this move comes a change in the understanding of the leadership role and the actual responsibilities and the conditions in which department heads have to work. As a result, their leadership role affected those in their individual school contexts differently, as it did themselves. Furthermore, as schools become increasingly data driven and goal oriented toward student success, these change processes require schools to move toward new goals, and additional formal and informal teacher leadership positions are emerging. These nontraditional roles are at times just as complex and ambiguous as the traditional department head positions. However, from a review of the literature, it is clear that teacher leadership is evident in the role of the department heads.

The methodology for the research is outlined in Chapter Three, where the qualitative nature of this research is presented. In particular, this research used constructivist inquiry. Rodwell (1998) stated that constructivist inquiry involves obtaining multiple understandings of a phenomenon and the coconstruction of a process that accommodates these multiple understandings. This research explored the perceived nature of the leadership role of secondary school department heads and the factors that impact these individuals along with their strategies for navigating the role. It explored their perceptions of teacher leadership. Constructivist inquiry suits this topic because
being a teacher leader is considered to be a process (Pounder, 2006) and, as such, is a
developing, yet tangible area of education to be investigating. Furthermore, this research
used constructivist inquiry design as described by Charmaz (1994) because of its focus
on respondents’ perceptions of their work.

Chapter Four presents a thorough summary of the data obtained through the six
initial interviews and the subsequent follow-up interviews with the research participants.
It is structured around a framework for department heads as teacher leaders which
emerged from the data. It also includes details regarding the memo-writing during the
analysis phase of the data collection. It is organized by focus questions and areas which
emerged as relevant or common to all the research participants, with details and excerpts
of responses to the semistructured interviews. Chapter Five discusses the research
findings and the framework of teacher leadership for department heads. Implications of
the results and recommendations for further study have also been identified.
CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter provides an overview of the literature on department heads and teacher leadership. It is organized around the three main questions that guide this inquiry. First, I investigate the perceived nature of department heads' leadership role in secondary schools. Next, I focus on the complexity of the role by examining the conditions and factors that impact the department heads' leadership role. Finally, I study how department heads navigate the conditions and factors that impact their role.

Although secondary school department heads have been in existence since the organization of schools into subject-specific areas, little has been written on their experiences (Moore, 2007). Department heads, as middle managers in secondary school organizations, are indispensable and effective in various areas of school and departmental organization. First, they play a pivotal leadership role in the school, and they are necessary as liaisons between administration and departments. They are the required link in the chain of command between administrators and teachers. Siskin (1991) stated that "department chairs emerge as "middle managers" with financial, curricular and personal responsibilities" (p. 153). A department head's leadership can indirectly affect school improvement and student achievement (Muijs & Harris, 2007). However, there is a gap in the literature regarding the effect their leadership role has on teachers as educators, leaders, and as individuals. There is also limited research on role ambiguity, strain, and confusion (Aubrey-Hopkins & James, 2002; Mayers & Zepeda, 2002; Schmidt, 2000). These effects of the role are a plague on many department heads and teacher leaders. What is prominent is the fact that the role is ambiguous and amorphous.
Nevertheless, there is a wealth of research on teacher leadership, a more generic term used to refer to teachers who take on additional responsibilities for student success in their schools. However, there is a dearth of research examining how department heads exemplify the concept of teacher leadership and how they construct it. This inquiry is directed to these points. The following section will be a review of the literature which identifies the key elements of the research regarding department heads and teacher leadership.

This chapter is organized into three sections. In the first section, the nature of the department head's leadership role is overviewed. This is then followed by a more elaborate examination of the construct of teacher leadership. This includes the importance of leadership skills, collaborations, expertise in knowledge, curriculum, and pedagogy, and also the barriers to teacher leadership. The third section of this literature review includes a detailed discussion of the departmental headship. Their leadership work, administrative duties and collaborative efforts will be presented. In addition, the factors and conditions that exist for this role will also be presented along with barriers that they experience and the effects of their work.

The Nature of the Department Heads' Leadership Role

It is clear from the literature on department heads that the role lacks both a clear definition (Adduci et al., 1990; Hannay & Denby, 1994; Moore-Johnson & Donaldson, 2007) and a clear job description (Francis, 2007). The great variety in the leadership role is what makes it a complex area to study. Nevertheless, the examination of the role of secondary school department head will be guided by three main focus questions, which were presented in Chapter One.
It is important to note that each department in a secondary school will be different, as will each school. To further the idea of diverse school and department culture, Turner (1996) contended that schools and departments will vary greatly because of two issues. The first issue is the contextual factors that affect schools and departments, such as background and beliefs of teachers, policy, pupils, school size, budget, and parental support. The second issue is the internal school features, such as the administrator’s leadership style, ethos, aims and vision, professional working relationships and structure, decision making, communication, monitoring, and evaluation. In addition, department heads have to deal with teacher reticence to change and the highly autonomous professional who resists collaborative efforts (Moore-Johnson & Donaldson, 2007). All these conditions add to the complexity and ambiguity of the role of the secondary school department head.

According to Poultney (2007), department heads have two main roles, which are to lead and to manage. Many department heads take on leadership positions to assist or support their colleagues (Aubrey-Hopkins & James, 2002), to extend their own learning (Melville & Wallace, 2007), and to improve student learning (Brown, Boyle, et al., 2000). Hill (1995) saw an educator’s continued learning as central to the role of department head. Although the leadership aspects of their role are important, they shield a true reflection of the position and its responsibilities. Their job involves the management of people and resources, and it is often overloaded with less meaningful, more mundane tasks that frustrate and burn out even the most effective department head (Mayers & Zepeda, 2002). Despite the development of the construct of teacher leadership, the evolution of the role of department head has not progressed to meet the
demands of their environment. Since its inception in the early part of the century, the role has remained limited to largely bureaucratic and managerial tasks, leading to frustrations and isolation (Schmidt, 2000). The role involves managing a budget, ordering materials, timetabling, mediating between various parties, providing information, and being a link between administration and teachers. These administrative duties take up much of the limited release time that department heads are given for their role (Glover, Miller, Gambling, Gough, & Johnson, 1999). Regardless of the frustrations that arise from the challenges of managing and leading, department heads have evolved to be significant teacher leaders in their schools (Aubrey-Hopkins & James, 2002).

Pounder (2006) suggested that the traditional idea of the department head is outdated and must be replaced with a more effective teacher leadership concept which can embody the process of change in instructional practices and curricular efforts. He extended his analysis of the department head to suggest that the new teacher leadership model should focus on mentoring and coaching, professional development opportunities, school level decision-making, and reflective inquiry. Fullan (1993) contended that “teacher leadership encompasses inter-related domains of commitment and knowledge, including commitments of moral purpose and continuous learning and knowledge of teaching and learning, educational contexts, collegiality, and the change process” (p. 246). Yet another perspective by Muijs and Harris (2006) emphasized the importance of distributed leadership and the transition to the development of a shared culture, a set of shared values, and a unifying vision among the whole school. They also suggested that strong leadership, clear roles, trust, and a focus on collaboration and professional development will support teacher leaders (Muijs & Harris, 2007).
Teacher Leadership

Teacher leadership is a key phrase used in literature to describe a teacher who demonstrates leadership qualities in their classrooms, schools, and/or school districts. These acts of leadership can manifest in numerous fashions and are driven in large part by the needs of the context in which they are demonstrated. Teacher leadership may be illustrated by a teacher who takes on additional responsibility for supporting colleagues in their need to provide curriculum to students identified with special needs. Alternatively, teacher leadership may be demonstrated by a department head who focuses his or her department on increasing whole school achievement on standardized assessments. The range of teacher leadership can be limitless and is driven by what needs to be improved in a certain educational setting.

Teacher leadership is a broad notion with many different definitions, yet one which “offers a variety of unseen opportunities for forcing schools out of established frames of reference and toward genuine school improvement” (Ackerman & Mackenzie, 2006, p. 66). However, when conducting research into teacher leadership in the UK, Muijs and Harris (2006) found that teachers were often unaware that they were acting as teacher leaders and that they were having a significant impact on their schools. Therefore, it is this ambiguity and misunderstanding around the role of the teacher leader and the effects of their work that has led to a great deal of interest more recently.

York-Barr and Duke (2004) developed a concept of teacher leadership that reflects many of the aforementioned ideas and extends them. They conducted a detailed review of the literature on teacher leadership and developed their own definition and framework. They identified teacher leadership as “the process by which teachers,
individually or collectively, influence their colleagues, principals, and other members of school communities to improve teaching and learning practices with the aim of increased student learning and achievement” (p. 287). Their definition outlines four key ideas: teacher leadership encompasses a process, teacher leaders influence, they focus on improvement, and they want increased student results.

All the aforementioned definitions of teacher leadership and department heads emphasize similar aspects. However, for the purposes of this literature review, I presented department heads as teacher leaders as a concept which has several key elements. First, student success and improved student learning through effective teaching are at the focus of teacher leadership, and this links to a teacher’s foundation in the classroom. Next, there must be an intertwining of knowledge and skill which is sustained by support. However, definitions of teacher leadership must include reference to the impediments presented by barriers such as lack of resources, lack of professional development and role ambiguity, conflict, and confusion (Ackernian & Mackenzie, 2006). In particular, a depth and breadth of knowledge of curriculum, pedagogy, the school (Birky, Shelton, & Headley, 2006), and change (Fullan, Cuttress, & Kilcher, 2005) must be interwoven with above average skills in teaching, facilitation, organization, and collaboration (Gusky, 1986), resulting in meaningful influence on colleagues and effective leadership (Barth, 2001). The efforts of the department head as teacher leader must be supported through the provision of appropriate professional development and support from colleagues and administration (Bush & Glover, 2005). However, the current literature on teacher leadership has some gaps. Notably, there is a
dearth of research exploring the effects of teacher leaders’ self-efficacy and the impacts of teacher leaders on others.

Leadership Skills

Teacher leaders must possess many leadership skills, including facilitation, teaching, and collaboration skills. Lipton and Wellman (2007) note the importance of purposeful conversations about the learner and learning. With the use of this technique and other facilitation techniques, teacher leaders can engage peers in meaningful data-driven discussions around student learning and student success. Understanding the dynamics and culture of the school are important to all teacher leaders. Danielson (2007) noted that the school is one of the three primary areas where teacher leaders extend their reach. In addition, Barth (2001) contended, along with many others (Danielson; Lambert, 2003), that principals are no longer able to manage the school on their own and must be supported by teacher leaders. He outlined the role of the principal as key to fostering teacher leadership and presented a fairly distributed form of leadership as being required for this to succeed and a culture of collaboration to build. For teachers to be successful leaders, there needs to be a clear process for the transition from traditional hierarchical management to a more distributed management style (Muijs & Harris, 2007). The use of distributed leadership seems to reoccur in the literature as a means to foster empowerment of teacher leaders (Barth; Glover et al., 1999; Spillane, Camburn, & Pareja, 2007; Turner, 1996). Therefore understanding the culture and leadership styles that exist in the school is relevant to the success of a teacher leader.

In addition, teacher leaders must also be able to work with conditions that at times honour their leadership roles but at other times squash them. Ruebling, Stow, Kayona,
and Clarke (2004) contended that effective leadership behaviour relates specifically to developing and monitoring the implementation of curriculum and that this is necessary for satisfactorily achieving learning results. They clearly stated that one must nurture the instructional environment and become curriculum leaders to see improved learning (Ruebling et al.).

**Collaborative Skills**

Collaborative skills are some of the attributes which are repeatedly noted as being fundamental to the success of a teacher leader. MacTavish and Kolb (2006) contended that the use of a model which supports collaboration, collegiality, and psychological empowerment will encourage teachers to create authentic, engaging, and empowering learning environments. Aubrey-Hopkins and James (2002) also supported the view that collaboration and collegiality are key to improved leadership. Muijs and Harris (2006) encouraged capacity building through structures such as professional learning communities (PLCs) and cite the work of Linda Lambert on leadership to foster this. Ackerman and Mackenzie (2006) also presented the idea of a culture of collaboration as a requirement for success for teacher leaders.

According to the York-Barr and Duke (2004) framework for teacher leadership, by maintaining a focus on teaching and learning and the practices that take place in the classroom, teacher leaders can positively influence their colleagues. This can only be done with the development of trusting and constructive relationships which illustrate a joint focus on students and their learning. These two previous foci of leadership can be enacted through formal and informal points of influence. Nevertheless, teacher leaders also influence teams or groups such as departments or sections, and they also have an
organizational capacity which extends their influence beyond their department to the whole school, the district, and at times beyond.

Absence of leadership skills which focus on teaching and learning and classroom practice causes difficulty. Ackerman and Mackenzie (2006) noted that paradoxically, some educators who are outstanding teachers and facilitators are less than effective “when it comes to constructively developing their colleagues’ learning” (p. 67). Furthermore, because teacher leaders are stepping out of the confines and isolation of their classrooms, they are taking a risk that can place them as a target for those who prefer to see teachers maintain their more autonomous roles in the classroom. At times, teacher leaders are perceived by their colleagues to be rude, disloyal, or worse, which can pose a significant barrier to teacher leadership (Ackerman & Mackenzie).

Knowledge, Curriculum, and Pedagogy

Teacher leaders’ primary focus is on student success and improved student learning. They make decisions based on their perceptions of how changes affect student learning. They forge ahead with new initiatives or resist others based on their beliefs (Ackerman & MacKenzie, 2006). A teacher leader focuses on many areas to ensure improved student learning. These areas include, but are not limited to, curriculum, other teachers, and most important, students. They examine issues, sometimes using action research to identify problems and solutions in schools (Glover et al., 1999). They work co-operatively with others to drill down to understand problems and then build solutions. They also work within devolved management systems and aim to improve communication between stakeholders and to improve student achievement. They encourage others to lead in their areas of interest, and they mentor these new leaders and
support their needs. Ackerman and Mackenzie stated that

“teacher leaders carry the weight of responsibility for ensuring that
reforms take root in the classroom and deepen the learning of all students.
They are also a school’s conscience. They care deeply about students and
about the institutions designed to help students learn, and they continually
think about the gap between the real and the ideal in schools” (p. 66).

The primary foundational element of the York-Barr and Duke (2004) framework of
teacher leadership illustrates how teacher leadership is predicated on respect from other
teachers for the leaders, a focus on lifelong learning, and a breadth of leadership ability.
However, a teacher leader’s power lies in his or her ability to stay familiar and
comfortable with the classroom. In turn, this foundation in the classroom will lead to the
development of credibility by his or her peers and eventually support for the teacher
leader’s efforts.

A teacher leader’s knowledge of the curriculum and subject area content along with
the pedagogy that envelops these two areas is fundamental to his or her success. It is this
knowledge that Barth (2001) stated has the most impact on student learning and success.
Along with knowledge comes an ability to be reflective about his or her own
understanding and philosophies of education. Harris and Muijs (2003) indicated that
teacher leaders need to be “tight on values, but loose on the freedom to act” (p. 3) with
regard to the background to their knowledge of curriculum and pedagogy. Furthermore,
Young (1988) contended that involvement in curriculum work leads to increased self-
confidence and morale as well as the acquisition of new ideas and the ability to rethink
one’s own ideas. He cited research that identifies participation in professional
development as a cause of increased job satisfaction, work achievement, and personal integration into the organization (Young). Furthermore, Pankake and Moller (2007) outlined the duties for teacher leaders and emphasize the importance of sticking to instructional leadership as their main goal. Donaldson (2007) concurred with this point and stated that teacher leadership is an asset which will improve instructional practice. The knowledge of curriculum, content, and pedagogy is key to the success of teacher leaders.

*Barriers to Teacher Leadership*

There are many barriers and conditions that impede teacher leadership, despite educators' endeavors to improve student learning through leadership. The third foundational element of York-Barr and Duke's (2004) framework for teacher leadership outlines the conditions which are necessary for effective teacher leadership roles to develop. The conditions include an encouraging culture along with a supportive principal and colleagues. This support, complemented with time for leadership efforts and resources in the form of material, people, and professional development will create a structure in which teacher leadership can flourish. However, what this framework omits is the negative conditions or barriers for teacher leadership and the importance of teacher leader autonomy.

Barth (2001) acknowledged the many difficulties of being a teacher leader. He stated that lack of time, too many responsibilities, large-scale assessment, and, at times, colleagues are impediments to successful teacher leadership. The literature is riddled with comments regarding the lack of time and or increase in responsibilities that pose difficulties (Francis, 2007; Glover et al., 1999; Muijs & Harris, 2007; Wallace, Parker, &
Wildy, 1995). Another primary impediment to teacher leadership is the lack of professional development for teacher leaders and the absence of opportunities for them to plan and present professional development for their colleagues. Harris and Muijs (2003) stated that there is a clear link between teacher leadership and teacher learning. This seems to suggest the move toward development of professional learning communities and other organizational structures that support teachers learning to lead and leading to learn. Guskey (1986) suggested that high quality professional development is the central component for any school improvement effort and, as a result, much needed for teacher leaders. Relatedly, and as a way to quell the constant call for leadership professional development, Quinn, Haggard, and Ford (2006) presented a framework for the inclusion of leadership skills in preservice and inservice teaching programs. This framework includes four phases that begin with developing leadership skills in the classroom, moving to professional organizations and with peers, acting as a mentor, and leading with a capacity for making systemic changes.

Furthermore, because of the complexity and challenges that exist in teacher leadership positions, role ambiguity, confusion, and conflict arise. The many barriers that exist for teacher leaders are daunting. However, research specifically examining these conditions is limited to their emotional effects on the individuals, such as the work on role strain, ambiguity, and conditions (Adduci et al., 1990; Mayers & Zepeda, 2002; Schmidt, 2000). What is known from the research is that the role can lack direction and vision (Brown & Rutherford, 1998) and effective job descriptions (Francis, 2007) or role expectations (Glover et al., 1999) and clear definitions (Johnson & Donaldson, 2007).
Teacher leaders may also lack experience in leading (Hannay & Denby, 1994; Quinn et al., 2006).

The effects of the barriers are clear. Few teachers are willing to take the risks involved in becoming a teacher leader. Young (1988) found that there were four key findings when looking at the reluctance of teachers to take on leadership positions dealing with curriculum development. Teachers could be reluctant to participate because of insufficient release time, colleagues' negative reactions to a teacher's participation in a curriculum project, inadequate rewards, and/or a concern over implementation or lack of implementation of the material developed. Although there are some reasons to avoid the role of teacher leader, the experience can be very rich. What is clear is that very few teacher leaders are successful without the support and encouragement of their administrators (Birky, Shelton, et al., 2006). Johnson and Donaldson (2007) contend that "teacher leaders need support to overcome the stubborn barriers created by the norms of school culture—autonomy, egalitarianism and deference to seniority" (p. 8).

Wallace et al. (1995) discussed at length the difficulty in attracting teachers to become teacher leaders. Teacher leaders tend to fall into four categories: (a) educators who are interested in change because it is personally relevant to them; (b) educators who have had success in experimenting with similar projects; (c) educators who felt they have had ownership of the curriculum; and (d) educators who were interested in both intrinsic and extrinsic rewards being offered (Wallace et al.). People who choose not to become teacher leaders do so in part out of a reluctance to be scrutinized by fellow teachers. Despite the possible backlash from colleagues, many teachers continue to thrive while participating in curriculum change from the ground up.
However, Wallace et al. contend that teachers are becoming more selective about their involvement in projects and their roles as agents of change as a result of the negative effects and the decrease in time, support, and motivation for taking on additional responsibilities.

Alternatively, there is research in addition to York-Barr and Duke’s (2004) findings about supportive conditions. These include the importance and significance of supportive cultures and structures, strong leadership, commitment to action enquiry and data richness, innovative forms of professional development, co-ordinated improvement efforts, high levels of teacher participation and involvement, collective creativity, shared professional practice, and recognition and reward (Muijs & Harris, 2006). Therefore, it is important that a framework of teacher leadership include both supportive conditions and nonsupportive conditions affecting teacher leadership. It then provides a more detailed and balanced framework of the role and the adversities that some teacher leaders must overcome while highlighting their value to schools.

The Role of the Department Head

Department heads conduct a variety of different types of work. However, for the purpose of this review of the literature, work will be categorized into leadership, management, and collaborative efforts. Clearly, there is overlap between the types of work that department heads do. At times, some decisions are made independently, whereas at other times decisions are made more collaboratively. Nevertheless, there is a disconnect in the literature between the amount of time the administrative efforts, which fall under the category of managerial work, take when compared to the time for the leadership efforts. More detail must be presented regarding this gap if we are to better
understand the nature of the department head’s leadership role. An overarching idea regarding department heads is that their primary role is to build the capacity of those with whom they work and to foster self-evaluation (Francis, 2007). Lambert (2005) defined leadership capacity “as an organizational concept meaning broad-based, skillful participation in the work of leadership that leads to lasting school improvement” (p. 38). As a result, the various types of department head work do foster capacity building to different degrees amongst their colleagues. This takes form in mentorship and collaborative efforts. Nevertheless, the reality of the job suggests that significant time is spent on administrative duties, thus reducing valuable time spent with colleagues and students.

Leadership Work

Leadership work comprises tasks that involve the department head in a role leading a team of people. Aubrey-Hopkins and James (2002) identify department heads as leading professionals who act as exemplars to their department members and their colleagues. Brown and Rutherford (1998) extend the idea of the department head as a leading professional to focus on improving teaching, learning, and achievement in the department and by students. Department heads must be up to date with curriculum developments, and they are more than just competent teachers. They extol influence throughout the department and school (Gabriel, 2005). Department heads are expected to be curricular and/or instructional leaders.

In this capacity, the department head is an agent of change in secondary schools. Department heads are key to engaging teams and departments in innovations and policies that lead to changes in teaching and learning; however, this can be a challenge because of
the large size of schools and because of the organization of schools into subjectspecific groupings (Hannay & Denby, 1994). Furthermore, Mayers and Zepeda (2002) contend that department heads are in a position to lead change “if they are empowered to be more than mere gofers attending to administrative detail” (p. 49). In addition to developing a group identity in the department, department heads also improve staff and student performance (Bush & Harris, 1999) through the capacity building of teachers and encouragement of self-evaluation (Francis, 2007). Nevertheless, it is imperative that department heads understand the nature of change (Hannay & Denby) and can also conceptualize the “wider school management policies and how these might impact on their department, even if there is no evidence that subject leaders are making any change in the wider school level” (Poultney, 2007, p. 10).

Department heads lead in many different ways and with the use of a variety of strategies. One strategy is the regular departmental meeting (Gabriel, 2005). These departmental meetings vary depending upon the department, but in Ontario, they are required to occur. In many cases, meetings are called either on a monthly basis or on an “as-needed” schedule when new initiatives, policies, or issues arise that affect the department. At times, departmental meetings are issue related and focus on school policies, and yet other, more effective meetings are driven by department and school goals and involve the professional development of the staff and group learning.

Department heads also buffer teachers from the myriad of details that sometimes fall into their laps as a result of school, district, and ministry policy. Examples of leading involve writing and developing curriculum (Adduci et al., 1990), mentoring and coaching new and struggling teachers, and modeling innovative, useful teaching strategies and
techniques (Gabriel, 2005). Heading committees within and outside the department along with providing professional development to colleagues is also leadership work.

Department heads also bridge or broker information between groups of people. They translate the school and district policies for the classroom teacher (Bush & Harris, 1999), and they are the channel of communication between senior staff and teachers (Glover et al., 1998). These examples of duties are only a small and brief overview of the types of leadership activities in which department heads partake.

For department heads to have an impact on the whole school, a more distributed form of leadership structure must be in place. Distributed leadership, which is currently a widely discussed form of leadership, is the structure that most easily facilitates teacher leadership (Harris, Leithwood, Day, Sammons, & Hopkins, 2007; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). However, for it to be fully in effect, department heads need to be empowered and have the opportunity to contribute to whole school decision-making (Brown, Rutherford, et al., 2000). Next, department heads need to actually participate in schoolwide decision-making. Brown, Boyle, and Boyle (1999) stated that based on their research of department heads in the UK, “there is sufficient evidence from the study to contend that middle managers are increasingly seeking a greater say in decision about the school” (p. 328) and that they want a more distributed form of leadership in their schools. If distributed leadership in schools is to become even more prominent, teachers, department heads, and administration will have to conceive of their roles differently and will have to assume responsibilities beyond their traditional roles for purposes of overall school improvement (Mayrowetz, Murphy, Seashore Louis, & Smylie, 2007). Therefore, department heads will have to exercise their leadership capacity, which stems from their
department and extends to the whole school, when they actively participate in a school with distributed leadership.

**Management Work**

Management work often involves tasks that the department head completes on his or her own, with little, if any involvement from colleagues. Earley and Fletcher-Campbell (1989) conducted their research examining the role of middle managers and the types of tasks they completed in the mid-1980s. They found that the tasks which they completed were often done independently and comprised of routine administration and crisis management and resulted in little time for strategic thinking. These individual tasks or administrative duties involve managing and allocating department resources (Bushe & Harris, 1999), such as ordering consumable materials like overhead sheets, pens, and pencils, and so on, and other supplies like textbooks, printers, and computers (Gabriel, 2005). The types of independent work documented in the literature were void of any explicit links to teacher leadership. This is an area that requires more exploration.

According to Glover and Miller (1999), department heads in the UK spend much of their time on these administrative and managerial tasks. More and more frequently, department heads are being called upon to maintain their own technology when a problem arises with computers in their classrooms and offices. Other examples of administrative work are managing staff absences, timetabling, curriculum planning, developing teaching resources, and attending professional development sessions. At times, department heads will be responsible for evaluating teachers or teacher candidates, although it must be noted that the evaluation of teachers no longer falls under the aegis of the department heads in Ontario. Turner (2003a) also stated that department heads in the
UK must meet targets set by administration and government performance standards and balance all of this along with their own teaching load. This is becoming evident in Ontario, where department heads are beginning to experience increased pressure to work toward improved student success on standardized test scores.

These administrative tasks are time-consuming and pull department heads away from their leadership role and meaningful, collaborative efforts. Schmidt’s (2000) study of department heads indicated that “some department heads expressed frustration that their roles were managerial, bureaucratic and isolated,” and they “expressed disappointment, disillusionment and frustration upon discovering that their headship positions were filled with “paperwork” and “meetings”—work that was “not with the kids”” (p. 832).

Work with Colleagues

Collaborative work involves tasks that the department head completes with colleagues. This may involve facilitation, but they are tasks in which the department head does not take a direct leadership role. Collegiality, co-operation, and cohesiveness are essential elements of collaborative efforts and, thus, teacher leadership (MacTavish & Kolb, 2006). In addition to these collaborative elements, student success is increased when educators are provided specific and appropriate professional development geared toward higher quality teaching. In their research on subject leaders in Wales, Aubrey-Hopkins and James (2002) noted the importance of promoting a culture of collaboration, and this is reiterated time and time again in the research. Fitzgerald and Gunter (2006) stated that collaborative, collegial, and supportive environments will help foster a community of leading and learning, which in turn is connected to school improvement
and teacher development (Brown, Rutherford et al., 2000). Collaborative work was key to restructuring secondary schools in Hannay and Ross's (1997) research in Ontario. Furthermore, Aubrey-Hopkins and James stated that the promotion of a culture of collaboration, through the establishment of shared norms, expectations, and routines, is key to influencing other teachers and working toward improving student success.

Collaborative work can be illustrated in much of the work department heads do within the department. This work can include the use of formal and informal means of communication, joint decision-making, policy creation, and the development and sharing of best practices. In Melville and Wallace's (2007) research, working cohesively and collaboratively towards curricular endeavours as a community led a department to empowerment as an organization. Establishing departmental policies collaboratively sets out clear expectations and ensures consistently high standards of practice across the department (Aubrey-Hopkins & James, 2002). Teams may be involved in simple administrative duties such as ordering new and appropriate texts for specific grades or more complex tasks such as developing professional development opportunities for a group of teachers. Department heads may be called upon to collaboratively assist with hiring new teachers and developing school-wide policies alongside administration. Significant strategies exist for department heads to increase collaboration among colleagues.

Collaborative work can also cross departmental boundaries. One principal's collaborative efforts discussed in Siskin's (1997) research encouraged staff to engage in cross-curricular endeavors through the creation of committees, providing release time, rearranging meetings, and staff development and supporting those identified as moving in
the “right” direction. Brown, Boyle, et al., (2000) also noted the benefits of interdepartmental collaboration. However, Hannay and Ross (1999) found that “the departmental middle management structure was unable to implement policy initiatives requiring cross-departmental collaboration” (p. 346). Francis (2007) stated that middle leaders had little time to collaborate with other schools and to share and observe. Furthermore, Siskin (1995) contended that interdisciplinary work often fails because of the force of departmentalization. The strength of the departmental boundaries is specific to each school and, as a result, will vary. Nevertheless, when engaging in any collaborative efforts, Bennett (1999) warned of Hargreaves’s ideas of contrived collegiality, where colleagues develop a false sense of effective collaborative work.

Factors and Conditions that Impact Department Heads

Department heads work in a myriad of environments, with at times greatly varying conditions. As each school is different, the work conditions will also be unique. Every position has a separate context. Bennett (1995, cited in Aubrey-Hopkins & James, 2002), noted “four particular factors that play a part in creating this diversity: subject epistemology; departmental membership; the Subject Leader’s individual competence and expertise; and the concept of teaching underpinning the Subject Leader’s practice” (p. 307).

To simplify the organization of the literature around the topic of factors that impact the department head’s leadership role, I have developed two categories affecting the context and the role. First, external factors are explored. These include the leadership approaches of the administration, the department head’s focus on his or her work, the school and department culture, access to resources, and the provision of release time.
Second, the internal conditions that affect department heads’ work is explored, with details of the personal skill and limitations of the department head and the effects of role confusion, role conflict, and role ambiguity.

*Leadership Approaches of Administration*

One of the most significant factors affecting the ability of department heads to lead is the leadership approach used by the administrative team of the school. It is this approach which will set the course for much of the department head’s role. If an administrator uses a distributive form of leadership, the department head can expect a role which will go beyond the boundaries of the department. However, if other leadership approaches are in use, their role could be more traditional. Aubrey-Hopkins and James (2002) contended that the head teacher and the senior management team in Welsh schools have an effect on the department head. Administrators may push responsibilities onto their department heads as a result of their own heavy workload. Administrators need to focus on the “facilitation of others’ knowledge, talents and expertise” (Brown, Boyle, et al., 2000, p. 9) as opposed to controlling individuals as a way to compensate for their overloaded work expectations. When administrators chose to clearly outline and link department head responsibilities to people, not just tasks (Francis, 2007), and to provide clear job descriptions (Mayers & Zepeda, 2002), department heads were more effective. In addition, administrators need to recognize the efforts of department heads. Recognition may come in the form of perceived status, incentive pay, or access to policy making (Glover et al., 1998). The leadership approach influences not only the leadership role of the department head but also the whole school culture.
Focus of Department Head's Work

The focus of the work also varies greatly from department head to department head and from school to school. Focus of work draws attention to the target of their efforts. Department heads can work on tasks that focus on the whole school, the department, an individual, themselves, or any combination of the aforementioned targets. As a result, the role of the subject-specific department head remains ambiguous and lacks clarity. A departmental headship can take a myriad of forms. As previously stated, they are most commonly subject specific, such as the head of math or English. However, they can take a cross-curricular or school goal focus. Examples of such headships are Head of Assessment and Evaluation, Literacy Lead Teacher, or more recently in Ontario, Head of Student Success. There can also exist department heads who hold responsibility for an entire grade of students or who hold pastoral headships such as Head of Guidance.

Tasks that involve a whole school focus are becoming increasingly more prevalent for department heads. As distributed leadership becomes more common in schools, department heads take on additional tasks outside of their traditional department area of responsibility to contribute to whole school decision-making. Examples of whole school decision-making may involve data analysis of standardized test scores or the development of whole school policies. Brown, Rutherford, et al. (2000) explored the extent to which department heads perceive their management role as whole-school, moving beyond their department and the extent to which they have real access to decision-making across the school. They found that it is no longer possible for one individual or a senior management team to make decisions on his or her own, and Bennett (1999) also added that principals will not be able to effect any change without
the assistance of middle managers (DHs). As a result, Brown and Rutherford (1998) contended that heads of department are key to developing successful departments and hence successful schools.

Traditionally, department heads have focused on their individual areas of responsibility such as their subject-specific departments, and that continues to remain the primary focus of their work. They may complete tasks that develop departmental policy on students late to class, missed assignments or other issues that arise on a daily basis for teachers (Gabriel, 2005). Alternatively, the focus of the tasks may be on one specific teacher within the department. As is the case with mentoring and coaching, department heads may be working one-on-one with a new teacher to develop his or her skills or with a struggling teacher to refine his/her skills. Department heads may also focus their work on students and parents by facilitating meetings with colleagues to resolve issues (Glover & Miller, 1999). Last, department heads’ focus may also be on themselves. Department heads require independent time to think through issues, reflect, plan initiatives, develop their own lessons, and strategize their moves in the political climate of education.

Subject-specific department heads focus on the teaching and learning that takes place in their departments. They examine a variety of data and academic results and use data-based decision making; however, this can be a challenge for some department heads who need to understand data and how to analyze it (Turner, 2003a). They develop departmental handbooks and establish departmental priorities (Francis, 2007). Unfortunately, subject-specific foci may clash with cross-curricular or pastoral-focused departments.
School and Department Culture

The culture of the school and the department can have a significant impact on the department head and his or her ability to lead and move toward improved teaching and learning. Mayrowetz et al. (2007) noted that school culture is both a key to reform and an impediment to it. There needs to be a whole school culture of learning to move toward change and improvement. According to Busher and Harris (1999), departmental structure has four main parameters. The first parameter includes the structural organizational configuration of the department; this explores how the departments are organized and the distribution of duties. The second parameter is the degree of social cohesion and collegiality within the department. Next, the status or esteem in which a department is held is significant as it places the department in the hierarchy that exists in schools. Last, the final parameter is power and how it permeates the previous three points and in terms of what constitutes power in social situations. Included in this final point is also the exploration of the power imbalance between leader and followers, the strategies that leaders exert, and formal authority and informal influence. The various parameters and the nuances of each department can affect a department head’s ability to act as a leader when working with a specific group of teachers. If a department is loosely organized with low social cohesion and collegiality, is a lower status department, and has a feeble power structure, department heads will have a low probability of effecting change.

Balkanization of Departments

The balkanization of departments is also a barrier to the effectiveness of department heads. Hargreaves and Macmillan (1995) noted the possibility of departments
becoming entrenched in their own domain and unintentionally or intentionally balking at outside influence. This has also been referred to as the egg-crate organization of schools and limits cross-curricular efforts and whole school thinking. In addition, the legitimacy of subject area and subsequent hierarchies that exist in schools can also inhibit the work of the department head (Siskin, 1995). At the centre of this problem is the lack of communication between various stakeholders in the school and also a lack of direction and vision (Brown & Rutherford, 1998). Researchers such as Fitzgerald and Gunter (2006) called for the development of more professional learning community (PLC) models in schools to avoid the aforementioned negative conditions associated with subject-specific departments. However, there is no evidence to date presenting findings on the effects of PLCs on department heads.

The subject-specific department has come under scrutiny and fire. Hannay (1995) critiqued the role of the department head and suggests a need to move away from traditional subject-specific department head positions to others that blend academic areas or at least reach across subject areas. But teachers do have strong subject associations, which play into their sense of self and identify (Melville & Wallace, 2007). Nevertheless, traditional subject-specific departmental structures are not supportive of change; research indicates that the traditional subject department is not a useful tool for building change capacity (Ross & Hannay, 2001). In addition, Siskin (1997) cautioned that even with the best conditions, it may take a very long time to break down established subject-specific departments that have been reinforced in institutions. It will also require tremendous support, desire on the part of the teachers, time, energy, and resources. If precaution and preplanning are not done, it could result in further solidification of departmental lines.
Overall, Siskin seemed to question the validity of subject-specific departments because of their divisive nature to whole school vision. Hargreaves and Macmillan (1995) concurred with this and label it the balkanization of departments. Alternatively, Visscher and Witziers (2003) presented findings regarding the departmentalization by interdisciplinary teams which shows that they are not more effective than subject-specific departments.

There continues to be the challenge of ensuring that both the school and department focus mesh together positively. It is the responsibility of the department head to work toward policies in the department that will support those of the whole school and vice versa. Department vision and goals need to support and coincide with school and district goals (Brown, Rutherford, et al., 2000), and the department head needs to liaise between whole school and department. Nevertheless, Turner (2003a) contended that there is a disconnect between department plans and school-wide plans.

Departmental Structures

Similar to the diversity in school structures, departmental structures also vary greatly. However, Busher and Harris (1999) characterized the different forms of departmental structures and drew attention to their implications for departmental leadership. From their discussion and Turner’s (2003b) research, it is clear that many different elements comprise the departmental structure. First, it is important to note that the subject being taught affects the management of the department (Turner). However, after this initial overarching idea, there are a number of areas that departmental structure works around.

Similar to school structure, Brown and Rutherford (1998) contended that department heads need to develop flatter structures where leadership is more widely
shared while promoting greater ownership of change and, as a result, a more committed team in the department. Turner (1996) and Poultney (2007) also support this idea when they emphasize the importance of democratic and fairly distributed leadership with an emphasis on collaboration and support. Harris, Jamieson, and Russ (1995) examined effective departments, and Sammons, Thomas, and Mortimer (1997) examined ineffective departments. Both note the importance of departmental policy. In particular, departmental policies should be developed collaboratively but reflect whole school policies as well as incorporating some flexibility for teacher autonomy.

Departmental documentation in the form of a comprehensive departmental handbook is an initiative that improves quality of education and raises standards (Brown & Rutherford, 1998). Francis (2007) and Gabriel (2005) also found that the use of departmental handbooks provides a framework and set of expectations for not only the department head but also the teachers within the department. Furthermore, communication through the use of meetings, memos, bulletins, notice boards, email, circulated material, and informal communication are important to successful departmental structures. Collegiality, developing parents as partners, a focus on student success (Brown & Rutherford), a focus on students, teaching, and learning (Harris, 1998) and sharing good practices are equally as important. Glover and Miller (1999) also suggest that a focus on teaching and learning leads to more leadership activities.

Another aspect of departmental structure is department decision-making. Departmental decision-making is beneficial for two reasons: (a) greater engagement and commitment to outcomes; and (b) greater range of experience inputted (Aubrey-Hopkins & James, 2002). Therefore, this engages teachers when moving toward a change and
brings together a variety of ideas, ensuring all voices are being heard in the department. However, Brown, Boyle, et al., (2000) noted that some teachers feel reluctant to be involved in decision-making efforts, and they are resentful of the investment of time because they perceive themselves to have little influence.

Access to Resources

Access to needed resources is key to the success of a thriving department; however, as departments vary, so does their access to resources. Resources come in many forms, with the most precious resources being time and materials. Time is repeatedly noted as essential, but lacking for department heads to work effectively (Brown & Rutherford, 1998; Glover & Miller, 1999; Muijs & Harris, 2007). Some department heads have a limited or partial timetable, others are strictly department heads and do not teach, and still others teach a full schedule in addition to their duties. As the role of department head is changing and expanding, so too are their responsibilities. A department head’s responsibilities now extend beyond his or her subject area to affect whole school efforts, which greatly taxes his or her time (Glover & Miller). Next to time, department heads cite resources such as texts, consumables, and technological resources as much needed (Gabriel, 2005).

The physical layout of the school and the department along with an equitable distribution of space is important to department heads and teachers alike. In many schools, as departments grow or shrink, their physical location in the school is altered. This can affect teachers’ response to their work and department as well as their sense of efficacy. Alternatively, a department can remain stagnant, in one location, resulting in the lack of cross-curricular interaction amongst teachers. Brown, Rutherford, et al. (2000)
noted the tension that arose as a result as an "us versus them" attitude exuded in some schools and between some departments, resulting in a difficult work environment and a negative school culture. In turn, Francis (2007) also reinforced the importance of trust and department head credibility among colleagues. If trust exists, a department head can both manage teachers' needs and negotiate with them regarding his or her situations, teaching timetable, location, and access to resources, allowing for a balance with whole school needs. Regardless, problems will arise when there are philosophical differences and beliefs regarding teaching. An effective department head is one who can maneuver through the rough terrain of equitable distribution of resources within their department and maintain a sense of collegiality while continuing to focus on school goals and vision.

Lack of Release Time

Time is by far the most significant barrier for department heads to overcome. The immensity of their leadership role and the limited time provided to do the tasks have a negative effect on both the individual department head and the other stakeholders. Lack of time is repeatedly cited in the literature as a problem for department heads (Aubrey-Hopkins & James, 2002; Early & Fletcher-Campbell, 1989; Glover & Miller, 1999; Mayers & Zepeda, 2002). In particular, Brown and Rutherford (1998) noted how lack of time affects a department head's ability to monitor and evaluate teachers. The lack of time stems from the increase in administrative chores and the need for more nonstudent contact time (Glover & Miller, 1999). As a result of the significant shortage of time, Turner (2003a) called for research regarding what department heads do in their noncontact time to better understand their role. Adduci et al. (1990) noted the lack of clerical support, which requires department heads to continue with minor administrative
duties instead of working with colleagues and students. The shortage of time to complete
tasks associated with this leadership role is significant. Many teachers see this as an
impediment to success and a negative factor to consider when searching for a position of
responsibility within the school.

Personal Skills and Limitations of Department Heads

As every school and department is different, so is every department head. In
addition some department heads are either supported by their strengths or weighted down
by their limitations. Poultney (2007) stated that department heads are impaired by their
limited leadership skills and, like administrators, they need to lead with influence, not
control. Brown and Rutherford (1998) supported this notion when they stated that
influence based on professional expertise rather than authority is an aspect of the head of
department as servant leader, a typology of leadership that is effective for developing
collaborative and forward-moving departments. In addition, Poultney supported the
notion that a department head is not an expert but a sharing equal. Therefore, department
heads need to work on developing skills and moving away from their individual
limitations.

Department heads need to understand the culture of the school and the people in
it. They need to have developed organizational skills, particularly revolving around the
"effective organization of teaching" and a collegial style of management (Harris et al.,
1995). To support their skills, department heads must have a set of deep personal values
and belief’s and they must demonstrate an ethic of care to all (Brown & Rutherford,
1998; Busher & Harris, 1999). The skills and values will reflect the leadership ability of
department heads.
Additionally important skills such as the ability to delegate tasks within the department and school and to maintain and establish routines are also relevant for department heads (Poultney, 2007). They must also develop “a high level of trust, autonomy and respect for teachers’ professionalism” while setting high expectations, encouraging teachers to take risks and providing support for others (Fitzgerald & Gunter, 2006, p. 6). Research recognized the positive effects of department heads who have energy, enthusiasm, drive, and motivation for their work and who have long-term plans to implement change in the department (Poultney). The personal limitations of department heads impeded their efforts to move toward change because of their reliance on their personal images of what school should be like (Hannay). Department heads could not move beyond their own previous experiences of departmental headship to create a new construct of teacher leadership, which was more reflective of their context and, as a result, more influential (Hannay, 1996). Furthermore, department heads must build trust, develop approachability, and maintain effective teams. This along with emotional intelligence and the ability to work in a nonthreatening manner are all necessary skills for department heads. Overall, Poultney stated that department heads need to focus on instructional leadership and improving teaching and learning. The personal skills required of the department head, unlike the role itself, are clearly outlined and are what separate teachers from department heads.

*Role Ambiguity and Role Conflict*

Department heads encounter many emotional difficulties with their leadership role despite the value attributed to their work and their necessity in secondary schools. Role ambiguity develops when a department head has insufficient knowledge of the
expectations of the assigned position. For department heads, this is a significant issue. Oftentimes, headships are ill defined, or not defined at all (Siskin, 1995) and fragmentary and vague (Turner, 1996). In addition, newer, goal-focused and cross-curricular headships can be more ambiguous than existing traditional headships. Many department heads feel unprepared for their roles (Leithwood, Steinbach, & Ryan, 1997) and as a result remain an underutilized source of instructional leadership (Weller, 2001).

This role confusion and ambiguity is compounded with the fact that many headships are becoming increasingly politicized (Schmidt, 2000). As a result, some department heads may attempt to reshape roles to conform to the their needs, knowledge, skills, and orientation. Additionally, constant shifts in policy and curriculum pose significant challenges, as do changes in administration. Hannay (1995) noted the challenges faced by department heads with regard to integrated curriculum, changes to assessment and evaluation, and the incorporation of higher order thinking skills. Hannay and Denby (1994) stated that after interviewing 35 department heads, they found that the department heads did not have a clear understanding of the curriculum changes that had occurred in the last 10 years; this therefore illustrates how the leadership role of the department head can be overwhelming and vast.

Role conflict is another significant barrier that many department heads experience. It occurs in various circumstances, one being when incompatible role demands are placed on a person or when two or more statuses are held at the same time by the same individual (Schmidt, 2000). For department heads, this occurs with the dichotomous role of part teacher, part manager. Department heads are considered to be greatly underused, and their leadership potential is often neglected by administrators due
to the confusing and changing nature of their role (Weller, 2001). Role conflict can also occur as a result of changing roles. As previously mentioned, as schools lean more toward distributive leadership and the school-wide leadership role of department heads expands, their role can change drastically. For some this may be a needed and exciting change, while for others it may be perplexing and frustrating. In addition, role conflict can occur when people have differing expectations of their leaders. A department head may expect to have responsibilities that his or her administration may extend or curtail and, as such, he or she may be conflicted by his or her own values.

Last, role confusion can occur when leaders have different ideas about what they should be doing versus the expectations that are put upon them. Department heads often feel pulled in different directions by the allegiances to the people in their department and to the administration. Conflict arises between managing their own teaching and supporting others. There is conflict and tension between being a teacher and being a leader and conflict because of their middle or dual status of teacher and administrator.

The effects of role ambiguity, role conflict, and role confusion are detailed and negative. Mayers and Zepeda’s (2002) work on role conflict is extensive and includes reference to the following research. Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, and Rosenthal (1964) and House and Rizzo (1972) identified lower job satisfaction, high levels of tension, reduced organizational effectiveness, and an increased tendency to quit when individuals experience role ambiguity and role conflict. Schwab and Iwanicki (1982) contended that emotional exhaustion and depersonalization are linked to role conflict, resulting in burnout. Lunenburg and Cadavid (1992) asserted that teacher burnout can lead to a decreased ability in coping with classroom situations, and this is linked to Hart’s (1994)
contention that role ambiguity can also lead to little change in program and teacher isolation. Furthermore, stifled productivity, stress and dissatisfaction, stress leading to disability, early retirement, unfilled leadership roles, frustration, and anxiety are all a result of role ambiguity and role conflict among department heads (Mayers & Zepeda).

These facts alone indicate that department heads’ roles must be clearly defined after thorough discussion and negotiation regarding their leadership and responsibilities. Furthermore, these discussions should continue on an ongoing basis to ensure continuity between department head and administration.

How Department Heads Navigate Their Role

Support from administration, departmental colleagues, and others in the schools along with students and parents is fundamental to a department head, as is access to training and professional development.

Support From Administration

Ross and Hannay (2001') noted the importance of support from administration for the efforts of department heads. In turn, Lambert (2005) suggested that building relationships with principals is reciprocal, as administrators also need the support of their middle managers with regard to whole school efforts and policies. Unfortunately, Schmidt (2000) found that there was very little assistance for new department heads during their transition from teacher to department head and, once they are in the position, department heads can no longer wholly identify with either teachers or administrators, resulting in role confusion. In addition, Mayers and Zepeda’s (2002) found that new department heads primarily resort to trial and error as a means to deal with their new leadership role as opposed to relying on skill and supportive measures set in place in the
school. Adduci et al. (1990) suggested that with more clerical support, a department head would be able to accomplish more work that is focused on student improvement rather than minor administrative efforts.

**Professional Development Needs**

Department heads also need ongoing professional development and training, not only with regard to their curricular area, but also with regard to leadership and departmental organization. Significantly absent, support, in its many forms, is much needed for department heads. Brown, Rutherford, et al. (2000) and Brown and Rutherford (1998) noted the instability of curriculum and the subsequent workload that accompanies a change in curriculum as a problem for department heads. As the department head is key to the understanding and use of curriculum, he or she requires support to engage in these new curricular innovations. Additionally, teachers seeking administrative positions are required to complete Principal Qualification Courses in the province of Ontario. However, there is no initial training course or qualification program for those seeking headships.

Professional development and training with a leadership focus is also notably absent and importantly required for department heads. Aubrey-Hopkins and James (2002) stated that department heads “will need training and development in understanding both the rational and non-rational aspects of the role, in ways of creating and sustaining productive cultures of collaboration and in addressing the issue of teacher underperformance” (p. 318). Additionally, Brown, Rutherford, et al. (2000) identified leadership training as an area of need to improve the leadership and management style of middle managers in the UK. Adduci et al. (1990) stated that professional development
beyond the content area with a greater focus on departmental headship duties and effective ways to perform these duties is imperative. This type of training needs to include interpersonal communication training (Fullan, 2002) and more specific types of training dealing with budgeting and conflict management (Gabriel, 2005).

Department heads are required to actively mentor new and struggling teachers within their department and sometimes beyond (Schmidt, 2000). However, Francis (2007) stated that the skill level of middle managers in the UK varies greatly, as does their receptiveness to change, resulting in a challenge when providing support for these educators. Both teachers and leaders require support if they are to continue in their leadership roles and if they are aiming at improving their own skills and thus positively affecting students (Ross & Hannay, 2001). Fitzgerald and Gunter (2006) summarized the importance of leading learning and state that it involves “the act of influencing and working with others in a highly collaborative, collegial and supportive environment that encourages risk and innovation and which places learning at the centre of all activities” (p. 8). As a necessity, teachers need to participate in discussions and reflective practices to further their own personal learning and development. As a result, support and professional development must be specific to the department head to ensure that it is valuable to him or her and suited to his or her specific needs.

Effects of Department Heads’ Work

The formal leadership role of secondary school department heads is important to students, teachers, departments, and schools (Brown, Boyle, et al., 2000; Fitzgerald & Gunter, 2006), and it is also important in bringing about change and improving pupil achievement (Aubrey-Hopkins & James, 2002). However, their work has been largely
ignored in research (Hill, 1995). Department heads can positively affect many of the aforementioned stakeholders when they are provided with sufficient support, release time, resources, and professional development (Mayers & Zepeda, 2002). Francis (2007) found that department heads with clearly defined roles played a crucial role alongside their administrators in the work to turn around a struggling school. Department heads mentor new and struggling teachers and collaborate with others on both departmental and school-wide efforts while focusing on best practices (Aubrey-Hopkins & James). In Brown, Boyle and Boyle’s research on English Department Heads, they found that too many of them limited their role to management of resources rather than to management of people and that effective department heads collaborated within and outside their departments and focused their energy on the “facilitation of others’ knowledge, talents and expertise” (p. 9). When department heads stay grounded in classroom teaching, they maintain their potential for professional learning (Melville & Wallace, 2007) and stimulate their pedagogical interests while improving their skills as an expert teacher.

There is clear research noting the effect that department heads have on students. Not only do many department heads remain in the classroom, but they also remain closely attuned to student needs and concerns (Bolam & Tuner, 1999 cited in Aubrey-Hopkins & James, 2002; Harris, 1998). Glover et al. (1998) conducted research regarding the needs of middle managers. In their research, they found that department heads were emphatic about their first responsibility being to students. Furthermore, Marland, Hill, and Bayne-Jardine (1981) stated, “The role of the head of department in secondary schools has long been acknowledged as important in sustaining pupil achievement” (p. 305). The role’s importance has increased with the drive to improve student achievement
and because of the increase in more distributive forms of leadership (Aubrey-Hopkins & James). Therefore, the significant effect that the department head has on student success is apparent in the literature.

Department heads also have an effect on their colleagues in addition to their effects on students. Department heads affect teachers because of their close proximity with them; they work with them in the trenches of the classrooms and halls (Aubrey-Hopkins & James, 2002). It is important to maintain collegiality and collaboration because “a sense of efficacy and community is fostered where teachers know each other’s work and are helpful to their colleagues” (Brown, Boyle et al., 2000, p. 9). However, it is important to note that department heads are hesitant to monitor the teaching of their colleagues because of teachers’ valued autonomy and preference to solve their own problems. Department heads are also reluctant to hold teachers in their departments responsible for what happens in their classrooms (Glover et al., 1999). In Ontario, it is prohibited for one teacher, regardless of position of responsibility, to evaluate or monitor another member of the OSSTF (OSSTF, 2008). Department heads promote reflection through the use of the professional learning community model of departmental organization (Melville & Wallace, 2007) and can affect colleagues through discussion of their own self-reflections. Nevertheless, tension may arise over conflicts between department heads and teachers who maintain a high degree of professional autonomy (Poultney, 2007). However, it is clear that department heads can have a positive effect, and Turner (2003b) stated that department heads can have an impact on the quality of teaching and learning in their department with regard to their curricular area.
Department heads can affect departmental performance (Busher & Harris, 1999). The department head's "realm of knowledge" is the departmental sphere of influence (Siskin, 1995), and within this realm of knowledge the department head has the opportunity to raise concerns, share ideas, and reflect as a means to promote a department's curricular efforts (Melville & Wallace, 2007). Tuner (2003a) stated that the department head can exert some influence on the department but that the department members can also exert influence on each other as well. Visscher and Witziers (2003) also stated that support from administration can have more impact by strengthening the role of the department head.

The role of the department head has numerous effects on the individual or self. The individual context of the department is significant to teacher identity, community, and pedagogy (Melville & Wallace, 2007). A department head in a positive working environment with a strong culture of change for improvement and thriving collaboration could experience many positive effects of the role, including increase in status (Poultney, 2007), self-confidence, and teacher self-efficacy. However, many department heads experience a lack of confidence, feelings of insecurity, anxiety, and feelings of insufficient structural power (Schmidt, 2000). The role promotes self-reflection (Turner, 2003a), which is important, as there is little formal evaluation of the leadership role.

In addition to influence on the self and the department, there is overwhelming evidence of the influence of department head performance upon school performance (Busher & Harris, 1999). Department heads are effective at leading school change and improvement (Harris, et al., 1995). However, there is no research to show the effects of the department head on the school district or on any other outside organizations or
agencies such as subject-specific associations or ministries of education. Nonetheless, Aubrey-Hopkins and James (2002) contended that the closeness that department heads have to their colleagues as teachers tends to increase their impact and allow for “greater influence on pupil progress” (p. 306). This indicates the importance of the leadership position that secondary school department heads have and its impact on those around them. It must also be noted that the ambiguity of the role and the subsequent strain and confusion that arise from an unclear or vague job description can negatively affect the department head and his or her feelings of teacher efficacy. Glover and Miller (1999) note that many subject leaders in the UK are confused by their lack of role expectations and the vagueness of their management and leadership functions.

Summary

In this chapter, I reviewed the existing literature on department heads and teacher leadership. I presented the findings on department heads and teacher leadership by examining the nature of the departmental headship in the first section. The departmental headship was described as a leadership and managerial role that lacks clarity. It is strongly affected by the context in which it evolves; each school culture constructs the roles differently. It must also be noted that little has changed for department heads; however, there is a move toward teacher leadership. I subsequently detailed the research that exists on teacher leadership. This section focused on the teacher leadership research and discussed the needed knowledge, required skills, and barriers that teacher leaders face. In particular, teacher leadership, like the departmental headship, is a broad notion. It is a role that focuses on teaching and learning and that is rooted in the classroom. Success as a teacher leader or a department head is possible only with the support of colleagues.
and administrators. In the third section, I presented the types of leadership work department heads do and the focus of their work. I next identified the factors and conditions that affect the department heads’ work. These included the leadership approaches in use by administration, the school and department culture, and personal and professional skills required by department heads. The factors that affect the department head’s work were also explored, along with access to resources, support for and barriers to the role and the departmental structures in place. Last, I presented the current literature on the effects of the department head’s leadership role, on themselves and others. This explored the notion of self-efficacy, role ambiguity, role strain, and role confusion.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

This chapter describes the research methodology and procedures that were used in this study, which investigates the leadership perceptions of secondary school department heads. The chapter opens with an overview of the qualitative research design and its connections to constructivist inquiry. It also locates this research within constructivism. The instrumentation used for data collection, the procedures related to the collection, and the recording of the data are presented. The selection of 6 research participants and the location of interviews are identified. The process for data analysis is also clearly outlined along with the methodological assumptions made and the limitations of the research. Finally, this chapter delineates the importance of trustworthiness in the study and how credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability were established along with the ethical considerations that were made during the planning and the course of this study.

Research Methodology and Design

This research was qualitative in nature and used constructivist inquiry. Qualitative research is inductive and places the data at the core of the research (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Although Creswell (2005) states that qualitative research can be an eclectic process, it allows for deep insight into the data. According to Merriam (1998), all qualitative research shares five basic and essential characteristics. First, the goal of the research is to elicit understanding and meaning. In the case at hand, the goal was to develop a deeper understanding of the complexity of the role of the department head and their perceptions of their leadership experiences. Second, the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis. As the primary researcher, I prepared for the
interviews and analyzed all the data, with consultation from my thesis supervisor, Dr. Denise Armstrong. Third, the research involves fieldwork. During my research, I conducted two sets of interviews with 6 department heads. Fourth, there is an inductive orientation to analysis. I used the constant comparative method for data analysis to move from the specific words and ideas of the research participant to the development of codes and categories about department heads and their perceived leadership roles. Last, the findings are richly representative due to the descriptive nature of the interviews.

Influence of Constructivism

This study uses constructivist inquiry because of the importance of capturing department heads' own perceptions and constructions of their leadership role. I chose to use constructivist inquiry to ensure that my research is well grounded in the perceptions of my research participants and that it will develop into a meaningful and valuable addition to the body of literature regarding their role as teacher leaders. It acknowledges both the researcher's and the participants' constructs of the process being studied. Constructivist inquiry is also called naturalistic inquiry and stems from the original work of Guba (1978) and Guba and Lincoln (1985).

At the core of constructivist inquiry are three elements. The importance placed on the participants' views is fundamental to the research, as is the setting or context in which the participants express their views. Also, the meaning that the participants hold about the educational issue being addressed is at the core of constructivist inquiry (Creswell, 2005), which in this case is the perceptions of the department heads' own leadership role. By using constructivist inquiry, I can build my own understanding, in the form of this thesis, of the social constructions which department heads use to define their leadership role.
This is personally relevant, as I have been in the role of department head on two occasions and can openly recognize the complexity of the role and the variety of department heads’ experiences.

Teachers, and department heads in particular, construct their own understanding of educational leadership practices within their specific school setting and context. It must be recognized that each context and construction is different and affects the ability of a school to move toward improved student success. Lambert (1995) states, “failure to understand the nature and role of leadership may well be the ‘missing link’ in our change efforts today” (p. 56). Delving more deeply into the leadership constructs of department heads’ roles will allow for an extensive understanding of how to move forward in change efforts.

Constructivist inquiry is the process of observing, recording, analyzing, reflecting, dialoguing, and rethinking. It appeals to a variety of educational researchers because it is rooted in the data and participants’ own views. Furthermore, constructivist inquiry proposes that all aspects of reality are interrelated, and by looking at one aspect of an issue, you “can usually predict with great accuracy the nature of the entire cloth [educational issue]” (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993, p. 11).

Constructivist inquiry also assumes that there is not one single reality, but multiple realities of which the researcher must be aware (Charmaz, 2006). This is particularly relevant to the study of department heads because there is no clear definition of what a department head is or does. In addition, constructivist inquiry suits the topic at hand because teacher leadership is considered to be a process (Pounder, 2006) and as such is an evolving, yet tangible area of educational inquiry. Furthermore, each
department head holds their own constructs of what their role involves. As a result, constructivist inquiry is appropriate for this study as there is no preexisting framework for department heads. Constructivist inquiry will allow for the development of this framework because “the process of inquiry for the naturalistic researcher becomes one of developing and verifying shared construction that will enable the meaningful expansion of the knowledge” (Erlandson et al., 1993, p. 21).

In addition, constructivist inquiry holds a number of characteristics which add to its rigor (Erlandson et al., 1993). It lends itself to qualitative methods because they provide an opportunity for rich data to be collected and for the illustration of interconnectedness of the diverse contexts being explored. It considers the relevance and rigor of the study to be important, but it regards relevance as more significant. It notes the preference of grounded theory and recognizes that tacit knowledge is treated differently, but equally with positional knowledge. Constructivist inquiry considers the primary research instrument to be the researcher. Additionally, the research design comes from the research. A natural setting for the research is preferred for constructivist inquiry.

Teacher leadership is a process, and clearly a constructivist inquiry approach is best suited to capturing this process because, as a researcher, one can delve into the details of the research participants’ experiences of teacher leadership to identify relevant areas of meaning.

Selection of Site and Participants

The selection of a suitable research site is important because it is where the research can be observed in the immediate context of the problem being explored. The site needs to maximize “the opportunity to engage that problem” (Erlandson et al., 1993).
In the case at hand, interviews were conducted with department heads regarding their perceptions of their leadership role. As a result, the site of the interviews was afforded some flexibility. The research participant and the researcher mutually agreed upon the locations for the interviews, which furnished comfort to all. These locations allowed for ease of access without a limitation on length of stay. They occurred in suburban areas of southern Ontario.

The sample chosen to complete this research was 6 department heads who have had a variety of professional experiences, yet still reflect the processes involved in being a teacher leader. Two sampling methods were used to identify potential research participants. This was necessary because of the challenge in garnering interest in the study and identifying a diverse range of research participants. First, a snowball sampling method was used to make initial contact with some research participants (2005). Snowball sampling is a method used to gather research participants when their availability is scarce. It allows one individual to recommend a research participant to participate in the study. Only one participant was engaged in the research study using this method.

After reviewing school websites and identifying department heads from the posted material, research participants were called and invited to participate in this study. After the initial contact, candidates were asked demographic questions to identify whether they were appropriate research participants for the interviews (Appendix A). Candidates were also provided with a Letter of Invitation. The initial questionnaire was presented to each potential research participant to ensure a variety of participants were gathered. After the completion of the questionnaires, research participants were
purposively sampled based on established criteria. Merriam (1998) states that “purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (p. 61). As a result, there was a purposeful selection of participants based on criteria that presented a varied set of experiences as a department head across subject areas. This resulted in maximum variation sampling where a smaller sample of diverse participants can result in data which can lead to a deeper understanding of the process being explored (Merriam).

The final sample intentionally included 3 men and 3 women. It was important to engage both men and women in the study, as all individuals construct their roles differently. I also felt that an exploration of both genders would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the complexity of their own constructs of teacher leadership. The participants were from a variety of ethnic backgrounds, ages, and types of departments and schools. They also ranged in years of experience and size of department. This selection of department heads reflects the diversity of experiences and perspectives in this role. See the Research Participant Overview Chart in Appendix B. This led to a deeper understanding of their leadership role and the processes in which they participate. Seven research participants initially volunteered for the study. However, one research participant would not return any calls or emails and was abandoned as a participant.

To complete this constructivist inquiry, two in-depth interviews were conducted with each department head. A systematic set of procedures for collecting data, identifying themes, relating these themes to existing literature, and exploring the processes involved in the leadership role of the department head was undertaken. The goal was to ensure that
the research was rooted in data and that the results would provide a more in-depth interpretation of the leadership role, which would inform the existing literature. As a result, using constructivist inquiry was most suitable to my goals in conducting qualitative in-depth interviews regarding how department heads perceive the nature of their leadership work, the factors and conditions that impact their role, and how they navigate these factors.

Instrumentation

In-depth interviews were conducted to gather information about the department heads' perceptions of their leadership role. Charmaz (2006) states that gathering rich data through the use of intensive interviewing will “reveal participants' views, feelings, intentions, and actions as well as the contexts and structures of their lives” (p. 14). It is this type of rich data that was necessary to build a well-grounded understanding of department heads as teacher leaders. Furthermore, Rubin and Rubin (2005) contend that qualitative interviews allow the researcher to understand experiences, how and why things change, and our working lives. They also state that interviews allow us to reconstruct events, describe social and political processes, delve into personal issues, and shed light on problems. As a result, interviews were determined to be the best tool suited to gaining insight into the perceived leadership roles of department heads, as they involve so many of these key areas of insight. In-depth interviews are an emergent technique that allows the researcher to direct focus, yet allow for flexibility when conducting research (Charmaz).

The instrument used to gather the data was in-depth, semistructured interviews. The interview questions and guide were developed to be as open-ended as possible so
that my previous knowledge of department heads and teacher leadership would not skew the direction of the interview and misrepresent the experiences of the research participants. In addition, the interview guide was developed based on the three focus questions and uses Charmaz’s (2006) techniques for interviewing (see Appendix C). The research questions focused on the research participants’ own construction of their leadership role. These questions were based on a close examination of the literature around both department heads and teacher leaders. They were further influenced by my own knowledge, experiences, and professional interest in the role of the department head. The following are the three research questions, which guided this study.

1. What is the perceived nature of the department head’s leadership role?
2. What conditions and factors impact the department head’s leadership role?
3. How do department heads navigate the conditions and factors that impact their leadership role?

Furthermore, as suggested by Charmaz (2006) and Rubin and Rubin (2005), an attempt to establish rapport was made to show respect and to ensure that the research participants were comfortable and open to discussing their perceptions.

Data Collection and Recording

The data were obtained from semistructured interviews with 6 different department heads in suburban Ontario. Initial contact was made with potential interview subjects by telephone. The first set of interviews took place in the summer, with follow up interviews in the fall. Initial interviews were between 1 and 2 hours in length and were followed up with more brief interviews of 30 minutes to 1 hour. The interview questions
were designed around the three main questions associated with participants' perceptions of their leadership roles.

Interviews were digitally recorded so as to ensure that all the data were retrieved and also to allow the researcher to reflect on the questioning techniques and the questions themselves. From this point, I transcribed the data and began the ongoing process of constant comparative analysis and memo-writing. After the transcription of each interview, I emailed the transcripts to the research participants for their first member check and comment. I continued with ongoing data analysis and then contacted the research participants for follow-up interviews. Again, these interviews took place at a mutually acceptable location. Once the follow-up interviews were completed, the sessions were transcribed and emailed to the participants for their second member check. Simultaneously, to ensure the inquiry was in line with the research participants' perceptions of their leadership role, the developed codes and categories were also presented to the department heads for their comment. The final summary of the research was also shared with the research participants at the end of the study.

Ongoing memo-writing was used as a method to document my thoughts and ideas regarding the interviews along with the data analysis process. Charmaz (2006) states that "memo-writing is the pivotal intermediate step between data collection and writing drafts of papers ... and memo-writing constitutes a crucial method in grounded theory because it prompts you to analyse your data and code early in the research process" (p. 72). As data analysis and data collection occurred simultaneously (Merriam, 1998), memo-writing was effective in ensuring that the qualitative data led to the development of an
understanding of the perceptions of department heads and their leadership role that was
rooted in the data.

This study required research participants to openly reflect on their leadership role
and to present their perceptions of their work. As a result, it was paramount that the data
collected were kept confidential and to follow ethical guidelines. The participants were
assured at several points of the confidentiality of the study. This provided a sense of
security to the research participants and therefore would ensure open responses,
uninhibited by fear of negative fallout due to publication of confidential information. In
particular, because the research participants were in a position of responsibility within
their schools, their comments needed to be closely guarded and used only for the purpose
of this research.

During the research process, confidentiality of the data was maintained through
the use of codes and pseudonyms for names, places, and other personal identifiers.
Personal data which included the research participants’ names, ages, phone numbers,
email addresses, gender, ethnic background, position of responsibility, and school were
collected. Personal identifiers were coded to ensure confidentiality of the participants.
Participants were assured that electronic information would be secured in a password-
protected computer file and would be destroyed once the study was completed. All
digitally recorded documentation regarding the research participants and their interview
data were kept in a locked filing cabinet and will be shredded after 5 years.

Data Processing and Analysis

The constant comparative method of data analysis (Charmaz, 2006) was used in
this research as a means to develop a fuller understanding of the department heads’
perceptions of their leadership role. I constantly compared data from the interviews and my memos, building on codes and categories to develop an understanding for department heads as teacher leaders. This was an ongoing endeavor that was repeated throughout all the interviews, subsequent follow-up interviews, and memo analysis.

I analysed the data following a set of procedures set out by Charmaz (2006). From the first interviews, I conducted line-by-line coding to develop initial codes. These include “administrative support,” “collaboration,” “meetings,” and “teacher refusal.” From this point, I conducted the second phase of coding to focus on the most significant and/or frequent previously identified codes. The codes began to group more clearly into categories. I then developed tentative categories, such as “supports for department heads,” “strategies department heads use,” and “challenges department heads face.” I revisited the data and conducted the second round of interviews to ensure saturation. This allowed for a more accurate definition of the categories. From this point, I used theoretical sorting as a way to work through the categories. I began to identify themes, patterns, and omissions in the department heads’ perceptions of their leadership role, the conditions and factors that impact the department heads’ leadership role, and how they navigated these conditions and factors. In addition, I frequently developed visual organizers and other diagrams to assist in my thought process. This allowed me to set the groundwork for the development of an understanding of the research participants which placed importance on both department heads as teacher leaders and my own experiences with the research process.
Methodological Assumptions

The main assumption of this research was that research participants would openly and honestly answer questions during the interview. Research participants were given opportunity to speak freely, to review their responses, and to provide additional information during follow-up sessions. It was made clear to the research participants that their responses were confidential and that only the faculty associated with this research and I would have access to their responses. Furthermore, it is recognized that there is a mutual influence that researcher and respondents have on each other (Erlandson et al., 1993). There is also a shared construction of the role of the department head between the researcher and the research participants. It is important for the researcher to share in the construction of the research participants’ views about the headship. Context is very important, and it provides the ability to understand and make predictions about social settings (Erlandson et al.).

Strengths

This study of secondary school department heads as teacher leaders had many strengths with regard to the establishment of trustworthiness through the use of constructivist inquiry. It held strong credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. In addition, it also held true to the importance of authenticity in constructivist inquiry.

Importance of Trustworthiness in Constructivist Inquiry

According to Rodwell and Byers (1997), “conventional methods for establishing rigor cannot be applied to constructivist inquiries” (p. 1). As a result, constructivist
inquiry is audited for its trustworthiness, which corresponds to internal and external validity, reliability, and objectivity.

Credibility is important in constructivist inquiry, as Erlandson et al. (1993) state, "more pertinent is the compatibility of the constructed realities that exists in the minds of the inquiry's respondents with those that are attributed to them. This relationship is termed credibility" (p. 30). Guba and Lincoln (1985) also identify the following as important to credibility: prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation, referential adequacy materials, peer debriefing, and member checks. For this research, these strategies recommended by Guba and Lincoln, with the exception of triangulation, were used to ensure credibility.

Conducting in-depth interviews and follow-up sessions with the participants at two different times of the school year allowed for the establishment of credibility of this study. The completion of two interviews allowed for the collection of more data pertaining to the leadership role of the department head. The timing also allowed for reflection on the data both on my part and on the part of the research participants. Although the time spent with the department heads was not lengthy in hours, the 1 and a half to 2 hours that were spent discussing their perception was sufficient to immerse me in their construct of their role. Furthermore, the interviews were conducted at two different times of the school year. The first interview was conducted at the end of the school year, allowing for department heads to reflect on the previous year's events. This also provided insight into their well-being after the end of a long school year, which in many cases included feelings of exhaustion and frustration. The second, follow-up interview was conducted at the beginning of the school year, in the fall, allowing for a
discussion of goals and plans for the upcoming year. This also provided insight into their well-being at the beginning of a new school year, which in many cases included feelings of anticipation and enjoyment.

Data analysis was ongoing and involved conversations with the research participants. The data were repeatedly analyzed and done so at different levels of understanding. Thus, persistent observation of the data was met. Additional materials outlining the role and responsibilities of secondary school department heads were collected. In particular, publicly available union documents and school district policies were reviewed to ensure that a holistic view of the role was garnered. I also consulted with my thesis supervisor, committee members, and other colleagues about my research. I listened to their suggestions and advice and allowed their feedback to influence the inquiry process. I conducted member checks with my research participants. I provided them with their transcriptions from their interviews, I reviewed my memos outlining my thoughts with them, and I solicited their input into the development of my own interpretations of their construction of the role of the department head. In addition, all research participants were offered the opportunity to have an in-person debriefing or to receive a summary of the research findings via email.

Transferability is also an element that adds to the trustworthiness of a study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) state, “an inquiry is judged in terms of the extent to which its findings can be applied in other contexts or with other respondents” (p. 290). However, total generalizability is never possible because all inquiries are defined by their own individual contexts. Nevertheless, transferability can occur in similar situations when there are shared characteristics (Erlandson, et al., 1993). Furthermore, Rodwell and Byers
(1997) also point out that transferability also illustrates how well a working hypothesis from one inquiry might work for another context by analyzing the quality of the report produced. To ensure that transferability is managed, Erlandson et al. suggest both the development of thick descriptions of the contexts and reports and purposive sampling. As previously stated, thick descriptions were developed and a sampling procedure which sought a diverse population of department heads within a similar context of a suburban setting was used (see Appendix B).

Another element which illustrates the trustworthiness of the study is the dependability of the inquiry. For an inquiry to be dependable, it must be consistent, reliable, and it must be replicable if given a similar set of research participants and contexts. To ensure that the inquiry is dependable and in turn valid, Erlandson et al. (1993) suggest the development of a dependability audit. Rodwell and Byers (1997) propose that a researcher should keep track of their research in a methodology log that can be externally audited to review their strategies. In the case of the research investigating department heads’ perceptions of their leadership role, I have used memo-writing and documented the inquiry process as it progressed and evolved.

The last element of trustworthiness in a constructivist inquiry is confirmability. This means that “an inquiry is judged in terms of the degree to which its findings are the product of the focus of its inquiry and not of the bias of the researcher” (Guba & Lincoln, 1985, p. 290). However, in a constructivist inquiry what is more important is that the data lead back to the research participants and that the researcher’s interpretations are both explicit and implicit (Erlandson et al., 1993). To manage this, another audit, a confirmability audit, must be conducted. This audit can be used alongside the
dependability audit to ensure the data and interpretations about the data link to the sources. Again, in the research at hand, such an audit could be conducted through the analysis of the memos, transcripts, and other notes maintained during the inquiry process.

*The Importance of Authenticity in Constructivist Inquiry*

Attention to authenticity is a focus for constructivist inquiry to ensure rigor in the research process and as a means to fill the void left by solely examining the research for trustworthiness. Rodwell and Byers (1997) focus on the integrity and quality of the research process and examine fairness, ontological authenticity, educative authenticity, catalytic authenticity, and tactical authenticity.

An attempt to create equal power in the research process must have been made for fairness in constructivist inquiry to be demonstrated (Rodwell & Byers, 1997). During my research into the perceived leadership roles of department heads, I provided opportunity for all research participants to have a valued voice in the research. A variety of different types of department heads were sought and their opinions given consideration. Member checks were conducted after interviews, and their ideas on the development of the understanding of the complexity of the department head’s role were also elicited as the research progressed.

The research participants also demonstrated ontological authenticity when they were invited to talk about their opinions, the effects of the interview process, and to supply their opinions and reflections based on our discussions. Educative authenticity evolved during the follow-up interviews and the debriefing as department heads developed a fuller understanding of the variety and complexity of the role and how each role depends, and is formed, based on many elements of the context, such as individual
department head, colleagues, and administration. Catalytic authenticity was illustrated by the comments that several department heads made about a willingness to change in the following school year. Last, tactical authenticity was demonstrated through a renewed vigor for some and a refined interest in specific facets of their role.

Limitations

There are two limitations associated with this study. The number of research participants is small, and they were from one suburban school district. However, it is clear the research participants provide data that can be used to develop an understanding of the perceptions of department heads as teacher leaders. Also, the data collected represent the research participants' experiences and were gathered over a short period. My research is therefore limited to their construct of their leadership role and experiences that were accessible to them; it does not reveal changes over a lengthy period of time. Although these limitations existed, the research findings do reflect the varied opinions and ideas of a sample of the population of department heads in suburban Ontario.

Ethical Considerations

There are many ethical considerations to consider when conducting research involving human participants. Ensuring that this research was fair, safe, harmless, and useful was important to me as a researcher and as a teacher leader. To ensure that ethical standards were met when conducting this research, members of the Faculty of Education at Brock University reviewed the proposal for this study, and an independent review was conducted through the Research Ethics Board (REB). This research was passed by the Brock Research Ethics Board (Appendix D).
There were several considerations taken into account when conducting this research. First, research participants were asked for their free and informed consent prior to beginning the initial interview and again prior to the second interview. This was done to ensure that their rights were maintained. Second, the research participants may have been wary of full participation for fear of retribution for any critical comments regarding their role, school, or district. As a result, all data were recorded using pseudonyms for the research participants, their schools, and their districts so as to protect their identifiable personal information. Third, to ensure that there was no conflict between the research participants and me, I informed them of my status as a teacher on leave from a suburban Ontario school district who would be returning part time in the fall of 2008.

Chapter Summary

This study investigates how secondary school department heads in suburban Ontario perceived their leadership role. Constructivist inquiry was used to ensure that a clear understanding of the process of teacher leadership was obtained when interviewing secondary school department heads. The interviews were structured around the three questions designed to obtain data regarding their perceptions of their leadership work, the conditions and factors that affect their role, and how they navigate the these conditions and factors.

The data were gathered from the interviews, transcribed, and, using a constant comparative method, analyzed through coding and selective categorizing. In addition, throughout the process, memos were written and taken into consideration into the development of categories and data analysis. After the coding of the data was completed,
the analysis of department heads' perceptions of their role as teacher leaders was developed.

The subsequent chapter will outline the findings of the study. This will be discussed using a framework which emerged from the data. The perceptions of department heads regarding their leadership role will be presented according to their views of its root in teaching and the classroom. In addition, how a department head mentors, liaises with administration, acts as a curricular or instructional leader, and completes administrative duties will be discussed as they consider these elements to be fundamental to their leadership role. In addition, department heads face many challenges that presented themselves in two facets. Department heads are faced with the challenges rooted in relationships with colleagues, and they are also faced with role ambiguity and role confusion. Nevertheless, both their colleagues and their administration support department heads. The aforementioned are issues that department heads presented during their reflections on their perceptions of their leadership role.
CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH FINDINGS

This study investigated the complexity and variety of the leadership role of the secondary school department heads in suburban Ontario in order to identify their perceptions of their leadership role, the conditions and factors that exist for them, and the ways in which department heads navigate these conditions. This chapter organizes the findings according to a framework of teacher leadership for department heads which evolved from the research (Figure 1: a framework of teacher leadership for department heads). As such, the findings will be discussed according to the leadership perceptions which the department heads all supported. These perceptions included both leadership and managerial elements, which were rooted in classroom teaching experiences and focused on improving student learning. In addition, this chapter will present how the department heads discussed the challenges and factors that affected their role. These included both the external and internal factors affecting their leadership role. Department heads also relied on supportive conditions such as positive relationships with colleagues and administration, professional development, and time to navigate their role. In addition, to navigate their role, the department heads used four key strategies, which included acting as a resource and providing resources, distributing leadership, collaborating, and communication. Nevertheless, department heads did not discuss at length their role as a “teacher leadership,” role and there seems to be a disconnect between the language of academia and the language of the classroom teacher and department head.

This chapter presents the findings of the study that were retrieved through interviews with the 6 department heads. Each research participant was interviewed
How Department Heads Navigate their Leadership Role

Leadership
• Instructional and/or curricular leader
• Mentor

Management
• Acting as a liaison
• Administrative duties

Classroom Teaching & Focus on Student Success

The Nature of the Department Head's Leadership Role

Factors/Conditions that Impact the Department Head's Leadership Role

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<td>• Time</td>
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*Figure 1. Framework of teacher leadership for department heads.*
twice, and the interviews took place in a variety of locations, including private homes and libraries. The department heads reflect a variety of backgrounds and experiences.

The data collected reflect the three research questions that guided this study.

1. What is the perceived nature of the department head’s leadership role?
2. What conditions and factors impact the department head’s leadership role?
3. How do department heads navigate the conditions and factors that impact their leadership role?

Department Heads’ Perceived Definition of Their Leadership Role

The department heads spoke at length regarding their perceptions of their role and how they defined it. For all department heads, their role had three essential elements. These elements varied in priority from department head to department head, but they remained consistent amongst them. All the department heads considered themselves to primarily be teachers with a focus on student success. In addition, they also noted their role as one in which there were both leadership and managerial facets.

The Department Head as a Teacher

The department heads all identified being a teacher as one of the most defining elements of their role. Being a teacher included teaching a full course load, completing supervisory duties in halls and other locations, doing on-call coverage for colleagues, implementing curriculum, and developing sound instructional practices and classroom management strategies for their own classrooms. However, the department heads communicated different understandings regarding what “teacher leadership” meant and how their roles demonstrated this. Several of the department heads were unfamiliar with
the term “teacher leader” as is illustrated by Leonard’s questions, “A teacher leader? What the *heck* is that?” Teacher leader was not commonly used in their discussions around their work and role in their schools.

Leonard stated that one must be a competent teacher to take on the role of department head.

A lot of people don’t understand this about teaching or about being a department head: you don’t have to love it. You don’t have to. It’s a job. I don’t know how many people I’ve heard talk and articulate with this kind of assumption that you really have to be committed to kids to do this job. Well, you don’t. You can just be committed to your pension. That doesn’t mean you don’t do a good job. You can be competent at your job. So, I can be a little disgruntled, not even disgruntled, I accept it. I accept this weird disconnect between the notion of a head and the actuality. I live with it, and it doesn’t bother me. (Leonard)

Leonard’s perception of a teacher was juxtaposed with Sanjay’s views on being a teacher. Sanjay explored his role as a teacher by stating that being a teacher has allowed him to be a ground-up manager, a more successful teacher leader, and to have insight and a connection to the issues that affect all teachers. He stated that he was able to be a teacher leader because “you know what other teachers need, what their wants are, because you haven’t forgotten what you needed when you were in the classroom.” Arjit supported elements of Sanjay’s ideas of teaching and noted that to be able to connect to his department members he also needed to be able to partake in their shared educational experiences in the classroom. He stated, “We are in the trenches with everybody else,”
and this gave credibility to his role. Leoni, Carol, and Anita also supported this idea and stated that teaching connected them to their colleagues and provided credibility and valuable experience. Anita commented, “I do feel that it [the departmental headship] is more of a teacher role” and that through this role she was able to share and model effective teaching strategies in her subject area.

Leadership Elements of the Department Headship

The department heads interviewed in this study discussed leadership elements of their role. They all identified two key elements of their leadership role as being a curricular or instructional leader and being a mentor. However, it must be noted that there is an overlap in some aspects of their leadership and managerial work.

_The Department Head as Curricular or Instructional Leader_

All the department heads defined their role as either a curricular leader or an instructional leader. However, their perceptions of this element of the role varied, as did their understanding of curricular and instructional leadership. Based on the research participants’ understanding, a curricular leader focused on a depth of understanding of the curriculum in a specific area of responsibility coupled with knowledge of instructional strategies to effectively implement the curriculum. These two elements combined with the ability to share, model, and explain illustrated curricular or instructional leadership.

Sanjay, in his role as a cross-curricular department head, frequently led groups of teachers from all departments during curriculum development activities that were supportive of a school- and district-wide literacy initiative. In addition, in his previous headship as an ESL and Special Education department head, he facilitated course
development with other teachers that was specifically designed to meet the needs of the school’s growing ESL population. He also reviewed the curriculum for Special Education and made suggestions pertaining to curriculum and instruction to his colleagues as was necessary.

Any sort of major assignments, or tests, or in, class exams, I would help the special education teachers just review that and make sure that it was ok, and make sure it was legitimate. Proofread it, but also make sure that it was legitimate in terms of what they had been doing all year long. And again, the same thing, if there was any major assignments or ISU [Independent Study Unit], or exam, I would review it. (Sanjay)

Leonard also stated that he was a curricular leader and that he found ways to encourage people to explore a variety of strategies to deliver the curriculum. He encouraged department members to find methodologies and to consult the curriculum, but he did not police people or their implementation of the curriculum. In contrast to Sanjay, Leonard did not push people because he had accepted the fact that he could not engage all his department members and, in particular, those who were reluctant to take on new ideas or teaching strategies. When asked how he felt about his role as a teacher leader, he stated the following:

Cynical. I don’t know, maybe it’s just my personality, actually .... It just goes back to the fact that we have no supervisory role in the building. And so if there is no supervisory role, what’s left? Putting books away. Putting numbers on books, ensuring that people collect their books, and you know, basically, being a secretary for the department. (Leonard)
Leonard often felt disenfranchised as a leader and, as a result, he described his efforts at times to be perfunctory.

Arjit acted as a curricular leader by providing input into course meetings as a way to ensure that the administration’s focus was being addressed and that the curriculum was being followed. Similarly, Leoni identified herself as a curriculum leader for her areas of responsibility. However, she noted the struggles that she encountered with her dual responsibility headship of Business and Technology.

Business and Tech are very different. I mean, in Business we have academic kinds of courses, whereas in the Technology area, a lot of the things that I’ve had to learn are things like safety issues that you don’t have to worry about in a regular classroom the way you do when people are using band saws. (Leoni)

Carol, another department head with a dual responsibility headship, believed that the department head should be current with curriculum resources and information along with implementation ideas if he or she were to be an effective curricular leader. She described herself as follows:

Curriculum specialist. I believe that that’s the person that should be current on curriculum to be able to implement, to be able to have ready with resources, ideas, etc. for people that you work with. And I also believe that if you are so current on your curriculum and the best practices, then you should also be involved at the board level, as well as at the provincial level, on any of the governing bodies that are in support of that discipline. (Carol)
She also kept the Family Studies teachers in her department abreast of important meeting dates and supported their attendance at their own subject-specific association meetings, yet she noted her limitations with regard to her second area of responsibility.

I’m just not as involved with the Family Studies because ... It’s just not there yet. So, at the board level, yes, I can find out when the meetings are and be sure that someone in the department is attending. (Carol)

Anita primarily saw her role as an instructional leader. When asked how she defined her role, she stated,

An instructional leader. I think that’s important. Just making sure that those core understandings are being met and that everybody understands that certain skills have to be obtained by the end of a certain grade level just so they can be successful at the following grade level. (Anita)

All the department heads identified being a curricular or instructional leader as a key element to their role, yet their construct of these leadership facets were all slightly different.

*The Department Head as Mentor*

Mentorship was also another element that the majority of the department heads felt defined their role. Mentorship was demonstrated by supporting individual teachers over time, by providing guidance and encouragement, by engaging in meaningful collaboration, and by acting as a source of information and teaching materials. Some department heads felt this was intrinsic to their role, while others saw it as something any experienced and willing teacher could do.
Some of the department heads defined mentorship as fundamental to their leadership role. For Sanjay’s objective of increasing student success on standardized assessments to be reached, he needed the support of his colleagues and administration. As a result, Sanjay mentored two groups of teachers and fostered collaboration to ensure that they were part of the process. He actively engaged them in the preparation of the students for standardized tests and in the development of resource materials for these tests. He also worked individually with teachers.

But with regard to mentoring new teachers, we talked about specific strategies. But sometimes it would just happen in the department, we would talk. So one of the new teachers sat right beside me, and sometimes she would come in and be a little exasperated and complain about a couple of kids and I would ask her what happened and would give her specific strategies for what she could do next. (Sanjay)

Carol and Anita often mentored new teachers because they saw the department headship as a role that many people looked up to for help and support, whether they were new teachers or experienced teachers who were simply unaware of a new issue in the discipline. Anita also distributed this mentorship responsibility with her colleagues in the department.

Well, we have a mentoring program and people have signed up for it, and we mentor informally, as well. But, you know, “I’m working with you and we’re working on this course together and this is how I’m doing it.” So we have taken people under our wings. (Anita)
Anita and Leoni saw mentorship as an important element of their role, as they had both reaped the benefits of being a mentee and wanted to pass that experience on.

My first couple of years in teaching, somebody just totally took me under their wing. It was great. I think if I hadn’t had that experience, perhaps I wouldn’t be where I am today. It just gave me a very positive view of everything instead of having a lot of negativity. So, I’m kind of paying back or paying forward because I just keep remembering that experience. (Anita)

Anita also discussed the level of mentorship that she provided was more than what she had expected.

I found it [the role] was a lot more support of the staff. We did have to do a lot more support and just helping them with lesson planning and just teaching them in the science role .... So coming here, it was a lot of mentoring, like I knew there’d be component of it, but I didn’t realize how large a component. (Anita)

Three department heads felt that they mentored, but not because it was part of their role. Both Leonard and Arjit acted as mentors for new teachers. In this capacity they reviewed the curriculum, cowrote exams, and participated in district-wide programs such as Side By Side, which support mentorship. However, both stated that they did not consider this to be a part of their responsibilities as a department head or as a formal part of the job. Both also mentioned that they were not necessarily more experienced or more knowledgeable than other teachers in their department. However, they both did actively
mentor teachers. Arjit described the complexity and at times, cumbersome nature of mentoring.

It [mentoring] is an ongoing thing .... We have the Side By Side program ... where the first or second year teachers are paired up with somebody ... more seasoned. So, that system being in place sort of helps department heads, or else all your new teachers are relying on you for mentorship. And that becomes a little too cumbersome, I believe. But, of course, time to time, some situation develops when you have to mentor, like how I would handle and things like that and do what you can. (Arjit)

Although all the department heads discussed mentorship as an element of their role, many did not see it as a necessary aspect of it. This demonstrates the different constructs of the role that exist across these department heads with regard to mentorship and their role in general.

Managerial Elements of the Department Headship

Similar to leadership elements, the department heads in this study identified several managerial elements in which they engage. These managerial elements comprise acting as a liaison with administration and completing administrative duties. Again, it is imperative to note the overlap that can exist between these managerial elements and the leadership work that department heads complete.

The Department Head as a Liaison with Administration

Aspects of acting as a liaison with administration involved taking information between the department and administration, providing feedback and suggestions, and collaborating with both sides to garner understanding and expectations. All department
heads discussed the importance of this element of their role, but again, there were
differences in the degree to which the communication was open and reciprocal between
the department heads and their administrators.

Four department heads discussed an openness with their administrator that was
positive and supportive. Sanjay worked and liaised with his school's administration
frequently, as his cross-curricular role had a whole school focus. He consulted his
administrators with regard to the strategies and programs that he would implement to
meet his objective to increase student success on standardized tests. Together, Sanjay and
his administrators jointly analyzed the problems that existed for their school population
with regard to the percentage of failures on standardized tests. In addition, Sanjay worked
with his administrative team to balance out an inequity in the school's budget. Many
departments were being retrofitted, but Sanjay's department was omitted from the plan,
resulting in much discontent on the part of teachers.

So, I advocated for my department with the administration, trying to get a
bigger office space, but she wouldn't budge. So I said, well, let's come to
a compromise. At the very least ... we are sitting with desks that are from
the 1960s. Can you please at least upgrade our area? And she did. She
gave me $8000 and we revamped the entire office, got new desks, and it
looks very beautiful and the staff really, really like it. (Sanjay)

Leoni and Anita would go to administration to advocate on a teacher's behalf if
they were struggling with an issue. One example was the poor behaviour of an individual
student; the teacher felt he was not receiving enough administrative support. Again, both
Leoni and Anita identified themselves as a liaison between administration and the teachers and as a facilitator between these two bodies as well.

Other department heads felt that being a conduit of information between administration and their departments was the primary duty of acting as a liaison. Leonard and Arjit felt that they forwarded communications between administration and the department. More specifically, they attended heads’ meetings to gather information, but they felt that their opinions were not always sought on important aspects of the school. However, Arjit did mention that the department heads in his school worked cooperatively with the administration to set school goals.

At the heads’ retreat, we came up with the amazing goals that we have for the next school year. [laughs] But one very important thing is that the administration listened to us, to the department heads. (Arjit)

Arjit was also expected by his department to communicate with administration regarding important issues which at times conflicted with the OSSTF guidelines for the department head position. When discussing challenges to the role, Arjit stated,

The OSSTF limitations have been a hindrance in my role as a DH, because some to of the things that the OSSTF guidelines say and some of the things the administration wants me to do … sometimes there’s a conflict.

(Arjit)

Acting as a funnel of information was also mentioned by three of the department heads. They would gather information and pare it down to what was necessary and what was specific to the department. In this capacity, the department heads tried to ensure that teachers got the information that they needed but were not overwhelmed with detail.
Leoni acted as a filter as part of the liaison aspect of her role with administration and her department. She often would break down what administration said and present it to her department in a more digestible manner. Similarly, Carol believed that acting as a liaison was key to the role for the department head.

First and foremost I believe that the heads’ role is the conduit or the liaison with administration. The administration can only deal with so many people, so it’s the heads’ table then that’s what they’ll deal with it and then everything else gets disseminated from there. (Carol)

She also acted as a funnel of information to and from administration. She saw part of her role as a disseminator of information. Anita also identified being a liaison with administration as key to her role.

The other part is just kind of liaison to the administration basically. The stuff that I guess is coming down, making sure that the message is being filtered down to the department, and I mean filtered because you don’t want to, you know you want everyone to be positive. So you want to make sure that you maintain that positive atmosphere in the department. (Anita)

She was also an advocate for her department and the members in it. She addressed issues with administration and sought advice and support for her department.

*The Department Head’s Administrative Duties*

Administrative duties were a time-consuming element of the department head’s role and entailed tasks such as ordering and storing consumable items, organizing book rooms, classrooms, and office space. Department heads also account for department resources, budget, timetable, and numerous other duties. For the most part, the
completion of these tasks does not require a great deal of curricular or instructional skill and knowledge but does depend on strong organization and interpersonal skills. The majority of the department heads complained about the amount, type, and time-consuming nature of administrative duties.

Arjit noted that his role was vast, but without power. He stated, "In a nutshell, I have a lot of responsibility and absolutely no authority" and "You are just a person who makes sure things get done, and guidelines are being followed." He took on all the duties that others in the department did not want to take on. Ultimately, he felt that all the responsibility for the department lay on his shoulders. He identified himself as a guardian, clerk, postmaster general, custodian, conflict manger, doormat, and purchaser for the department. He also noted that he was expected to do any and all other duties as they arose in the department.

Leoni, who initially neglected to mention the administrative duties, later stated that she failed to do so because this element of the role was fundamental to the basic duties of a department head.

Right now it's the expectation that the head is going to do all that. All the heads are part of the budget committee at our school. Ordering, I do all the time. Minutes of our department meetings. The expectation is that they will be given to the principal, and so the expectation is that I would do it. I guess maybe that's why I didn't mention it, because I really feel that those are, you know, like if you were talking about what it is to be a mother, the basic things, you just wouldn't even mention, you would talk about what you do to enhance the role. (Leoni)
She stated that they were the “expectations” of the role and it was understood that the head does all of the administrative duties. In her definition of administrative duties, she included participating in the budgeting committee, ongoing ordering of supplies, preparing minutes of department meetings for the principal, and timetabling for staff. This description of administrative duties was echoed by both Carol and Anita.

Anita admitted to having some administrative duties attached to her role, many of which were a result of the role as a department head in a brand new school. At the beginning of the school year, she organized the entire department in their new school.

And I think it is just because it is the first year. It is a brand new school.

So, I had all that extra stuff do to, with following up on the orders and back orders, and that was a huge issue, stuff that were deficient in our plant .... There was just so much to do, just the unpacking and the organizing and the “this and that” and the inventory. It was crazy. (Anita)

She also budgeted for her department and included her department members in the decisions about budget, to ensure that the budget process was transparent to all.

In contrast, Leonard considered himself to be an “operational facilitator,” not a leader, but someone who administratively undertook a variety of duties in the department.

Well, the roles would be the same whether you had science and family studies. It’s all the same stuff, right? It’s just, you are just a facilitator, an operational facilitator. I’m not a leader of men, really. It’s a joke. I might say it, but I say it as a joke. Because they don’t want to be led. They’re not willing to be [led], and as an operational facilitator, it doesn’t matter what department it is, you know. Are the books being rebound? (Leonard)
He saw the role as more secretarial, yet a department secretary who could vet student exams. He sat on the budget committee out of necessity because it was his department that spent one quarter to one third of the school’s funds. His participation was important, but limited, as the budget was based on the previous year’s budget and on the principal’s suggestion. However, some negotiation, deliberation, and compromise took place.

Factors and Conditions Affecting the Department Headship

Factors and conditions affecting the headship evolved in two aspects. They were conditions that affected the department head externally and were outside his or her realm of control, or they were internal and affected how the department head felt about the role. At times these conditions interfered with the goals of the department or they were problematic for the department head as an individual.

External Factors and Conditions Affecting the Role of the Department Head

The primary external challenge for department heads was the challenging relationships with colleagues. Relationships with colleagues were widespread and varied. Department heads noted the challenge of dealing with some department members and administrators as being particularly difficult.

I think the worst obstacle that anybody can come across is a negative personality, [someone] who may have had some jaded experiences in the past ... they can really warp people’s way of thinking. (Sanjay)

Specifically, Sanjay felt that one principal with whom he had worked was deficient in interpersonal communication skills, preventing her from effectively communicating with all the staff. The principal had been grieved, and Sanjay cited instances where the principal seemingly picked on staff members, causing an overall decrease in staff morale.
He felt that conflict with others could have a far-reaching effect on school climate. He also noted that bickering occurred at heads’ meetings, where little was accomplished as there was insufficient focused discussion. He stated that this problem also occurred at staff meetings.

Leonard’s struggles with collegial relationships resulted from colleagues’ resistance to his suggestions or ideas. This contributed to his acknowledged cynical approach to the role. He stated, “But at the end of the day, you are prisoner to the people you’ve got and you can’t move mountains.” He described how people would superficially seek his advice and then ignore his suggestions. Leonard noted that he took the position while aware of preexisting personnel issues in the department. He described how nothing had changed; a collaborative climate was still absent because of his inability to effect any change.

I don’t have any problems with anybody in my department with the exception of one person. And I don’t think that person really understands the problems that I’ve got with them because they are so arrogant. But everybody else is just fine because I’ve accepted that I can’t move the mountain. And I think that they would have quarrels with me if you sat them all down. They’d all have something to say that wasn’t positive. But as a human being, I am certainly not perfect, and as a head, I am not perfect. (Leonard)

In particular, Leonard described several challenges with teachers. One teacher, who lacked classroom management skills, was an ongoing problem for both Leonard and his administration. Additionally, Leonard was faced with teacher reticence to buy into new
initiatives. He also commented on an overall feeling that people were not interested in anything except money, as money affected their access to resources. Leonard felt that his department members filtered information and engaged in only what was personally meaningful to them, "They are not concerned about anything that I have ever said in a meeting except money." Leonard also felt that some colleagues resented his being the department head and, as a result, would not co-operate.

For Arjit, the most predominant challenge occurred with the staff in his department. He identified significant conflicts between one department member, himself, and others in the department. This escalated to the point where a teacher accused Arjit of harassment and ultimately requested a transfer out of the school. This problem was compounded because Arjit felt isolated in his dealings with this incident. His normal supports, other department heads, had not experienced this level of discord and could not offer him suggestions. Arjit describes the department member, the conflict, and its results as follows:

She has had serious conflicts with other people. Everything that she’s experiencing, she is blaming it on me, in the department. And this one person has created a lot of discord, which has, like I say, I don’t think any department head at my school has gone through any of the difficulties that I have gone through. (Arjit)

Arjit felt that the conflict in the department was so severe that they could not have a departmental retreat as was customary in his school.

Leoni stated that it was a challenge to work with new teachers who were struggling and to provide support rather than to check up on them. She talked about
working together with teachers who were facing problems and trying to focus on support for them. She noted a significant change in the departmental headship, which resulted in a decreased interest in the role. She mentioned that there used to be assistant heads who would help the head and complete some of the administrative duties. This role no longer exists, leaving a broader role with fewer heads. Leoni stated, “There are fewer headships than there used to be, so you do have these dual roles.” She noted that the changes to the organization of headships have been a challenge because there were fewer headships overall, with an increase in dual roles and cross-curricular headships.

For Carol, relationship challenges existed because fewer staff were interested in extracurricular activities and because newer staff were unfamiliar with the school norms regarding the use of facilities. Carol noted that a challenge as of late dealt with staff use of the gym facility and equipment. Staff were using resources at inappropriate times and she had to solve this problem.

There are times when I need to talk to colleagues who deal with your facility, yet they are not in your department. They may even be brand new to the school, and you have to politely say, “It’s not cool for you to work out in the weight room when there is a class going on, because there is not even enough room and space for the kids that are in there, or machines for them to work out on, let alone you getting your own personal workout in.”

I feel that it’s the job of the head to actually go and discuss that with them. (Carol)

She also discussed the challenges of socializing newer department members. She noted that newer teachers who were eager to implement changes were not always familiar with
the traditions and policies of the department and the reasons for their existence. She noted that she listened to new ideas but became frustrated when the new teachers did not understand the lack of funds or time for different initiatives.

I think it’s always a challenge when you have new people come into your department. They are not sure of things, so you try to support them and point them in the right direction. Also, they may come in with preconceived ideas and notions as to what they would like to have done or see or let’s go, chop, chop. Then you’re going, “Wait a minute, this is kind of the way we do it. I’m open to new ideas and stuff, but we may not have the facility, we may not have the budget right now.” (Carol)

Some of Anita’s department members were very new to teaching and as a result were inexperienced and required a variety of support. One teacher in particular required assistance that went beyond the department head’s skills. The teacher was offered a coach to provide support, teaching strategies, and classroom management skills. Also, because this was a new school, all the members in the department came from different schools or from the faculty. It was “difficult” initially, but once the team was in place, they began to adjust after a period of time.

*Internal Conditions Affecting the Role of the Department Head*

The internal conditions of frustration, powerlessness, and stress were the manifestations of role ambiguity and role conflict. However, department heads did experience positive internal conditions such as enjoyment, satisfaction, and engagement in their work.
Role ambiguity and role confusion. The diversity of the role of the department head was clearly evident when all 6 headships were examined. Each department head identified roles and responsibilities that were similar to others and yet also very different. This often led to a misunderstanding of each other’s roles and a hierarchy among departments based on status as a graduation requirement, size of department, or individual charisma of the existing department head.

Sanjay recognized the diversity in the roles of department heads and the complexity in defining them. He also noted that he had had two headships that were very distinct with regard to their respective responsibilities. In the case of Sanjay’s cross-curricular headship, he developed the role on his own; however, he sought advice from outside educational consultants regarding specific issues at his school and developed a plan for this role. In his subject-specific headship, Sanjay developed his role in accordance with his own strengths and interests.

Sanjay felt that he had more pressure to be accountable as a department head than other department heads. He stated that if a student was in trouble at the office, he would be personally held responsible for the support that that student had or had not received if they were a student with ESL or Special Education needs. Sanjay also felt that at times administration had already made decisions and that department heads were being asked for input that would be limited or inconsequential. Sanjay noted the effects of balkanization in his department. Even within his dual role as Special Education and ESL department head, the former department head had held separate meetings for both departments. Sanjay changed this and held joint meetings, focusing on issues that pertained to both groups.
Leonard compared the ambiguity of the headship to parenting; you are expected to know how to do the job without any prior knowledge or experience. He developed the role based on his own approach to the job, and he evaluated his own success. Leonard stated, “Everyone leads with their own sense of what it is.” He explained that there was no list of responsibilities, it was “amorphous and inchoate,” and that it could be limitless, depending on the person in the headship.

When I applied for the job, I tried to get, find some information about what a head was, what the head was supposed to be. And I could find a description that was probably about four or five sentences long. And it struck me at the time and still strikes me that being a department head is very much like being a mother or a father. In some ways it is just something that you are expected to know how to do once you sign up, which I guess is true, because you just invent your approach to the job and then you sort of determine, on the basis of your own idea of what it is, whether or not you are doing the job. (Leonard)

Leonard then expanded and stated that the principal defined the job and allowed the job to develop but that the OSSTF also outlined what any member of the union could and could not do. In particular, union members cannot act in a supervisory role. As a result, department heads have been removed from any hiring processes, as this task would require them to judge a fellow union member.

Leonard recognized the disconnect between the ideal of a department head and the actual role. He said the role was not what he had expected, as he had anticipated having an impact on the school; however, his input has not been sought. Heads’ meetings
were informational and did not involve debate and/or discussion. He initially thought the role would be more of a teacher leader type of position where the department head had something to offer to his department members, along with his conviction. However, he felt that this was not necessary, as the principal had the ultimate say in what went on in the school. He felt that it was ironic that a department head was hired for having individuality and ideas, yet the principal wanted conformity and one-mindedness.

In addition, having a dual role headship posed challenges while trying to engage all department members in a single focus. Leonard felt that there needed to be a focus that was representative of the collective and a department head needed to be able to “coordinate” around this focus and accommodate for the arbitrariness of the lumping of two subject areas together. Leonard also offered his views on hierarchies in schools and how they diminish the value of some departments.

I mean, in some ways a head is a head is a head, just like a teacher is a teacher is a teacher, but we all know that in practice it’s really ... the head of science has way more significance and importance than the head of family studies, and that’s just a fact of life because everybody takes science, not everyone is going to take family studies. So, everybody needs science, not everybody needs family studies. (Leonard)

He also mentioned that he felt there was a discrepancy among the departments because of the individual heads who hold the positions; some have personalities that are more dynamic and garner more power in the school. This sentiment was echoed by Sanjay, Leoni, and Arjit.
None of the department heads received a job description or an outline of duties or responsibilities, and this led to further ambiguity of the role. Arjit stated, "there were duties you were just expected to do, and that was not always clear." Arjit also identified that the headship was not clearly defined. Similar to other department heads in this study, he was not given a job outline or description of a list of duties and responsibilities. Initially, in his first week, he stated that he "pretended to be responsible and took care of a few things here and there," illustrating his own sense of the unknown regarding his role. Arjit also referenced the OSSTF guidelines of the role while discussing the challenges that ensued due to the conflict between administratively assigned duties and OSSTF limitations of the role. Arjit was initially appointed to the position of acting head by his principal and saw his role as "managing the store" while the head completed her leave. He followed established procedures and only made changes when necessary.

As the research participants compared their roles to others, some of them presented divergent views of the level of responsibility of various department heads. A lot of these headships, a lot times, people [in these headships] haven’t had a very great response. A lot of times, people feel that, even among department heads, my responsibilities and the tasks that are on my plate are certainly a lot more than the person who is head of literacy. Or the person who is head of … not to knock them down or anything. (Arjit)

Leoni saw the headship as a learn-as-you-go experience. She stated that the administration had never provided her with clear expectations or guidelines for her role. Her dual role of business and technological studies was initially a challenge. As a business and math teacher, she was not familiar with the curriculum and other details
related to the technology department. She stated that it was “a real awakening for me to
pick up the technology department,” although she did enjoy working with the department
members and was becoming increasingly familiar and comfortable with their curriculum
after 4 years.

Similar to Leoni, and because of her dual role headship, Carol felt challenged by
the breadth of responsibility. She stated that as far as curricular leadership in Family
Studies, she was “not there yet.” Carol also illustrated her concern over her own headship
when she stated that she felt that a teacher who was not a Health and Physical Education
teacher could not take over her departmental headship because of its complexity and
breadth of responsibilities. The two departments under her responsibility were very
distinct and did not coalesce. In addition, the two departments were at opposite ends of
the school. Unlike Arjit and Leoni, Carol explained how departments are not created
equally, but that the school organization changes often and that smaller departments are
usually clumped together with little problem.

Leoni had been in her role for a number of years and has become accustomed to
the role and its ambiguity. She immediately noted that it was “getting harder and harder
to define the role of a department head because its so varied.” Anita went to the school
district website to gather information about the role of the department head but did not
receive, to her recollection, any document outlining responsibilities. Her former principal
gave her information about the role, and she was aware of the OSSTF guidelines for the
position. Although she did participate in a seminar about the school’s vision prior to
beginning work with her colleagues, Anita noted that all her own previous experiences
had led to the development of her role. She felt that her experiences as a teacher and her
strengths had led to her ability to lead a department. In addition, she had learned from others' experiences; she developed in herself the best qualities of other department heads whom she has known. She also felt that her learnings from attending the Principal’s Qualification Part 1 added to her understanding of leadership.

Negative Effects of Challenges and Obstacles

For all the department heads, feelings of frustration, powerlessness, and stress existed as a result of their work. This varied in degree and frequency among the department heads but was undeniably a significant effect of the role.

Frustrations

All of the department heads discussed feelings of frustration that resulted from their roles. In Ontario, the role of department head has undergone change in the last 2 decades as a result of changes in provincial government and policy. Up until the mid-1990s, there were relatively clear roles and responsibilities for department heads, and these were coupled with release time to complete administrative tasks and, at times, assistant heads to support the leadership role. In 1995, the Conservative Party and Premier Mike Harris were elected. They implemented a “Common Sense Revolution” which significantly revised the funding formula for schools and negatively affected education. Release time and assistant headship were removed as supports for department heads. Leoni felt frustrated with the lack of time to ensure that she was abreast of the newest technology, district-wide initiatives, and programs for her courses and her department.

So they [school board officials] sort of don’t really understand that whole idea that School Success begins in the classroom. So you know, don’t take
me out of the classroom for 2 or 3 days to go and talk about School Success. Let me be in the classroom, because that's where it begins. So, that kind of, can be really frustrating at times. (Leoni)

She felt challenged by the amount of time she put into her work; she had long daily hours and still worked at night and on Sundays.

And really, the time thing is a challenge. I mean, I said I get there at 7.15 and very seldom leave before 5.30. I eat at my desk, and I always have, spend Sunday pretty much working. So, and I have stuff to do every night when I get home. (Leoni)

Leonard stated that he felt that his sense of inadequacy as a department head was reinforced after reading his interview transcript and reflecting on his role. He thought the job was not working out for him. He also felt that he was initially wrong in his thinking that he could be a leader, but he thought that he could do a better job in the coming year and that he could do the job with a little more concern. He felt that this reflected his feelings about his teaching as well as his role as a department head. He expressed that he was a "crap department head" and very frustrated.

But I don't like to bash my head against the wall, and so I don't persist a lot in things if people don't seem to be buying in. I don't have a lot of meetings because nobody's interested. Nobody is interested. (Leonard)

He felt that he did not have any control over what went on in his department but that he was ultimately responsible for everything that happened. Despite his attempts to help people, they did not change. He felt disappointed by the limitations of his job, but he ultimately felt that he had been accepted in the department as the department head
because he had accepted these limitations. He was also frustrated with his inability to bring forth change in the school, and as a result he felt that departmental headships should be dissolved and another structure should emerge.

Department heads were also frustrated with changes to the role such as the removal of department heads from the interview process for new teachers. The OSSTF disallows department heads from participating in administrative tasks such as the interview process of new teachers to their schools and in particular to their departments as this can be construed as evaluation of a fellow union member. Several department heads commented on this point. For example, Leoni pointed out the effects of the removal of department heads from the interview process when she stated,

It’s really important that you hire people that are not only going to be able to teach the subject but are going to be positive members of your department, and they [administration] don’t get that. And I don’t blame them [administration], it’s not their problem. But I think that [removal of heads from interview process] was ridiculous, quite frankly. (Leoni)

Arjit also notes his disdain for being removed from the interview process of new teacher applicants when he states,

So, we are not supposed to be doing that [evaluating and interviewing teachers] at all. Which I think is a shame, because when a new applicant comes in, I am a better judge of “Will this person fit into my team or not?” than administration. (Arjit)

Finally, Carol clearly summarized the situation. She states that “OSSTF is adamant that you are not to be a supervisor and you have been withdrawn from the hiring
process and all that sort of stuff." For most department heads, their limitation in hiring is problematic as it infringes on their ability to construct a department which will cohesively work toward their developed goal.

Powerlessness

Four of the department heads also discussed feelings of powerlessness. They were not able to effect change or have impact in the way that they wanted to. Arjit stated that he had become very cynical about the headship because of his negative experiences and because he felt disenfranchised. He noted that his role was vast, but without power. He stated, “In a nutshell, I have a lot of responsibility and absolutely no authority.” He explained that as a department head, “You are just a person who makes sure things get done, guidelines are begin followed.” He felt limited by his lack of power and authority in the department. As a result, he could not effect what he considered to be sufficient positive change toward improved student success.

In addition, Arjit did not feel that he was prepared for the role. He was unsure whether he would apply for the position again when his tenure was complete. He felt embarrassed because of communication gaps between some of his department members and himself. He also felt that some department members had deliberately undermined his position by overstepping the chain of command and going directly to the administration for support.

And also, it undermines my position if people have problems in the department and it goes straight to the VP or something like that. How does that make me look? When people don’t turn to me? And there are one or two people who are constantly doing that. Deliberately undermine my
position. And why I say deliberately, because the VPs themselves have
turned around and told them, "You know this is your department head
issue. Go back to your department head." (Arjit)

His department members had made him aware of his limitations in knowledge and
experience by citing union regulations and other types of regulatory information.

Leonard echoed Arjit’s feelings of powerlessness, but for different reasons. He
felt that his role was meaningless and that he did not have much to do other than
administrative and communication-based duties. He accepted that he could not have an
impact on his department members or the school, and he felt that he had become cynical
about the role of the department head because of the lack of meaningful input he was
allowed. Leonard’s feelings of powerlessness are illustrated when he stated that “you can
only do so much with the people that you are given.” He described how the role had
sapped his energy and enthusiasm. He recounted an incident when he made a suggestion
to the principal. However, he felt that because his suggestion was not in line with the
principal’s focus, it was rejected without discussion, leaving him with a deepened sense
of powerlessness.

Sanjay also described the effects of rejection from his principal. When a new
principal was brought to his school who had a different agenda from the previous
principal, Sanjay felt that he no longer had any influence on the way the school was
working toward improved student success for the at-risk students under his remit. Sanjay
also discussed the chain of command, where the superintendents tell the principals what
to do, who enlist the vice-principals as support, and who tell the department heads and
teachers what to do, leaving little opportunity for department heads to effect change.

When asked about his whole school influence, he stated,

Not a lot. The principal makes up his or her mind. Vice principals have to buy into it, and of course the direction comes from above, and in my current role, I understand that process now more than before. Attending a superintendents’ meeting, hopefully you get to sit through that one time in your life, it is a very interesting experience, seeing the principals cower from the superintendents and the director. Not cower, but, you know like, a teacher in a school setting will say, oh my department head told me to .... And the department head will say, oh the principal told me to ... So, everyone is falling the direction of the principal. When you see the principal receiving orders. WOW, very, very different. (Sanjay)

Carol discussed how her feelings of powerlessness manifested due to her lack of involvement in whole school decision-making processes. She described how “administration makes decisions and says, ‘It’s this.’” She stated that her school’s administrators would establish new rules and a new vision that teachers and department heads would “have to live with.” Carol stated that as a result of this, she realized that she could not change things in her school.

Stress

Stress also affected all of the department heads. Both Sanjay and Arjit noted the effects of stress resulting from their leadership roles on their sleep. Sanjay was very unhappy with a change in administration and a subsequent change in focus in the school which took interest and support away from his department and his students’ needs. His
stress manifested itself in lack of sleep and guilt over his long hours and absences from his family. He worried about teacher reticence to participate in his initiatives. He described his workload and lack of release time as follows:

I wish I had release [time]. I could have done my job a little more effectively, but basically, I just went crazy for the first 2 and a half months and then relaxed. (Sanjay)

Arjit noted the increase in stress which has resulted in poor sleeping, more gray hair, hair loss, health issues, and a general feeling of stress.

Personally, it has affected me in the sense that physically it has affected me. I have aged a little more. I’ve got more gray hair in the last 3 yeas. I’ve lost more hair. I have had health issues. I’ve slept poorly in the last little while. It is a stressful position. (Arjit)

Leoni identified feelings of increased stress due to the breadth of her role and the lack of time to complete all her responsibilities.

No, I think because, I’m sure you understand this, the four-letter word in teaching is time ... I know, as I said, that the teachers are so time stressed that they just don’t want to do it [additional duties and committee work]. And so I do it, and I do find it very stressful. Because I go to these meetings and I think, that was 2 hours that I could have done something to make my class tomorrow better. (Leoni)

She found it stressful to remember and complete all the aspects of her job due to the constantly changing focus of the school district. As she was getting older, she worried about forgetting things and had developed strategies to compensate for this.
In order to reduce her feelings of stress, Leoni felt that she needed to refocus her role on the department, particularly in light of upcoming curriculum changes in the Technology area. To do this, she was planning on reducing her whole school responsibilities and involvement in committees. She stated that “it doesn’t say school head role. It says department head role.” At the end of the school year, Leoni was afflicted by physical exhaustion coupled with self-doubt about whether she was doing a good enough job.

Similarly, Carol described the negative effects of the removal of assistant headships. She described the increased workload for department heads, its effects on morale, and the reticence of teachers to take on additional duties which were once completed by the assistant head.

Well, are you going to take my assistant headship? I’m not going to do anything. I’m just a teacher now, and I’m not being paid for the extra duties that I might have done before. (Carol)

Anita noted the amount of work and the resulting reduction in time spent with her family was stressful. She missed her children. She had felt overwhelmed at times with the amount of work, yet, similar to Leoni, she was planning on setting some limitations to her participation in committee work for the upcoming school year and planned on limiting her number of hours at school.

The Departmental Headship’s Effects on Self

The departmental headship had affected the research participants both positively and negatively. All but one department head mentioned the positive feelings that resulted from the role, a sense of satisfaction, and an enjoyment of the work.
Five of the department heads discussed a love for their work and their role. Sanjay enjoyed the experience of headship itself, the leadership opportunities, and the way his colleagues treated him. He felt like he could positively contribute to the department as a head and he had the support of his colleagues. The confidence and skills that he gained in his role as a department head led Sanjay to a new teacher leadership position in his school district. Arjit felt that his efforts were worthwhile and that he had positively affected new teachers by providing them with mentorship and guidance. He also described how his relationships with most of his department have been rewarding.

I have a very good department. And the people in the department, who are there, who are my friends, or those who I don’t consider my friends, just my colleagues, they’re like great people, and if it wasn’t for them, I would have quit last year. (Arjit)

Leoni stated that she enjoyed working with people and helping new people. Carol felt that she was good at being a department head for Health and Physical Education and that it has made her a better person. She enjoyed influencing decisions and having a role outside of teaching. She also loved instilling her passion for her subject area in others, dealing with students, and watching them grow and improve.

I think it has made me a more patient person. It has allowed me to garner really positive relationships with the people that I work with, not only within my own discipline but others as well in the school. (Carol)

Anita thought that her efforts were effective in her first year as a department head. She was happy with what she was doing and planned to focus her goals for improving things next year. She was enjoying meeting new teachers, learning new curricular and
instructional strategies, and engaging in new challenges which encompassed the role of
department head. She appreciated being exposed to a new leadership style and to people
doing things differently in various departments. She felt confident and comfortable in the
position.

I do enjoy it. I do like it. (laughs) I haven’t lost my mind yet! The people
are great. I really enjoyed meeting new people from different schools.

(Anita)

Supports Department Heads Use to Navigate Their Leadership Role

Department heads received support from several different sources, including
colleagues, administrators, and family, yet to varying degrees. Support came in the form
of interpersonal communication between parties or through provision of time, access to
resources, funding, professional development and training, and confidence. Each
department head valued this form of assistance differently and needed it in different
ways. The department heads had an intensive role which ranged from teaching and
mentoring to leading and liaising while being enveloped by numerous administrative
duties. Many buttresses existed to help department heads accomplish their role. Not all
department heads used all the supports that were available. However, two stood out as the
most significant for all the department heads in their role as a teacher leader.

Support from Administration

Administrators provided necessary support for department heads in their roles. All
the department heads discussed how the principal’s support was necessary to succeed in
their positions. Many felt that the principal held the purse strings and thus could support
the department in this regard. Sanjay noted the power of money for a department. The
principal provided a budget which allowed Sanjay to offer his own staff the opportunity to attend professional development and to be abreast of current issues in education by having $100 available to them as a source of funding for conferences and professional books.

Principals also wield influence, which can assist department heads. During Arjit's first department meeting with his department, the principal attended and introduced him. She requested that the department members give him their support. Prior to Arjit's headship changing from being an acting headship to being a permanent headship, the principal counseled him to complete his Honors Specialist course to ensure that he was fully qualified for the position. Additionally, Arjit felt support from administration during staff and leadership meetings when the department heads' input was sought, when they were given the opportunity to address their concerns, and when they were engaged in problem solving. Arjit identified his principal as his second most important support, after his colleagues, "and my principal has been very supportive also. I find that I have open communication with her." He stated that his principal had a supportive nature and that if that did not exist, he would not have taken the position.

Principals provide emotional support by having confidence in department heads. Both Leonard and Arjit noted that their principals' confidence in their ability made them somewhat more secure in their own abilities as a department head. Leonard also felt that a department head needed a personal connection with the principal to be able to get things done.

It would bother me if I discovered that I no longer had the confidence of the principal. If I don't, then I'm not going to do the job because, in my
mind, that’s the key to the door. That’s what enables you to do your job, the little bit that you can do, in a kind of supportive environment. Once that’s done, you’re basically just going to be either fighting or resenting what you do. (Leonard)

Leoni, Carol, and Anita also commented on the supportive nature of their administrators. However, this came across in various ways. Leoni described how her administration supported her through challenging experiences with a department member who was grieving two department heads and several colleagues.

Up until now, I’ve had very supportive administration. The VPs that I work with on the Assessment Committee, for example. And I think, you know, like right now, one of the things I do over the summer is I revamp the Staff Handbook every year, and I do that on the computer. And I do a lot of things around the school. So I think that they’re very supportive and this one VP in particular, who is leaving, (laughs) will always appreciate what you do, and that’s nice. So, that is a support because it does keep you going. To have a little bit of a pat on the back once in a while, because you don’t get a whole lot of it in teaching. Really, do you? (Leoni)

In addition, Carol described how administration was appreciative. They sent thank you cards, allowed for department heads’ autonomy, and did not interfere with department details. Anita claimed that the principal had “faith” in her and that she had been allotted “quite a bit of freedom.” Her principal was supportive of the department’s initiatives such as everyone’s attendance at a subject-specific conference. The principal was very open
and transparent with budgetary issues, which was a positive model for the department heads.

*Support from Colleagues, Mentors and other Department Heads*

All department heads noted the encouraging effects of colleagues, their own mentors, and other department heads as positive influences on their role and supportive of their efforts. Sanjay worked with various committees. After his first success with one initiative, his colleagues assisted him by volunteering to be on a second committee, which extended his influence in the school. The colleagues in math and drama who worked with him to create a literacy unit for their classes backed his efforts. The former department head in this cross-curricular position also supported him by providing some advice around strategies to increase teacher buy-in.

What I found was that when I first started in September, I was starting to get things rolling, someone came and whispered something, it was the person who had the job before me. So she called me in September and said “Sanjay, don’t do anything on your own, because they are not going to like it, go through Robert, our principal.” (Sanjay)

He also relied heavily on his former department head for his expertise with Special Education and ESL students. In addition, Sanjay discussed the importance of mentors in his life. Not only did he talk about his father being a role model, but also a former principal.

If you don’t have an administrator who is super supportive. When I first started, my principal, Robert, he was very, very supportive. I guess he gave an open hand, “do what you want, but within the legal
ramifications.” But there was no problem there, do what you want to do.

(Sanjay)

His former principal had given him insight into educational processes and the importance of interpersonal communication with colleagues. Sanjay’s colleagues also encouraged him and were “ecstatic” when he suggested that he might apply for the subject-specific headship.

During his time as an acting and then a permanent department head, Arjit frequently depended on two senior teachers in his department for support and advice. There was also both formal and informal mentoring for new department heads by senior department heads at his school. Formally, the principal assigned each new department head a mentor from the preexisting pool of department heads. He called this a mentorship program for department heads. Informally, Arjit relied on two or three other department heads for their advice in certain situations and insight into how he should handle situations. However, they were not always able to help, which is evidenced by Arjit’s difficulty with accusations over harassment by a department member. Nevertheless, he identified these other department heads as his primary support in his own role as department head and as his own mentors.

It’s their [his department members’] contribution, their presence in the department that gives me the strength to continue and to do my job because I know out of the 16 people, I have the support of 15 people, and they are very good people and they support me. So, that is what gives me the strength to go on and makes my job worthwhile. (Arjit)
He stated that he received support from some department members who would gladly take on roles and duties within the department.

Leoni identified her department members and colleagues as being supportive.

Well, I think that the staff that I work with has always been supportive, which helps, a whole lot. You know, I think in their own way, they would appreciate things that I would do for them. (Leoni)

Carol and Anita also described their departments’ culture of sharing and collaboration, which required support, not control to foster and develop it. Carol noted, though, that only the teachers in one area of responsibility under the remit of her headship were supportive and helpful of her whole school efforts.

Yes, they’re very supportive, very supportive. Now, Family Studies [teachers], no, but Health and Phys Ed [teachers], the ladies, yes, and if I ask for help, they’re there. (Carol)

The remaining department members were not unsupportive, simply not forthcoming with help.

Strategies Department Heads Use to Navigate Their Leadership Role

All department heads implemented four strategies to support their department members. Supporting department members was necessary to effect change and to make positive improvements in teaching and learning practices. All the department heads discussed how they used these strategies to engage department members, to provide them with opportunities to develop their teaching practice, and to ensure compliance with school and district policies. These four strategies included acting as a resource and providing resources, distributing leadership, collaborating, and communicating.
Providing and Acting as a Resource

To support their colleagues both in their departments and within the school, department heads provide teaching materials and act as a personal resource. In particular, department heads will provide professional development to their colleagues, locate, distribute, and discuss teaching materials, and share innovative research and new information in their subject areas.

Providing Access to Professional Development

By providing access to resources, new ideas, or experiences, department heads demonstrated their own immediate value to their department members. Providing access and support for professional development was one way in which 3 of the department heads provided resources. Sanjay, Carol, and Anita all actively encouraged their department members to engage in professional development and to seek additional information related to their teaching. Sanjay provided funding for access to books and professional development. Carol participated in numerous curriculum organizations and encouraged her colleagues to do so also. She was keenly knowledgeable in one of her two departmental roles. She also liked to be aware of available resources and what was happening pedagogically in her subject area. If she did not know something, she would organize that the “real pros” come in and help with the provision of workshops and meetings. Subsequently, she shared this information with her own department and across the district.

Anita also provided support in the form of professional development and discussion around instructional strategies. She stated that she was
Working on strategies with everyone who may have had not enough ... experience. So just working with them on strategies. You know, how do you get certain concepts across. We used Beyond Monet, by Barry Bennett. That kind of stuff, just to help get the concepts across. (Anita)

Anita also mentioned that she provided professional development to her department. She described how “some of the teachers were newer, so they didn’t have a lot of exposure to the demos. We spent time in our department meetings doing the science type stuff. We ordered a lot of probes, so we did quite a bit of PD on how to use that technology.”

Anita’s efforts to provide support were recognized by her department and noted as encouraging consistency in the department.

Arjit also described how department heads were encouraged to prepare and present PD to other heads.

But last year what we were doing, when we were hosting a meeting, the principal asked each department head to host a meeting. There were certain things you had to be responsible for. You come up with the agenda. You come up with snacks. You come up with some sort of a PD within the heads’ meeting. So, something like stations, group co-operative learning where we read an article on assessment and did like a jigsaw and those sorts of thing and all sorts of exciting stuff. (Arjit)

Providing Access to Teaching Materials

Providing teaching materials, such as course binders and access to teacher-developed websites, was another strategy that department heads implemented to engage
their colleagues. As a way to engage people in curriculum planning and collaboration,
Leonard shared his resources, boxes of work, and course binders. He also encouraged
others to develop a mutual understanding of course goals and to develop course binders.
This did not always take place and, for the large part, was not a success.

Leoni initially created almost all the course binders in the business department,
and she had encouraged people to use these and to make improvements to them.

Well, I just talked about the binders. This is in the business Department.
And so a lot of the binders came from courses when I was teaching them.
And then when I would leave that course, the other teacher would come in
and make changes. And I have no problem with that. But our basic
binders in most of the courses are ones that I have developed in the first
place. But as teachers take them over, they update, make changes, which is
great. (Leoni)

Anita also supported her department through the provision of resources.

My binders were always there and then they would always go to
MyClass.com. I gave them access so that they could see what my daily
plans were and what my worksheets were. So they had access to all that.
They could use it if they wanted to. Because if they wanted to do it step-
by-step, that’s great, but I didn’t say that everybody has to do this lock in
step. I don’t feel that that’s necessary, especially when you’ve got the
experience under your belt. It’s nice to have that freedom and giving
people that ownership I think so .... (Anita)

Carol also shared her best work with colleagues in one area of her department.
Anything that I gather, a new resource, or whatever, I’ll say, “Hey, here. Here’s something cool.” And copy it and everybody gets a copy, etc.

(Carol)

Providing Access to Innovative Research

Three of the department heads also provided innovative research and news related to their subject areas to their department members. Leoni was an avid reader of content in her subject area, with a particular interest in marketing and also pedagogical issues. She often copied resources and shared them with particular teachers in her department with a personal note explaining why she was sharing the resource.

I’ll often just find something and put it on someone’s desk with a little sticky, saying, “This might be of interest to you.” And that sort of thing, just because I am interested. It’s not that I do it because I think I have to. Like with marketing. I am interested in marketing. I am often reading articles, so if I find something .... I am a member of ASCD, so often I read an article and think, “Oh that would be good. Maybe so-and-so would like to read that.” (Leoni)

Additionally, Sanjay would research a problem, such as how to increase student success rates on standardized tests and present it to teachers. He was cognizant of the time other teachers had for these initiatives and respected their limitations and commitment.

I went on the internet and I did searches. And what I found was the number one way to pass a standardized test at the school was to teach to the test, not teach to the skill, and so all the packages were geared toward
specific skill sets for the test. And so, I just used those techniques and presenting to the team, and I went forward from there. (Sanjay)

He gained access to information that he would share, and he also accessed outside agencies for their support.

*Distributing Leadership*

The provision of leadership opportunities for department members not only increased their own capacity but it also relieved the department head of some the duties and responsibilities that were involved in their role. Sanjay and many of the other department heads assigned course chairs and supported people’s interests in leadership by providing opportunities for them.

So those are the people I went to, because they are go-getters, they had the initiative, they had the drive and motivation, to actually participate and take this thing on, and one of the persons, well, actually two of the people went on to become department heads, like, right after that. So it was kind of, for them, like something to put on their resumes, so to speak, in terms of something they did school wide. And one of them right now is considering administration now. So that was kind of, 4 years ago, that was a jumping platform for that person. (Sanjay)

Arjit invited course chairs for each of the courses in his department. The course chair would co-ordinate meetings of the team of teachers working on that course. Arjit attended their meetings when he could and participated by providing insight into what administration would deem acceptable and in line with the curriculum. In these teams, people were “expected to collaboratively produce things and share things.” He
distributed responsibilities in the department to build capacity in others and to ensure his own workload was not too cumbersome. He ensured that everyone had a partner to whom they could send their lesson plans when they were absent. He did not assign duties, but asked for volunteers. He tried to plan his requests by aligning individual interests to specific tasks. He asked for volunteers and tried to match people’s strengths to interests, as is the case in the library liaison, the social committee representative, the literacy representative, and the representative on the exam committee. He believed in offering opportunities to people. He tried to build capacity in others, “Because as a team, we can only become as strong as when everybody is doing their best and their weaknesses are compensated by somebody else’s strengths ....” He allowed others to represent the department on various committees and in staff meetings.

Leoni established course leaders, and she encouraged the leaders to hold meetings among teachers who were teaching the same course. Similarly, Carol wanted people to take ownership of certain areas and she stated, “I think that’s important [ownership], that they feel part of the process and part of the decision making as well.” Carol also stated that she shared and distributed leadership with other colleagues, in particular the Athletic Directors and Athletic Contact. Through their co-ordinated work, they managed the facilities and equipment in the school as it pertained to athletics. In addition, Carol had a department member who was in charge of the budget for the department. This left Carol “with the opportunity to delve into other things.”

Anita also assigned people to the role of course chair, which distributed her responsibility and fostered capacity building in others. She noted the individual strengths of department members and encouraged people to informally mentor teachers when they
were working on a similar course or in their areas of strength. In contrast, Leonard attempted to establish course chairs. When questioned about the use of course chairs in his department, Leonard stated,

Well, I tried to start that sort of thing, but it's kind of broken down because, with few exceptions, we don't have courses that require collaboration. Whatever we do, it's sort done in an ad hoc, informal kind of way. People get on, right? So, I don't feel I have to intervene, but I have asked people to take on jobs because I have somebody who I can go to and say, how is this being done? Well, that has not been so successful.

(Leonard)

Due to the nature of his subject area and the fact that many single-section courses exist, opportunities to collaborate broke down or were nonexistent.

_Support of and Participation in Collaborative Efforts_

Although the definition and implementation of collaboration varied by departments, all department heads noted their attempts, successes, and failures with collaborative efforts within their department. Sanjay collaborated with other colleagues from various departments to create literacy materials for their respective subject areas and grade levels. He worked with science, music, auto, drama, and other teachers to develop materials and units focused on literacy skills. He had representatives from every department creating functional, user-friendly, markable embedded literacy tasks. This had positive effects for literacy scores in his school.

We [a cross-curricular team of teachers] worked together to actually create preparation materials to use in different subject areas. And we went up
significantly in terms of our marks. We went up to 80%. It was actually 82% with the kids who were taking the OSSLC. (Sanjay)

He would rely on the expertise of subject specialists. He worked closely with the Special Education and ESL department head as they mutually engaged each other’s expertise. Sanjay was also transparent with regard to his department’s budget, elicited input into budgetary decisions, and allowed for access to all budgetary documents and information.

In contrast, Leonard stated that his department collaborated, but on a very superficial level. This may be a cursory form of co-operation rather than true collaboration. Leonard described how his department experienced collaboration; however, as is evidenced, this form of collaboration is more likely termed co-operation regarding access to resources.

Everything we do on one level is collaborative, because we share spaces, we share equipment, we share kids and courses. And so we have to co-ordinate our activities, on one level. On another level, you do what you want to do. And everybody does what they want to do. (Leonard)

Arjit, Anita, and Leoni described how their departments collaboratively developed policy. In Arjit’s department, this entailed developing a policy pertaining to student late assignment submission. Leoni’s collaborative efforts were pervasive and the norm. She stated, “I think if you come into a department and it kind of already exists, it’s pretty easy to build.” Leoni described how teachers in her department collaborate.

I also think it’s really important to be able to feel comfortable, to allow people to feel comfortable enough that they can share. You know, here’s this really neat worksheet I did for Introduction to Business Studies
Course. You know, give it a try, but you might want to change this, because this really didn’t work well. Feeling comfortable enough to say that, “This didn’t work well.” But I’m willing to share and tell you this is what I did. (Leoni)

Anita also fostered collaborative efforts when she asked her department members for advice and input on various issues and in particular on budgetary issues. She felt that team input into budgetary decisions was different in each department, but that for her department, it was important.

Maybe certain departments don’t collaborate as much on the budget, whereas here, I mean, a lot of them [department heads] were hired first. I was hired first, so I made the initial decisions, so then I sent it [the budget] out to everybody and said, “Look through this. What’s missing? What do you need? What don’t we need? What can we get away without?” So that was nice, that I got to involve them in how to spend that pot. (Anita)

She did not want to be the only one making decisions. She focused much of their collaborative efforts on lesson planning and deepening an understanding of the science curriculum.

*Communicating*

The use of effective communication strategies and detailed explanation were also paramount to department heads when it came to supporting their department members. This occurred informally in casual conversations or impromptu meetings and formally at department meetings and professional development sessions. Leonard explained how he collated information from heads’ meetings and other sources to share and distribute to his
department. He also communicated with the administration regarding a variety of departmentally and school-focused issues. He described how he revisits the topic of assessment: "I keep going back to it from time to time. Every 6 months I'll talk about it in some way." Leoni felt that she was constantly communicating with her department. She said she was available "on and off, all of the time" to answer questions from her department members and to provide advice or help.

In addition, Carol would take the minutes from the heads' meetings and communicate these to the department members. She kept the lines of communication open, encouraged, and modeled openness and approachability. She felt that addressing issues openly and immediately would solve problems more readily. Carol and all of the other department heads used email as a form of communication along with other informal notes and memos. She also held informal meetings with the Physical Education teachers while in the gym together and more formal monthly meetings with the Family Studies teachers. Carol used patience and diplomacy to work with colleagues when a challenge arose. She circulated information in the department and elicited feedback and opinion.

Then we all have a part in that decision, and that's a decision that we've made as a group. So, ownership is important, because they feel that "Yeah, I had a say and I feel good about this." (Carol)

Sanjay stated that he took time to explain a new initiative and to provide a coherent rationale for it during a staff meeting. He held information nights for parents, department meetings, and committee meetings. In addition, he spent time with his department members in social and work-related settings.
Conclusion

The data collated from the department heads outline their perceptions of the role framed by the elements of teaching, leading, and managing. Although at times they expressed these elements differently, to different degrees, and with distinct outcomes, these were the three cornerstones of their work. The effects of the role of the department head on the individual was two pronged, with special note being made of the positive effects due in part to the supports of administration and colleagues. However, frustration, stress, and ambiguity were also attributed to their work due to the struggles with relationships with colleagues and the breadth of the role. The department heads in this study identified supportive strategies that they provided to their colleagues. These included collaboration, communication, provision of leadership opportunities, and the provision of resources.
CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Secondary school department heads have existed as small "i" leaders in schools throughout the 20th and continuing into the 21st centuries in Canada. The role of the secondary school department head is ambiguous, but necessary to facilitate school organization and student success. Department heads support students, teachers, and administration. The duality of their role requires a complex set of interpersonal communication skills, a strongly developed knowledge of curriculum and instruction, and honed collaborative abilities; these are in addition to the prerequisite ability to deal with stress while supporting the needs of others.

This chapter begins with an overview of the study which focuses on the perceptions of department heads with regard to their leadership role. It then explains the qualitative nature of the study, the use of constructivist inquiry, and the analysis strategies used in the examination of the data. The chapter explains the key elements of their role, the factors that affect their role, and how they navigate these challenges. It also provides an overview of the study and a framework of teacher leadership for department heads.

The discussion section of this chapter begins with the effects of the research on the research participants and me. A review of the definitions of teacher leadership leads into a discussion of the research participants' lack of familiarity with this term. Next, teacher leadership is further explored as a tool for managing, leading, and as a change agent. The effects of school and department culture are reviewed along with the effects of change on the role. The supports that exist for department heads are addressed, and
subsequently the strategies that they use to navigate their challenging positions and assist their colleagues are also presented.

Last, this chapter presents recommendations for change. This section begins with the perceptions of the department heads, their own views on how the role can be improved, and their recommendations to do so. Subsequently, recommendations and implications are presented for theory and practice. These include suggestions for department heads, school administrators, unions, school districts, professional bodies, and faculties of education. This chapter will conclude with proposed next steps and final thoughts.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate secondary school department heads’ perceptions of their leadership role. The primary rationale for this study was to provide clarity around the nature of their leadership role and to explore the conditions that exist for the individuals who work toward teacher leadership. The role of the secondary school department head in Ontario is varied and challenging. This research recognized the diversity in the role of department head and gave a voice to the department heads who take on these roles. The study explored how 6 department heads demonstrated elements of teacher leadership. To explore teacher leadership, department heads were asked to discuss their perceived definition of the department head role, the conditions that exist for department heads, and how they navigate these conditions.

Summary of the Study

This study was qualitative in nature and used a constructivist inquiry design. The research participants’ perceptions of their role were at the core of this study, and thus
qualitative research was conducted in the form of semistructured interviews to support the central placement of their opinions in the research. Qualitative research focuses on human behaviour, the reasons behind this behaviour, and the context of this behaviour. Examining the leadership perceptions of department heads in secondary schools is therefore closely in line with the focuses of qualitative research. Qualitative research also supports the use of smaller, focused samples, thus fitting with the number of research participants involved in this study.

Constructivism focuses on the social construction of meaning and, in the case at hand, the development of meaning around teacher leadership and the departmental headship. As a former department head, I was well aware of my own views of the role and felt that constructivism afforded me the opportunity to develop my ideas of teacher leadership along with my research participants as opposed to trying to separate my research and my own perceptions in an attempt to avoid bias. It was important that the multiple opinions of my research participants were heard and that their constructs of the role of secondary school department heads and teacher leadership were expressed.

Constructivist inquiry was used because of the importance it places on the participants’ views on topics related to educational issues and the development of meaning which ensues. Constructivist inquiry is a process which involves observing, recording, analyzing, reflecting, dialoguing, and rethinking. I attempted to implement these elements in my research on the leadership perceptions of department heads. In-depth, semistructured interviews were conducted with 6 research participants on two separate occasions, as the goal of the research was to elicit information, feelings, and thoughts from the research participants regarding their teacher leadership roles. Each
research participant was either currently a department head or, in one case, had just left the role. They presented a breadth of experience, age, subject responsibility, department size, gender, and years of experience.

Overview of Analysis Strategies

Due to the constructivist nature of this inquiry, there was an inductive orientation to data analysis. After interviews were transcribed, I read the transcriptions, noting key ideas in the right-hand margin. The interviews were reread several times, and eventually colours were assigned to five main areas and specific codes delineated aspects of these colours and codes. The development of the coding process was reviewed with the research participants, and their opinions were sought regarding the codes. During this process, the constant comparative method was implemented, as the data were analyzed in an ongoing manner. As new data were introduced after each interview, the data were reanalyzed and coded along with constant memo-writing.

Memo-writing allowed for ongoing reflection of the data and coding system. The memos were revised, rewritten, and used as fundamental elements of this thesis. A summary of each research participant's interview was made after the initial set of interviews and shared with them individually. Their reflections on these constructs were sought and used to further develop an understanding of their construct of teacher leadership and the role of the secondary school department head.

Overview of the Results of the Study

The study provided a richly detailed representation of the research participants' construct of their leadership role while acting as a department head. These constructs were rooted in their words and thoughts. They evoked powerful and vivid understandings
of the role of department head. The participants’ perceptions of the role of department head involved a definition of the role with three key elements (Refer to Figure 1). All research participants stated that their role was rooted in teaching. They noted that additional elements of their role were to manage and to lead. The leadership elements were comprised of mentoring new teachers and supporting their colleagues within the department through curricular and instructional leadership. The managerial elements emphasized the numerous administrative duties that department heads undertake and their responsibility to liaise with administration. They constructed their individual leadership roles with these elements in mind while recognizing the diversity and breadth of their own experiences and situations.

All research participants recognized the importance of support for their leadership role. In particular, they noted the necessity of assistance from administration and help from their colleagues inside and outside of their departments. The support that the department heads received had positive effects on the department heads themselves. These effects include engagement in their work, a sense of satisfaction, and feelings of enjoyment.

The research participants also clearly identified two common challenges in their role. The first challenge was rooted in challenging relationships with colleagues, and the second was due to role ambiguity and role conflict. The challenges that the research participants faced had several negative effects on both themselves and others. For all the research participants, feelings of frustration, powerlessness, and stress were a direct result of their work.
Five of the research participants had dual role headships. These headships combined two or more subject areas under one department head. These roles were additionally challenging because many of the research participants were not qualified as specialists in both of their areas of responsibilities. In some cases, the research participants were not even qualified to teach in the subject area. This duality of the role resulted, at times, in developing a headship that was divisive. The department head could more fully support one subject area and group of teachers than another.

All research participants implemented the following four key strategies to support their department members. These strategies included acting as and providing resources to department members and colleagues, distributing leadership opportunities, collaborating, and communicating effectively. This information can be shown visually in the Framework of Teacher Leadership for Department Heads (Figure 1), which illustrates the various facets of teacher leadership exemplified by the research participants.

Discussion

Conducting interviews with the research participants was not only enjoyable but affirming of my own personal experiences in the role of department head. It was comforting to know that many of the successes and challenges that I had experienced, my colleagues had also experienced. Sanjay, one of my research participants, hypothesized that the more people I would talk to, the more I would find that everyone seems to have had similar experiences. He was correct. Many of the research participants that I spoke with had similar experiences. In addition, the frank and open discussion with these individuals was enlightening and provided me with a new set of standards and expectations for myself as a department head.
I was surprised and pleased with the responses from the research participants. All were eager to share their experiences and thoughts, and all were additionally thankful for the opportunity to reflect on their roles. During the second round of interviews, many stated that the first interview and the member check of their interview transcript allowed them to think more deeply about how they act out their role, their own successes, challenges, and the supports they receive and provide.

All 6 participants thanked me for the opportunity to share their perceptions of their teacher leadership role, as they had never had the opportunity to do so before. Several mentioned that the experience had made them feel “better” about their role and allowed for a deeper understanding of their role. The opportunity to discuss the role also clarified for some what they needed to do next in their role. Time and space for reflection are needed for department heads.

Based on an analysis of the data, it is clear that the perceptions of research participants clearly link the department head role to teacher leadership. This is illustrated in the Framework of Teacher Leadership for Department Heads (Figure 1), although the complexity of each research participant’s context allowed teacher leadership to illustrate itself in diverse ways. This is consistent with Siskin and Little’s (1995) observation that each department has its own “context-specific differences” which make us aware that “the department is the singular entity that most predictably unites teachers with one another, and most deeply divides faculty groups from one another” (p. 7). This statement supports the findings of this study. Teachers and department heads depend strongly on the organization of schools into departments, but this decreases their ability to have whole school vision and input.
Reviewing Teacher Leadership

Common definitions of teacher leadership indicate that teacher leaders should focus on mentoring and coaching, professional development, school level decision-making and reflective inquiry (Pounder, 2006). For the most part, this was true for my research participants. All described how they mentored other teachers, yet only some described how it was an extension of their leadership role. Most of the department heads described their involvement in professional development opportunities in their departments, schools, or boards. However, most also described a level of dissatisfaction and frustration with the absence of school-wide decision-making. None spoke of reflective practices that they engage in to further their own teaching and leading.

Yet another perspective of teacher leadership by Muijs and Harris (2006) emphasizes the importance of distributed leadership and the transition to the development of a shared culture, a set of shared values, and a unifying vision among the whole school (Muijs & Harris, 2007). All of the department heads described experiences where they tried to distribute leadership and build capacity in their department members and colleagues in their schools. Two participants spoke disdainfully regarding the attempts of administration at developing a unifying vision. In turn, no department heads discussed how they had a set focus for their departments. Nonetheless, most described a culture of sharing and support.

Last, York-Barr and Duke (2004) identified teacher leadership as “the process by which teachers, individually or collectively, influence their colleagues, principals, and other members of school communities to improve teaching and learning practices with the aim of increased student learning and achievement” (p. 287). The department heads in
this study described their roles as constantly evolving and morphing to suit the needs of students and colleagues. In turn, it can be described as a process in which they work with colleagues to improve student achievement.

*Department Heads’ Lack of Familiarity with the Language of Teacher Leadership*

From the onset of the interviews, it was apparent that only one of the research participants was familiar with the term “teacher leader.” They were all unfamiliar with the detailed construct of teacher leadership, and therefore they developed their own idea of teacher leadership when I initially mentioned it. Some asked for clarification and definition of the term along with its background and evolution.

Five of the department heads were unfamiliar with theoretical definitions of teacher leadership. Their role was a “job” or “work” and often their language around the role did not include “teacher leadership.” Notwithstanding, they all referenced constructs associated with curricular leadership and instructional leadership. It is important to note that many described their role as an instructional leader: one who provides support to colleagues with regard to teaching and course content. It would suffice to say that the use of teacher leadership as a construct of what effective teachers do to promote student learning and growth has not filtered down from academia. Therefore, a disconnect exists between how department heads discuss their role and how researchers discuss the role of a teacher leader.

As a result, the value attributed to the department heads’ leadership roles by themselves can be negligible. They recognize that they do a great deal of work, complete many duties, assist colleagues and administration, but they do not perceive their role as important to the whole school. Their perceptions of their headship involve variety,
breadth, and complexity, but not one that necessarily involves the title of leader. This disconnect between the perceptions of department heads and the perceptions of those in the academy needs to be further explored. In addition, it would be interesting to see if administrators and colleagues also feel that these roles are merely "jobs" or if they are true leadership positions that accompany a set of values and norms.

**Teacher Leadership as a Process**

As with teacher leadership, being a department head is a process. All department heads started their role with a simple notion that it would involve leading and managing. For the most part, their construct of the departmental headship was based on their own previous experiences or observations. Their construct of the role evolved over time as they became more familiar with their role and out of necessity to accommodate the changes in school culture, focus, and other relevant and tangible issues that affected their leadership focus. This development is in line with Lambert’s (1995b) ideas of constructivist leadership. She states that constructivist leadership is "the reciprocal processes that enable participants in an educational community to construct meanings that lead toward a common purpose about schooling" (p. 29). For most of the department heads in this study, Lambert’s notions of constructivist leadership are evident in some manner.

Unfortunately, it is the ambiguity that accompanies this amorphous teacher leadership process which many department heads find problematic. Because of the lack of clarity in the departmental headship and the breadth and the variety in the role, many department heads feel the negative effects of the responsibilities. Department heads deal with a significant amount of stress, and the consequences of these effects are decreased
self-esteem, feelings of inadequacy, and lack of empowerment (Schmidt, 2000). In summary, department heads feel a lack of teacher-efficacy at times.

**Leading Versus Managing**

Poultney (2007) claimed that the role of department head is to lead and to manage. Department heads lead various elements in their departments. As Aubrey-Hopkins and James (2000) noted, department heads lead because of a desire to support their colleagues. This is illustrated by all the department heads in this study who attempted to support the myriad of needs in their departments. They have developed extensive strategies and supports that allow them to lead their department in a focus on improved student success (Brown, Boyle, et al., 2000) and climate for learning. In addition, Siskin and Little (1995) acknowledge the prominent position of departments as the “sole or even most critical source of influence for particular teachers or groups” (p. 7).

Department heads who lead. All the department heads identified a curricular and/or instructional leadership element to their role. Siskin and Little (1995) noted, “by their very design, departments place subject in the foreground” (p. 7). Being an expert in their subject area is also what gives department heads credibility with their colleagues. In their review of the literature concerning the role and purpose of middle leaders in schools in England, Bennett, Newton, Wise, Woods, and Economou (2003) found that “subject leaders’ authority comes not from their position but their competence as teachers and their subject knowledge” (p. 3). Nonetheless, not all middle managers in their study felt comfortable being identified as a leader, and several identified their primary role as a form of departmental secretary at times.
Many department heads and department members draw their sense of self through their membership in a department. This placement in a department forges “social identity, professional community and the social organization of the school” (Siskin & Little, 1995, p. 8). As a result, as a curricular leader in a specific department, many heads used the subject as a filter for information. They would engage their focus on their subject area and pass on information which was relevant to their study. This had a detrimental effect on their ability to participate in whole school decision making, as they were often limited by their own subject area. This in turn supported Hargreaves and Fullan’s (1998) ideas regarding the balkanization of departments and its detrimental effects on school culture.

Another element of leading is the research participants’ perceived role as a mentor. They all noted their mentorship efforts, but not all acknowledged that this was an intrinsic part of their role. Nevertheless, they mentored new and needy teachers, supporting their curricular and pedagogical knowledge and skill development along with their emotional needs at times.

*Department heads who manage.* Much of department heads’ time was engulfed with the less meaningful task of managing. Department heads manage and engage in administrative duties that consume their time and effort. Their management of resources and people, at times, leads to frustration and stress. Schmidt (2000) noted “the particular tasks of that role show that its responsibilities are not only vague but protean” (p. 828). Repeatedly, the research participants discussed how their responsibilities changed over time and with the shifting focus of the school and district, often resulting in more paperwork and “administrivia.” Department heads’ time is filled with duties such as stocking cupboards, distributing memos, ordering books and resources, and even tidying offices.
Schmidt stated, “Some department heads expressed their frustrations that their roles were managerial, bureaucratic and isolated” (p. 832). This is also true with the findings from this research.

Another management issue of the role which has not been substantially addressed in the literature is the perception of the department head’s managerial role as a liaison between administration and the department and vice versa. Acting as a liaison results in role confusion among department heads who are attempting to navigate a position that is at times quasi administrative. Many research participants saw the liaison aspect of their role as taking the departments’ views and concerns to the administration. However, in reality, the research participants were often the messenger from administration to the departments without reciprocal interest on the part of the administration.

Effects of School and Department Climate

Each department head spoke at length about the climate in his/her department and school. Henderson (2008) notes that developing a nurturing and supportive environment for teacher leaders prompts their success, a better climate, more appropriate decisions, and support for decisions. However, an administrator who is willing to distribute leadership and create leadership opportunities for teachers is also required. In this study, climate delineated, for several of the research participants, their ability to act as a teacher leader. If their school climate, for the most part, was progressive and open to change, the research participants noted high levels of collegiality and collaboration as was illustrated with Sanjay and Anita. Both were able to effect change and further support a climate of learning in their own departments. However, if the research participants were in a challenging climate, where change was not recognized as a necessity for improved
student success, they noted teacher reticence to change and high levels of teacher autonomy, as was evident with Leonard and, to a similar but lesser extent, Arjit.

Several research participants described how their administrators set the climate in the school through their own willingness to collaborate, make transparent decisions, and engage department heads meaningfully in whole school decision-making. Alternatively, others described a hierarchy which they felt constricted their leadership abilities. In research conducted for the National College of School Leadership, Bennett, et al (2003) found that it is “the tendency of secondary schools, in particular, to operate within hierarchical structures, which act as a constraint on the degree to which subject leaders can act collegially” (p. 3). Several of the department heads in this research noted the hierarchical nature of school organization and its negative effect on school climate.

**Need for Professional Development for Department Heads.**

Several of the department heads noted a need for additional professional development and training in specific areas. They discussed how most of their learning to be a department head was done informally and as a result of observing or interacting with other department heads. Similarly, Turner (2006) discussed how informal learning for subject leaders in the UK underpinned their work as leaders. He described how informal learning was beneficial to inexperienced subject leaders because of their access to and benefit from feedback and advice from more experienced mentors. This reflects what Arjit discussed when he described the informal network of supports that he used as a department head. He described how his supports were based on his relationships with colleagues who could provide insight and suggestions. Assistance was at times related to his subject responsibilities but more often than not they were related to leadership and
management issues. The professional development that can take place informally has great benefit, and this underutilized support network needs to be further explored.

Additionally, 4 of the department heads noted the need for professional development and training as it related to leadership and management issues. Sanjay, who sought additional training from a business organization that offered management training, most clearly illustrates this need. In addition, Leoni noted how additional computer training would better equip her as a leader. Teacher leaders must be cautious of the training in which they engage since not only is their time scarce and valuable but, as Turner (2006) explains, gains from professional development courses can be at times marginal. Nevertheless, 4 of the research participants felt that a variety of knowledge and skills were necessary for the role of department head and that they were not fully equipped with these. This is consistent with Weller (2001), who also listed the following skills and traits as necessary for department heads: “human relations skills, good communication skills, knowledge of leadership, knowledge of group dynamics, the ability to be flexible and diplomatic, knowledge of good teaching practices, and command of subject knowledge” (p. 80). All the department heads in this study addressed concerns about one or more of these aforementioned skills and traits.

**Supports for Department Heads**

As Douglas Reeves (2008a) stated in his presentation at the EQAO conference in Toronto, colleagues are the most important influence on a teacher. Their influence and support can quickly and efficiently engage or dissuade a teacher from taking on a leadership initiative. The foregoing could also extend to reinforce the fact that the research participants felt most supported by their fellow teaching colleagues. Repeatedly,
the department heads provided examples of their colleagues’ actions and words, which encouraged them and sustained their leadership initiatives. Most important, many of the department heads would not have taken on the headship role unless their colleagues had supported them. For all the research participants, support from administration manifested itself in many ways but was intrinsic to their success in the role.

Despite the value attributed to support from both administration and colleagues, many department heads also pointed to other types of support which were absent, but much needed. Mayers and Zepeda (2002) recommended that principals provide resources which would support department heads. These include clear job descriptions, professional development opportunities, resources, and ongoing support. The research participants in this study also believed these additional supportive elements were missing, along with others. For the research participants, resources were the provision of time, ongoing professional development opportunities and training, access to support staff, and access to resource teachers and curriculum specialists. In addition, clarity in the role was also regarded as a support for the role.

*Strategies that Department Heads Use to Support their Department Members*

For many of the research participants, the support of their staff manifested itself in being an effective resource and or by providing useful teaching materials. Poultney (2007) noted that a teacher leader is not an expert but a sharing equal, a professional willing to collaborate with colleagues. Anita and Leoni frequently provided resources and shared their own work, (i.e. lesson plans, handouts, DVDs, rubrics) as a means to support their department members. Both ensured that they were accessible to their colleagues for a large part of their working day to answer questions and assist in problem solving. The
other research participants found it a challenge to mediate all the various needs of their colleagues and to provide support to all of those who required it.

_Distributing leadership._ According to Grubb and Flessa (2006), “the concept of distributed leaderships clarifies that patterns of leadership can take many forms. This concept has been used largely to describe the relative balance of decision-making power between administrators on one hand and teachers on the other” (p. 530). Distributed leadership also “involves the allocation of responsibilities between principals and teachers” (Grubb & Flessa, p. 532). Distributed leadership models collaboration, and some research participants recognized the benefits to themselves and others and actively provided leadership opportunities to others. They demonstrated their collaborative skills and used it as a strategy to support student success and their own success as a teacher leader. Unfortunately, many research participants in this study discussed how their whole school input was rarely sought or done so only on a cursory basis. As a result, it would be interesting to examine why and how some department heads are effective at modeling distributed leadership when others are not. Poultney (2007) observed that some subject leaders have problems with the implementation of delegation and in turn distribution in leadership. This may be due to increased personal autonomy by teachers, lack of training, and/or their reticence to change.

The importance of support and effective modeling of leadership skills from administration can truly set the tone in a school and affect the leadership climate that exists for department heads in their own departments. Harris, et al. (1995) state that “one mark of collegiality, which was present in many of the departments, was the amount of delegation of tasks” (p. 288). Clearly, as trust and confidence in the department head are
established, department members feel more comfortable in taking on leadership roles and confident in the knowledge that they will be supported in their efforts. Melville and Wallace (2007) describe how the trust that the teachers have in their own leadership abilities and their capacity to influence the organizational capacity of their department are important considerations in high-performing schools. In addition, Poultney also explains that an effective attribute of a subject leader is the ability to build trust between the individual and his or her team.

Collaborating. Many of the department heads in this study discussed collegial relationships and a climate for learning within their departments as essential foundations for collaboration. In particular, Aubrey-Hopkins and James (2002) state that collegiality and collaboration will improve leadership, and MacTavish and Kolb (2006) explain how these elements along with empowerment will encourage teachers to create authentic, engaging, and empowering learning environments. Nevertheless, many teachers continue to insist on high degrees of autonomy in their classrooms, working in isolation, and not functioning as a team (Harris, 1998). Many department heads are challenged to develop true, collaborative efforts and environments that are more than simply tolerant of each other’s presence. The challenges they face are the lack of time for collaboration, lack of understanding of collaboration, and lack of effort toward true collaboration.

Structured meetings, which can allow for the sharing of course-specific materials and instructional strategies, were evident in most departments, according to the research participants. These meetings were, at times, clearly organized, as Harris, et al. (1995) describe, to be systematic in the maintenance of vision within a department. However, rarely were there opportunities when colleagues and heads worked together to develop a
clearer understanding of the curriculum, nor were there many opportunities to engage in professional development within the department. Multiple, informal encounters for curricular and instructional co-operation were made. These occurred over lunch, during brief discussions in departmental offices and classrooms, and through resource sharing. However, these encounters do not garner the same benefits as true, meaningful collaboration.

Communicating. Communication, as with the other strategies that the research participants in this study used, was implemented to various degrees and with mediating effects. What is clear from the study is that a department head and, as a result, the entire department can only be as effective as the communication that is being used in the department. Research participants such as Carol used a variety of informal and formal communication strategies (e.g., meetings and technological communication methods such as email). In their communication, the teachers in Carol’s department discussed curricular and pedagogical issues, focused on student success, and addressed their department’s role in the whole school.

Alternatively, Leoni detailed the change in her department when a new member was parachuted into the department and instigated departmental discord. She described how the level of communication dropped drastically and collaboration was also negatively affected. The climate of the department returned to its normal level of communication only once the individual left the school. Harris (1998) notes in her study of ineffective departments in secondary schools that many of “these less effective departments were not ‘talking departments’ and were marked by a lack of constant interchange of both formal and informal level” (p. 272). As a result, effective
communication in its various forms should be not only a strategy but a mandatory element of the role.

Communication skills are also important means of influencing teachers. McCartney and Schrag (1990) note that department heads have very little actual power over their colleagues, and thus their ability to effectively communicate and win them over is paramount to their success. Leonard and Arjit repeatedly spoke of the frustration that arose out of a feeling of disenfranchisement and lack of power which had its roots in poor communication. As a result, skills in interpersonal relations must also be linked to effective communication practices and is an area where many department heads could use training. Arjit and Sanjay also spoke of the need for leadership training practices that included conflict management and interpersonal communication skills.

How the Role Can Be Used to Effect Change

The traditional subject specific headship is a challenging position if the element of teacher leadership to be developed focuses on whole school improvement. Ackerman and Mackenzie (2006) note that teacher leadership “offers a variety of unseen opportunities for forcing schools out of established frames of reference and toward genuine school improvement” (p. 66). However, from the discussions with the department heads in this study, many struggle to focus on whole school improvement and district-wide initiatives. The complexities of the administrative tasks and responsibilities to support their departmental colleagues took precedence over the larger, vague focus that is dictated to these teacher leaders. As Leoni stated, many district initiatives do not seem to affect classroom teaching and change quickly. Department heads were not afforded time to fully understand the initiatives, nor were they offered sufficient professional development
and training so as to be able to articulately engage departmental colleagues in the
initiatives.

Furthermore, Mayers and Zepeda (2002) also note that, “due to the conflict
between the espoused nature of the job (the job description) and the reality of the job (the
faculty handbook), the participants experienced both role conflict and role ambiguity” (p.
55). All of the research participants in this study experienced similar feelings of unease as
a result of the reality of their job versus their perceptions of their roles. Schmidt (2000)
notes that “evidence points to the role of the department head being one of the most
stressful positions in the education profession” (p. 828). All of the research participants’
experiences support these statements.

Teacher leadership is a broad notion with many different definitions, yet one
which “offers a variety of unseen opportunities for forcing schools out of established
frames of reference and toward genuine school improvement” (Ackerman & Mackenzie,
2006, p. 66). In the course of discussions, very few department heads cited their work as
effecting change in their department. There were not a lot of initiatives on the part of
research participants to implement new ideas. The numerous preexisting school and
district initiatives were already too onerous. The ability to initiate change on a large scale,
or even on a department-wide scale, is very challenging and for the most part not
attempted. For many of the research participants, their role was centered on maintaining a
positive climate in the department which focused on student success but respected and
even promoted individual teacher autonomy, despite the attempts at collaboration.

In addition, as the scope of the role of school administrators also becomes more
ambiguous and wider, they distribute leadership to others. In turn, department heads are
becoming more cognizant of whole school issues but are not necessarily having more input into whole school decision-making (Poultney, 2007). Leoni and Carol noted with frustration the impact of whole school and district-wide decision-making. They felt that these decisions did at times affect their departments and that they had a limited, if any role in the decision-making process.

Recommendations

The findings of this research result in several recommendations. These recommendations include suggestions directly from the department heads in this study. It was important to give them a clear voice with regard to what they felt is necessary to change in the role. Furthermore, recommendations for department heads to more effectively navigate their leadership role are presented along with recommendations for administrators, unions, school districts, and professional bodies. Finally, there are also recommended next steps for research and the implications of this study. However, what is most important to note is the need for a co-ordinated effort on the part of all stakeholders to collaborate on strategy and policy which will recognize the complexity of the role of the department head as teacher leader and support it.

Recommendations From Department Heads

As this research was constructivist in nature, it was imperative to give a voice to the department heads who participated in this research. All the research participants had recommendations for fellow department heads, administrators, districts, the Ministry of Education, and the union. These suggestions ran the gamut from simple strategies to improve the climate for department heads to disbanding the entire department head structure as it currently exists. Most department heads who held dual responsibility
headships felt strongly that these roles were unrealistic and an overburden on the individual in the role. A department head was rarely an expert in both areas and felt inadequate as a result. All department heads called for additional release time or reinstatement of the previous amount of release time that was allotted prior to the cutbacks in the 1990s. Suggestions for structuring release time were provided, resulting in a number of different scheduling ideas. In addition, many department heads felt that their role was not being maximized in the school and that they had more to offer, yet no opportunity to do so. Administrators need to recognize the interest of some department heads in whole school activities and distribute leadership more freely. Other suggestions involved the development of a community for department heads to discuss issues and to problem-solve common discrepancies. This could also be a source for mentorship and guidance as well as professional development and training. Last, the research participants suggested that the OSSTF needs to revisit their regulations regarding a department head’s role in the schools and within the departments. In particular, they wanted to be a part of the hiring process again.

Recommendations For Department Heads

Department heads need to discuss their perceptions of the role and come to an agreement on how to navigate the role with their colleagues and administration. This could ensure a level of communication that facilitates leadership and moves toward improved student success. They need to identify their requirements and develop collaborative plans to support them. This must include an open, ongoing discussion which will illustrate the process of teacher leadership. In turn, department heads should reflect on their role and actions and seek feedback from their colleagues. This will not
only support a more collaborative environment but it will also model appropriate
leadership strategies, limit stress due to role ambiguity and role confusion, and clearly
outline the expectations for themselves and others in the department. Time is required for
these recommendations.

Recommendations For Administrators

School administrators need to work with department heads to develop a deeper
understanding of the responsibilities and scope of each person's work within the
department and the school as a whole. In particular, whole school responsibilities for
department heads need to be presented and outlined prior to a potential department head
engaging in the process of becoming a teacher leader. Department heads must be
presented with meaningful leadership opportunities that extend beyond their departments
and opportunities that they can present to their department members. This distribution of
leadership will foster collaborative environments and support the need for a culture of
change.

In addition, administrators need to be cognizant of not only the balkanization of
the departments but the divisiveness that exists among department heads because of the
misunderstanding of each other's roles and responsibilities. They need to create
meaningful opportunities for department heads to engage collectively in professional
development and training and other tasks that focus on improved student success.
Schmidt (2000) noted "that there was little to aid the transition between roles, from
teacher to department head" (p. 831). Providing professional development and
mentorship for new and experienced department heads will foster a deeper understanding
of whole school goals and break down the barriers that exist between departments and between teachers in departments.

Administrators have a significant impact on school climate, and climate is linked to a teacher leader’s ability to implement strategies that lead to improved student learning and to develop a supportive environment in their own department. Administrators need to foster a positive working environment through the establishment of layered supports for department heads that combine those available in the school, the district, and beyond.

Recommendations For Unions

The constant conflict between unions and school districts with regard to positions of responsibility is unsupportive of the individuals who take on these necessary, yet onerous departmental headships. There needs to be a new construct of the departmental headship which is negotiated by these two stakeholders. To facilitate the development of this new construct, unions first need to revisit the issue of removing department heads from the interview process. In most U.S. high schools, department heads play an important role in hiring new teachers (McCartney & Schrag, 1990). In Ontario, this responsibility was removed to ensure that department heads do not evaluate fellow union members. However, without department heads in the interview process, administrators are left to make decisions regarding appropriate teacher hiring. Without department head input, administrators can be ignorant of existing teaching strengths and weaknesses in the department, the intricacies of the subject area, or particular pedagogical issues that arise during the teaching of the subject. In addition, administrators are not always aware of the climate and personalities that exist in the departmental culture. If a new teacher is hired who does not properly “fit” the department, many problems can arise, as were illustrated
in the examples provided by Arjit, Leonard, Leoni, and Carol. This leads to increased workload for department heads, who have to socialize the new member to the department and ensure the climate in the department remains supportive.

**Recommendations For School Districts**

School districts need to be cognizant of the fact that many teacher leaders and department heads lack the training and professional development required for the role. This includes training in problem solving, conflict management, time management, leadership techniques, and issues around curriculum and instructional strategies. They need to provide opportunities for these skills to be developed, and for this to be successful, time must be afforded to department heads. Programs similar to the Side by Side program for new teachers must be made available for new department heads to ease the transition into the role and possibly the culture of the school. In addition, release time during which department heads can plan for departmental professional development and participate in whole school duties must also be provided.

In addition, districts need to rethink the “Duties as Assigned” tag that is attached to positions of responsibility. This phrase contributes to the ambiguous nature of the role. This tag needs to be removed, and positions need to be clearly outlined, negotiated, and revisited with individual department heads. This could become a part of the Teacher Performance Appraisal and embedded into yearly plans for department heads.

**Recommendations For Professional Bodies**

Teachers in Ontario are regulated by the Ontario College of Teachers (OCT), a professional body that was established in 1997 in part to regulate and govern the teaching profession. They have developed a clear set of standards of practice that ensures the
rights of all students in Ontario; they grant teaching certificates; and they accredit education programs. In addition, they provide guidelines for professional development for teachers. However, despite a new “Additional Qualification” course in mentoring and a new standard requiring teachers to demonstrate leadership in learning communities, there is a significant lack of interest on the part of the OCT in teacher leadership.

It would be meaningful for department heads and teachers to have the opportunity to learn about leadership, in specific education-related contexts and experiences. These learning opportunities could be guided by the experiences and research provided by the National College of School Leadership in the UK. This organization has been providing leadership support to teachers, leaders, and other interested professionals all over the UK. Their strategy for support of middle leadership would be one to explore and use to set expectations for professional development standards set by the OCT for department heads and teacher leaders. Henderson (2008) notes that there must be an alignment between teacher leadership and teacher learning. Therefore, professional development that is specific to the individual department head’s context and needs and that is supported by the administrators can facilitate a department head’s role as a teacher leader and should be implemented.

Recommendations and Implications for Theory and Research

Based on the research conducted with the 6 department heads, it is imperative to note that there is a disconnect between what department heads know and understand about their role and the construct of teacher leadership. Despite the fact that many department heads demonstrated aspects of teacher leadership, they are unfamiliar with the
language of teacher leadership. As a result, a bridge spanning teachers’ knowledge and experiences and what academia regards as teacher leadership needs to be developed.

In future studies, validity and reliability of the data would be increased through the triangulation of data. In particular, additional interviews with administrators and department heads’ colleagues would provide data that could allow for deeper exploration of the issues related to teacher leadership.

In addition, the data I gathered did not provide insight into the effects of the role on others. As a result, a more detailed and focused study examining the effect of department heads on others would provide a richer understanding of the effects of the role. Because of the ambiguous nature of the position and the variety of tasks that it encompasses, department heads require a voice to ensure that their concerns are heard.

As previously mentioned, particular interest remains in gauging teacher-leaders’ sense of self-efficacy. There exists literature about teacher efficacy (Ross & Bruce, 2007; Scribner, 1999), but nothing has explored the extent to which department heads feel confident in their own role as a teacher leader. This opens a new chapter in this area, which could focus on teacher leader efficacy. Further research should be conducted into the levels of teacher efficacy of department heads and how these change over time. More important, the concept of teacher leader efficacy needs to develop to properly capture the issues that are at hand for these individuals.

Last, this research did not encompass department heads who had left the position. As a result of the sampling method, many of the department heads in this research ran effective departments and were involved to some extent in school-wide decision-making processes. This leaves a gap in the study for those who struggle or leave the position of
responsibility. Their perceptions of the role would reveal insight into additional challenges.

Final Word/Conclusions

Department heads, for the most part, are teacher leaders. They exemplify how teacher leadership is a process that is pinned with a focus on student success and rooted in the classroom. With the construct of teacher leadership in place, along with the necessary supports and positive conditions, department heads can be empowered and feel entitled to lead. This chapter has discussed the construct of teacher leadership as it relates to secondary school department heads in suburban Ontario. Clarity has been provided by using constructivist inquiry, which illustrates how department heads view their leadership role as being rooted in the classroom and in teaching. Their role is multifaceted while including both managerial and leadership elements that assist them in supporting their colleagues. In turn, they are supported by their administration, their colleagues, and through their love of their work.

They are faced with numerous obstacles, which include role ambiguity and role confusion, the challenges that surface as a result of conflicts with colleagues, and feelings of powerlessness, frustration, and stress. To overcome these challenges, the department heads implement four key strategies, which include acting as a resource and providing resources to colleagues, distributing leadership, collaborating, and communicating effectively. Despite the best efforts of these teacher leaders and their colleagues, they still face the overarching issues of school culture or climate, district and provincial initiatives, lack of time, educational vision, and their own skill set.
Through the course of this study, I developed a deeper understanding of the departmental headship and its varying aspects of teacher leadership. I have given voice to a small collective of department heads and, as a result, have extended the existing body of literature. I have addressed the problems surrounding role ambiguity and role conflict along with the issues addressing the changes to the role over time. My placement in the study as the researcher exploring the leadership perceptions of secondary school department heads and as a former department head have been expanded, and I have been given the opportunity to reflect on my own experience and others’. In the future, the learnings from this study will not only be applied to my own leadership endeavours, but shared with those with whom I work.
References


Appendix A

Initial Questionnaire: Research Candidate Information Profile

Please complete the following Research Candidate Information Profile and submit it in the enclosed envelope to the head secretary at your school by June 30, 2008. Thank you for your participation.

Please identify the following:

1. Gender
   - ☐ male
   - ☐ female

2. Age
   - ☐ 25 - 29
   - ☐ 30 - 39
   - ☐ 40 - 49
   - ☐ 50 - 59
   - ☐ 60 - 69

3. Do you identify yourself as a member of an ethnic community? ☐ Yes ☐ No

   If you answered yes to question 3, which community do you identify with?

4. Title of your position of responsibility (headship)

5. Number of years in the current role of department head

6. How many full-time teachers are in your department?

7. How many part-time teachers are in your department?

8. Where is your school located?

## Appendix B

### Research Participant Overview Chart

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Sanjay</th>
<th>Leonard</th>
<th>Arjit</th>
<th>Leoni</th>
<th>Carol</th>
<th>Anita</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
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<td>Male</td>
<td>Male</td>
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<td>Female</td>
<td>Female</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
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<td>South Asian</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
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<tr>
<td>Educational Background</td>
<td>B Sc, B Ed, M Ed</td>
<td>BA, B Ed, MA</td>
<td>BA, B Ed</td>
<td>BA, B Ed</td>
<td>B Ph, B Ed</td>
<td>BA, B Ed, MSci</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teaching Experience</td>
<td>Less than 10</td>
<td>Less than 15</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20+</td>
<td>25+</td>
<td>Less than 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DH Experience</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Area of responsibility</td>
<td>Assessment &amp; Evaluation, ESL &amp; Spec Ed</td>
<td>Arts &amp; Technology</td>
<td>Social Science Curriculum Head</td>
<td>Technology &amp; Business &amp; Careers</td>
<td>Family Studies &amp; Health &amp; Physical Education</td>
<td>Science</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of School</td>
<td>Vocational</td>
<td>Academic</td>
<td>Collegiate</td>
<td>Collegiate</td>
<td>Academic</td>
<td>Academic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department Members</td>
<td>10 full time, 4 part time</td>
<td>11 full time, 2 part time</td>
<td>16 full time staff</td>
<td>12 full time</td>
<td>6 full time</td>
<td>11 full time, 4 part time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix C

Interview Guide

The following is a list of questions that guided the interview.

1. How do department heads perceive their leadership role?
   a. How do you define your role?
   b. What are your responsibilities? Have your responsibilities changed during your time as department head? If yes, how?
   c. What is a teacher leader?
   d. Do you see yourself as a teacher leader? Please explain.

2. What factors do department heads perceive as facilitating or hindering their leadership role?
   a. What are the primary supports in your role?
   b. What are the barriers or obstacles to your role?
   c. What are some of the leadership challenges that you experience?

3. How do department heads negotiate these leadership challenges?
   a. What strategies or tactics do you use to overcome challenges?
DATE: July 30, 2008
FROM: Michelle McGinn, Chair
       Research Ethics Board (REB)
TO: Dr. Denise Armstrong, Education
    Kristen A Clarke
FILE: 07-332 ARMSTRONG/CLARKE
TITLE: Department Heads as Teacher Leaders

The Brock University Research Ethics Board has reviewed the above research proposal.

DECISION: Accepted as Clarified (with note)

Please Note:
- Remove the statement that says that names will not be included or in any way associated with data collected.

This project has received ethics clearance for the period of July 30, 2008 to January 30, 2009 subject to full REB ratification at the Research Ethics Board's next scheduled meeting. The clearance period may be extended upon request. The study may now proceed.

Please note that the Research Ethics Board (REB) requires that you adhere to the protocol as last reviewed and cleared by the REB. During the course of research no deviations from, or changes to, the protocol, recruitment, or consent form may be initiated without prior written clearance from the REB. The Board must provide clearance for any modifications before they can be implemented. If you wish to modify your research project, please refer to http://www.brocku.ca/researchservices/forms to complete the appropriate form Revision or Modification to an Ongoing Application.

Adverse or unexpected events must be reported to the REB as soon as possible with an indication of how these events affect, in the view of the Principal Investigator, the safety of the participants and the continuation of the protocol.

If research participants are in the care of a health facility, at a school, or other institution or community organization, it is the responsibility of the Principal Investigator to ensure that the ethical guidelines and clearance of those facilities or institutions are obtained and filed with the REB prior to the initiation of any research protocols.

The Tri-Council Policy Statement requires that ongoing research be monitored. A Final Report is required for all projects upon completion of the project. Researchers with projects lasting more than one year are required to submit a Continuing Review Report annually. The Office of Research Services will contact you when this form Continuing Review/Final Report is required.

Please quote your REB file number on all future correspondence.

MM/kw