

Running head: "THEY SPEAK THE SAME LANGUAGE AS ME!" THE IMPACT OF
AFFORDANCES ON THE IDENTITIES OF TEACHERS OF DIVERSE LEARNERS

"They Speak the Same Language as Me!"

The Impact of Affordances on the Identities of Teacher Leaders of Diverse Learners

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Leadership and Learning in Organizations: Capstone

“They Speak the Same Language as Me!”

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Executive Summary

This project examines the Diverse Learners Cooperative, a small, non-profit organization in Nashville, TN that works with school districts, schools, and teachers to help them support their exceptional education (EE) and English learner (EL) students. One of the DLC’s organizational aims is to create a community of EE and EL teachers from different schools, including both charter and traditional public schools, through professional learning experiences designed to meet the needs of this specific subgroup of educators.

In my initial meeting with the DLC’s founder, she described how EE and EL teachers often feel isolated in their schools because they are either the only one or one of a few educators teaching this specialized subject and group of students. As a result, they tend to have less access to necessary resources and collaborative opportunities as well as professional learning specific to their needs. She believes that this feeling of isolation is a key factor that leads to higher rates of frustration and burnout for teachers of diverse learners. The DLC, therefore, is interested in understanding how its work can impact the retention of EE and EL teachers. The DLC leaders had developed a theory of change in which they hypothesized that if the DLC invests in teachers by connecting them to meaningful professional development opportunities and to others engaged in similar work, the teachers will remain longer in the field of teaching diverse learners (B. Allen, personal communication, December 7, 2019).

One way the DLC intentionally connects teachers and strengthen their identities as teachers of diverse learners is through their annual Teacher Leader Fellowship. The purpose of the Fellowship is “to increase the success of diverse learners by empowering and equipping teacher leaders to lead change within their classrooms and schools” with a focus on “equitable access to instruction for diverse learners” (“DLC Teacher Leader Fellowship,” 2021). During

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their year in the Fellowship, the participating teachers engage in professional learning on subjects related to instructing diverse learners and cultivating leadership skills. They receive regular, 1:1 support from a DLC coach and visit their peers at different schools to share their expertise. Fellows are expected to collaborate with leaders at their school sites to design an Impact Project, which involves identifying an issue around serving diverse learners through a needs-assessment and leading the implementation of a research-based solution. However, the closing of schools in this district in March of 2020 disrupted many of these practices, including peer observations and the Impact Projects.

Because 2019-2020 was the pilot year of the Teacher Leader Fellowship, the DLC leaders want to determine what the Fellows were learning and what aspects of the Fellowship supported that learning. They want a way to examine the effectiveness of the different features of the Fellowship. With the leaders’ questions in mind, I developed an investigation with the purpose of determining what about the Fellowship makes it a transformational experience for those who participate in it. The DLC hopes to draw on such evidence to market the Fellowship to more schools across Nashville and even the state of Tennessee in order to recruit and develop more teacher leaders. The leaders of the DLC believe that fostering a strong community of EE and EL teachers is beneficial for developing teachers’ pride in their work and will help build their confidence as both teachers and advocates for diverse learners. They hope that this strengthening of the teachers’ identities as teachers of diverse learners results in the teachers’ desires to remain in teaching and continue working with this population of students. The purpose of this study is to examine how the Teacher Leader Fellowship contributes to the development of the fellows’ identities as teacher leaders who serve diverse learners.

Given that the goals of the Teacher Leader Fellowship are to deepen the teachers’ commitments to their roles as EE or EL teachers and broaden teacher networks amongst such

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teachers, this study uses identity as an analytic tool to study the Fellows’ participation in the Teacher Leader Fellowship. I draw on Hand and Gresalfi’s (2015) framework, which defines identity as “one’s participation in and across activities and the sense one makes of oneself in relation to these activities” (p. 191). Therefore, the unit of analysis focuses on activity, context, and what individuals do with the resources they are given. Identity develops as a “joint accomplishment” (Hand and Gresalfi, 2015), meaning that individuals act in relation to the affordances that are available to them in the context. Affordances are interactional elements of an activity system that people draw on as they participate in the practices of particular communities, which include (but are not limited to) resources, tools, and relationships (Greeno and Gresalfi, 2008). Individuals’ identities shift across contexts and within different activities based on the affordances available to them (Hand and Gresalfi, 2015).

Drawing on preliminary interviews, documents, and literature relevant to the development of the Fellows’ identities, I crafted three research questions:

1. What practices characterize teacher leaders who serve diverse learners, according to the Fellows and DLC staff?
2. In what ways does the Fellowship provide affordances for the Fellows to become teacher leaders who serve diverse learners?
3. How does participating in the Teacher Leader Fellowship influence the fellows’ identities as teacher leaders who serve diverse learners?

Finding 1: The kind of teacher leader that the Fellowship aspires to develop is one who takes an inquiry stance, seeks to self-improve, and values exchanging ideas and resources with other educators rather than working in isolation. Teachers engage in formal components of the Fellowship such as the Impact Project, coaching, and networking with the hopes that the

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embedded practices within each component will transfer back to their work as teacher leaders within their own schools.

Finding 2: The Fellowship supports the development of teacher leaders through three categories of affordances: institutional affordances, resource affordances, and interactional affordances. The intentional planning and design of professional development, coaching, and learning tasks afford the fellows the opportunity to become ideal teacher leaders of diverse learners.

Institutional Affordances. The Fellowship fosters the development of teacher leaders of diverse learners through institutional affordances that provide Fellows the opportunity to participate more fully in professional learning, exchange ideas with other educators of diverse learners, and utilize a variety of resources that are not necessarily present in their school buildings. Some of the institutional affordances that the Fellowship provides include the availability of and introduction to a wide variety of instructional resources, the collection of a targeted group of educators who serve EE and EL students, and the design of the physical space in which the Fellows met.

Artifactual Affordances. In addition to institutional affordances, the DLC also supports the development of teacher leaders of diverse learners through artifactual affordances. The DLC provides artifactual affordances through the design of purposeful tasks and shared resources. Some of the artifactual affordances the DLC provide include books and research articles, structures and templates for data analyses and the impact projects, lesson plan templates, and questions to guide self-reflection during coaching cycles. The DLC leaders rarely provide artifactual affordances in isolation but rather deliberately pair them with interactional affordances, such as a structure for discussion or a group task. These artifactual affordances provide Fellows the opportunity to further their own learning as well as deepen their understanding of new knowledge by sharing insights with one another.

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Interactional Affordances. Finally, the Fellowship promotes the development of teacher leaders through interactional affordances. The DLC leaders intentionally design structures to encourage interaction among the Fellows, and these structures afford the Fellows the opportunity to build and strengthen their professional networks. Some of the ways the DLC leaders provide these interactional affordances is by assigning where Fellows sit during meetings and creating structures and protocols for group tasks. These affordances encourage Fellows to work together, resulting in the strengthening and expansion of their professional networks.

Finding 3: Most of the Fellows discussed how participating in the Teacher Leader Fellowship supported their development as both teacher leaders within their school and community. As a result of designing and implementing the Impact Projects, Fellows reported identifying more as advocates for their students than they had prior to the Fellowship. They described having more confidence speaking with administrators and other leaders in their schools and having a deeper understanding of their role as an agent of change.

Recommendation

Recommendation: Design a Teacher Leader Fellowship alumni group in order to promote interaction among Fellows beyond the eleven months in the Fellowship.

While Fellows reported high levels of engagement and participation throughout their time in the Fellowship, there is currently no guarantee that the momentum will continue once the Fellowship ends. Creating a Teacher Leader Fellowship alumni group would foster ongoing interaction among members of the current cohort. If the DLC facilitates interaction beyond the term of the Fellowship, then there will be sustained opportunities for the Fellows to seek advice from one another, share knowledge, problem-solve, and give and receive feedback on instructional and leadership practices. Additionally, if Fellows continue to interact with one

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another after the end of the Fellowship, then the effects of the Fellowship will be maintained, and the Fellows will be less likely to return to feeling isolated and teaching in a silo.

Introduction and Organization Overview

In this capstone project, I partnered with the Diverse Learners Cooperative (DLC). The DLC is a small, non-profit organization in Nashville, TN that works with school districts, schools, and teachers to help them support their exceptional education (EE) and English learner (EL) students. The DLC’s founder, Brooke Allen, taught exceptional education at both charter and traditional public schools in Nashville, TN for seven years. When I asked her about her motivations to create the DLC, she mentioned how, as an EE teacher, she felt isolated because she was either the only one or one of a few teachers who taught EE at the schools where she worked. She explained that professional development sessions never felt relevant for her context, and she had few peers with which to collaborate.

Brooke’s experiences are not unique and mirror those of many exceptional educators across the United States. For nearly thirty years, EE teachers have been leaving the teaching profession at a significantly higher rate than their general education peers (Nichols et al., 2008). Additionally, EL teachers are in short supply across the nation (Sutcher, et al., 2016). Both EE and EL teachers report similar reasons for leaving the profession, including feelings of isolation in the workplace (Ernst-Slavit and Wenger, 2006; Liggett, 2010; McOuat, 2008), lack of professional learning opportunities targeted to their context, and insufficient or non-existent time to collaborate with their peers (Sheldrake, 2013; Stempien and Loeb, 2002).

Brooke founded the DLC in 2018 with the purpose of creating networks for teachers of diverse learners and offering specialized professional learning opportunities for them. Brooke defines “diverse learners” as EE and EL students, two subgroups with more unique needs than

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the general population of students. The DLC partners with school districts, schools, and individual teachers to improve outcomes for diverse learners. Services include facilitating professional development and training sessions, coaching and mentoring EE and EL teachers, and consulting with school leaders and teams regarding how to best support *all* learners. Their mission statement is, “The Diverse Learners Cooperative exists to create purposeful networks of educators, providing them with high quality resources and collaborative learning experiences that increase best practices for diverse learners and teacher retention (“Our Vision,” 2021). The DLC is unique in that it connects EE and EL teachers from different schools, including both charter and traditional public schools in the Nashville area.

One of the ways the DLC intentionally connects teachers is through their annual Teacher Leader Fellowship. The stated purpose of the Fellowship is to “increase the success of diverse learners by empowering and equipping teacher leaders to lead change within their classrooms and schools” (“DLC Teacher Leader Fellowship,” 2021). A major focus of the Fellowship is around advocacy to increase the access to equitable and rigorous instruction for *all* learners. The Fellows begin meeting in July, one month before school begins, and in a typical year, meet until May when school ends. However, due to COVID-19, the 2019-2020 cohort stopped meeting in person in March 2020 and met via Zoom until the end of the school year. Throughout their time together, the Fellows engage in professional development on subjects related to instructing diverse learners and cultivating leadership skills. Some of the formal components of the Fellowship include regular, 1:1 support from a DLC coach, peer observations at different schools, and book studies on relevant literature. Fellows collaborate with leaders at their school sites to design an Impact Project in which they identify an issue around serving diverse learners through a needs-assessment and lead the implementation of a research-based solution.

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The DLC leaders want to know if their work helps teachers feel more prepared and confident in their abilities to teach diverse learners and if so, how their services might contribute to the retention of EE and EL teachers. By retention, they mean staying within the field of exceptional education or teaching English learners. They are more concerned with teachers staying in the field of working with diverse populations rather than only staying at their current schools in a different role.

The purpose of this capstone project is to determine the practices that characterize an ideal teacher leader of diverse learners and then examine what affordances the DLC provides that support the development of teacher leaders. The hope is that engaging teachers in these practices increases their likelihood of staying in the profession of teaching diverse learners by confirming their identity as effective teachers and leaders in their schools. This research is important for the DLC because it will inform their decisions in what to keep or change about the Fellowship in upcoming years. The findings will also help the DLC market to potential partners both in Nashville and across Tennessee as the leaders will be able to share evidence of the effectiveness of the Teacher Leader Fellowship and its impact on developing teacher leaders of diverse learners.

Review of Literature

Because the DLC leaders are interested in determining how their services might contribute to the retention of EE and EL teachers, I first reviewed literature that focused on the reasons teachers of diverse learners were leaving the teaching profession. After investigating relevant literature on the reasons for this national retention trend of EE and EL teachers, I turned to literature on interventions intended to increase the retention of this subgroup of teachers.

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Analyzing why EE and EL teachers leave the profession as well as what contributes to their likelihood of staying helped inform my conceptual framework and research design.

There is a national shortage of special education teachers, especially in urban schools in high-poverty areas (Levin, Berg- Jacobsen, Atchinson, Lee, & Vontsolos, 2015). As of 2016, 48 states in the U.S. reported shortages of special educators (Sutcher, et al., 2016). Compared to general educators, special educators have been leaving the profession at a higher rate since the 1980s (Nichols et al., 2008). Because special educators provide services that are required by law to students with exceptional needs, this national shortage results in about one million U.S. exceptional-needs students receiving their services from teachers without adequate training or receiving no services at all (Tyler and Brunner, 2014).

Several factors lead EE teachers to leave the profession altogether or switch to teaching students in the general education setting. These contributing factors include high caseloads, overburdening job responsibilities, and lack of time to collaborate with others (Sheldrake, 2013). Stempien and Loeb (2002) found that special education teachers were significantly more dissatisfied with their job than their general educator peers due to high stress and frustration caused by role ambiguity, unmanageable amounts of paperwork, lack of planning time and collaboration with other teachers, and finding teaching to be less rewarding than their peers who taught general education. In addition, special education teachers are often isolated, leading to a social capital deficit (McOuat, 2008).

Special education teachers are not the only ones in short supply. There is also a national shortage of teachers of English learners (Sutcher, et al., 2016). This problem is exacerbated by the fact that English learners are the fastest-growing group of students in the U.S. (NCELA, 2006). EL teachers have been found to leave the profession for similar reasons as EE teachers. Several studies have found that teachers of English learners are often isolated both physically

“They Speak the Same Language as Me!” and socially in the workplace (Ernst-Slavit and Wenger, 2006; Liggett, 2010). While EL teachers are knowledgeable in teaching language skills, they may not always be proficient in specific content areas they are asked to teach or co-teach. This lack of training and content-specific expertise can lead to lower professional status at school that socially isolates EL teachers and creates a non-collaborative culture (Nordmeyer, 2008).

Though there are high attrition rates among teachers of diverse learners, many studies have offered evidence to inform how to better retain these teachers. Cullen and Frederiks (2018) found that relationships with other teachers, students, and colleagues were vitally important to increasing job satisfaction among special education teachers, along with a feeling of making a difference. Four factors have been found to increase the retention of special education teachers, including reducing the stress of the job and increasing teachers’ self-efficacy, offering professional development tailored to special educators, cultivating positive collegial relationships, and providing teachers with choice in order to foster creativity (Stempien and Loeb, 2007). In addition, confirmation in their professional role identities can positively influence teachers’ desires to stay in the field. Rodriguez (2013) explains that teachers develop their identities by combining prior experiences with new knowledge. Identity affirmation is linked to EL teacher retention as engaging EL teachers in self-reflective tasks helps them make these connections between new learning and their personal histories explicit (Rodriguez, 2013). Schutz and others (2007) conceptualize identity consisting of teachers’ self-perceptions about who they are as teachers and what they do in front of their students. These identities shift continuously as teachers learn more about themselves and their profession.

While research on the identities of EL teachers is developing, most of it centers around those who are new to teaching without exploring the identities of experienced teachers (Farrell, 2011). This research is necessary because “Without question, English language teachers will

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Conceptual Framework

Given the emphasis on identity in studies on teacher retention, my study uses participatory identity (Hand and Gresalfi, 2015) as an analytic tool to study the fellows’ learning as they engage in the Teacher Leader Fellowship. Hand and Gresalfi draw from Wenger’s (1998) framework, which explains how identity and learning are inextricably linked. In this framing, learning is a type of participation in particular practices of a community, and identity is co-constructed through participation in these practices. Hand and Gresalfi explicitly define identity as “one’s participation in and across activities and the sense one makes of oneself in relation to these activities” (p. 191). “Activity,” in this conceptualization, refers to the environment or context. The unit of analysis focuses on the context and what individuals do with the resources they are given within that context. Hand and Gresalfi’s framework conceptualizes identity as a joint accomplishment rather than a fixed, intrinsic phenomenon common in psychology literature and popular discourse. In a community of practice, individuals act in relation to the affordances that are available to them in context. Gibson (1979) first used the term “affordance” to signify an opportunity for an individual to take an action in a specific context.

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Figure 1: Identity as a “Joint Accomplishment”



For example, in a study of two algebra classes taught by two different teachers, learners’ identities shifted in relation to the context in which they were placed as a result of the opportunities available to them in each space (Gresalfi, 2004, as cited in Hand and Gresalfi, 2015). One teacher provided her students with affordances for collaboration and placed the responsibility of understanding the mathematical concepts on the students. The other teacher did not provide many affordances for peer-to-peer interaction and placed the responsibility upon herself for her students’ comprehension of mathematical concepts. The studied student in the class that provided affordances for collaboration gradually took on behaviors that allowed him to make connections across mathematical concepts while a similar student in the other class did not take on these behaviors which aligned more closely with higher-performing math students.

As Gresalfi’s study illustrates, identity is a joint accomplishment because people only act in relation to the opportunities that are available to them in certain environments. These opportunities may include interacting with objects or tools, interacting with other individuals, or interacting with the environment itself. People co-construct their identities as they reflect and

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Given that the DLC was founded in order to create a generative context for teachers of diverse learners to grow as teacher leaders, a conception of situated identity helped me align the complexity of the goals of the organization with the design of this investigation. Many of the participating Fellows were either the only one or one of a few teachers in their school settings that taught exceptional education or a sheltered class of English learners. Using this framework helps highlight what affordances are available through the Teacher Leader Fellowship, how the Fellows act on these affordances, and the effects of doing so on their identities.

Research Questions

In my initial interview with Brooke, we discussed the purpose of the Teacher Leader Fellowship and her vision for its growth. Because the Fellowship was in its pilot year, the DLC was interested in ways to measure its effectiveness and be able to market it for future cohorts. They were already using quantitative tools (post-session surveys) to measure the Fellows’ perceived learning and growth but wanted to be able to show the effects of participation in the Fellowship in other ways.

The reviewed literature pointed to how strengthening the identity of EE and EL teachers has a positive impact on their decisions to remain in the field of teaching these special populations of students. Drawing on preliminary interviews, documents, and literature relevant to the development of the Fellows’ identities, I crafted three research questions:

1. What practices characterize teacher leaders who serve diverse learners, according to the Fellows and DLC staff?

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2. In what ways does the Fellowship provide affordances for the Fellows to become teacher leaders who serve diverse learners?
3. How does participating in the Teacher Leader Fellowship influence the fellows’ identities as teacher leaders who serve diverse learners?

Data Collection

The 2019-2020 Teacher Leader Fellowship cohort included twenty-one Fellows from seven charter schools and nine traditional public schools. There were eight EL teachers, eight EE teachers, and five support coordinators. Collectively, their teaching experience ranged from three to thirty years.

Originally, I planned on attending the professional learning days that the DLC provided throughout the year. Based on the conceptual framework and using identity as a joint accomplishment, I wanted to observe how the Fellows took advantage of different affordances and use these observations to create follow-up interviews with individual Fellows. However, the DLC decided to postpone the 2020-2021 cohort due to the outbreak of COVID-19. Due to this change, I decided to conduct qualitative data collection through semi-structured interviews with the 2019-2020 Teacher Leader Fellowship cohort. Through the interviews, I wanted to determine what affordances the DLC provided through the Teacher Leader Fellowship, in what ways the Fellows took advantage of those affordances, and ultimately discover what acting on those affordances allowed the Fellows to do and become.

To find answers, I designed interview questions that focused on the tasks in which the Fellows engaged. I drew on Brenner’s (2005) design questions that could generate rich discussion and an understanding of the Fellows’ lived experiences. I asked the Fellows about what activities they remembered doing and what was valuable to them from engaging in those

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practices. I asked questions that explored their interpretation of the context as well, including questions about why being with their specific cohort was valuable and why being outside of their own school environment was beneficial. Table 1 outlines how I aligned the interview questions with the research questions. With each participant response, I used probes and follow-ups as a way to deepen my understanding of their answers, pressing beyond surface level answers and into their explanations for why they answered in the ways that they did (Brenner, 2005).

Table 1: Aligned Interview Questions

Research Question	Aligned Interview Questions (for Fellows)	Aligned Interview Questions (for DLC leaders)
1. What practices characterize teacher leaders of diverse learners?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why did you apply to be a teacher leader fellow? • What did you hope to gain from the Fellowship experience? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How would you describe an ideal teacher leader of diverse learners?
2. In what ways does the Fellowship provide affordances for the Fellows to become teacher leaders of diverse learners?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What kinds of activities did you do when you met as a Teacher Leader Fellowship? • What activities did you look forward to the most? • What was it about this specific collection of people that created value for you? • How did what you learned in the fellowship compare to what you learned in Professional Development offered by your school or the district? • How did your level of participation in the fellowship compare to your participation in Professional Development offered by your school or the district? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How did you foster the development of teacher leaders of diverse learners? • What factors did you consider as you designed the tasks for the Fellowship?
3. How does participation in the Teacher Leader Fellowship influence the fellows' identities as teachers of diverse learners?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why did you apply to be a Teacher Leader Fellow? • Which activities from the fellowship did you find most transformational and why? • How did your teaching practice change because of the DLC fellowship? • How did the way you see yourself as a teacher or leader change as a result of the fellowship? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do you think the Fellows changed as a result of their participation in the Teacher Leader Fellowship?

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Interviews took place from September to December in 2020. In order to avoid interviewees talking over each other or possibly feeling pressured to agree with others in a group, I decided to interview each Fellow individually. I contacted all of the Fellows via email to introduce myself and request a time to interview them virtually through Zoom. Of the twenty-one Fellows, fifteen scheduled and completed an interview. The remaining six Fellows did not respond. No Fellows declined interviews.

After interviewing the Fellows, I interviewed the three leaders of the DLC to get a deeper understanding of how they designed the learning tasks and with what purpose. I designed this protocol with similar goals to the teacher leader protocol in mind but particularly prioritized how they intentionally created the learning environment and how they structured the practices in ways that promoted interaction among the Fellows. I hoped these answers would provide more context and help determine which practices helped the DLC meet its goals of fostering a learning network of teachers of diverse learners.

Before beginning each interview, I read the interviewee a script stating that they could request to end the interview at any time and did not have to participate. I requested verbal permission to record both audio and video from the Zoom interview before beginning the recordings.

Data Analysis

I used an online auto-transcription service called Otter AI to transcribe the audio from the interviews. I followed a basic thematic coding strategy that began with an initial pass and inductive analytic memo before proceeding to inductive coding of interview transcripts (Merriam, 1998). I conducted a first pass at the interview data by cleaning each auto-transcript. I then drafted an analytic memo for each transcript in which I summarized what the Fellow shared,

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noted terms that I thought were potentially important, and identified particular quotations that I found insightful for responding to the research questions. From these analytic memos, I identified practices that the Fellows and DLC leaders projected characterize teacher leaders as well as which affordances supported those practices.

Hand and Gresalfi’s (2015) conceptual framework does not prescribe types of affordances, so I used a constant comparative method of inductive coding (Merriam, 1998) in which I sorted the Fellows’ statements into categories based on similarities. I looked for instances where the Fellows described interacting with available tools. At the beginning of the analysis, I looked mainly at mentions of physical objects as tools. Yet, through the constant comparative method, I quickly realized that Fellows were interacting with more than physical objects. For example, many of the Fellows I interviewed mentioned the significance of reading a book (interacting with a physical object) as part of the Fellowship but continued by explaining how helpful it was to discuss the book with the other Fellows (interacting with other individuals).

Three salient types of affordances emerged out of this process, including institutional affordances, artifactual affordances, and interactional affordances. I designed a codebook to categorize the different types of affordances (see Appendix A). I used the code of institutional affordance for remarks around how the context of the Teacher Leader Fellowship provided opportunities for the Fellows to participate in the community of practice. The context included the physical space where the Fellows met and the specific collection of people who were present when the Fellows met together. I categorized statements describing interactions with physical objects or learning tools as artifactual affordances. Lastly, I used interactional affordances to distinguish remarks regarding learning through interactions with other individuals.

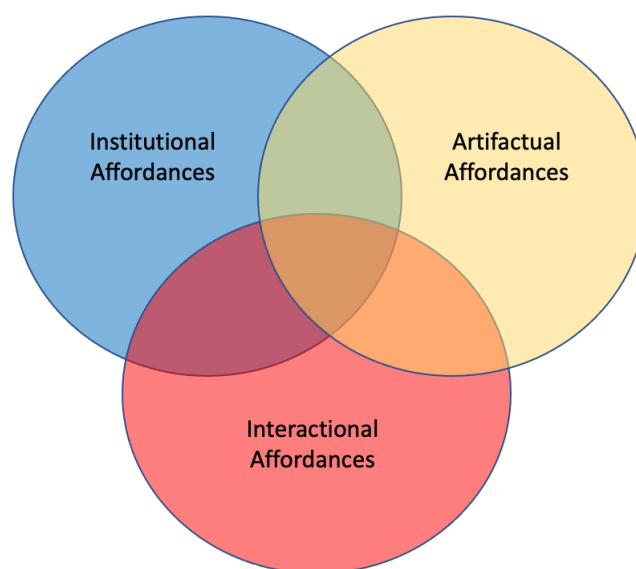
Throughout the constant comparative process, I found the need to double-code some statements because they could be sorted into two categories. For example, a remark about

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analyzing student data with other Fellows fell into both artifactual affordances (the data analysis tool) and interactional affordances (debriefing the data through discussion with other Fellows).

The process of constructing categories and coding according to those categories helped me visualize how the three affordances, though different, overlapped, as depicted in the figure below:

Figure 2: Overlapping Affordances



Findings

Research Question 1

What practices characterize teacher leaders who serve diverse learners, according to the Fellows and DLC staff?

Finding 1

The kind of teacher leader that the Fellowship aspires to develop is one who takes an inquiry stance, seeks to self-improve, and values exchanging ideas and resources with other educators rather than working in isolation. Teachers engage in formal components of the Fellowship such as the Impact Project, coaching, and networking with the hopes that the embedded practices within each component will transfer back to their work as teacher leaders within their own schools.

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The DLC’s website describes the characteristic practices of a strong candidate for the Teacher Leader Fellowship. The description states that strong candidates “Have a curiosity or awareness of gaps in opportunities for diverse learners in their schools and a desire to lead change that directly and positively impacts these learners” (“DLC Teacher Leader Fellowship,” 2021). One of the aims of the Fellowship is to develop teacher leaders who take an inquiry stance. Teachers take an inquiry stance when they create new knowledge by asking questions about problems they face in their work and pursuing theorized solutions to these problems (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1999). This practice involves careful observation of the current reality, interpreting barriers that are obstructing the realization of a goal, and responding to these problems in order to generate a new understanding that leads to effective change within their buildings.

Another practice that marks a strong candidate for the Teacher Leader Fellowship is working to improve communication skills with community stakeholders, including school leadership, parents, and other educators in the school in order to affect change for the EE and EL students the school serves (“DLC Teacher Leader Fellowship,” 2021). An ideal teacher leader understands the impact that working together with stakeholders has on leading change and communicates effectively with these stakeholders.

A central piece of the Fellowship that supports the development of a teacher leader who takes an inquiry stance and works effectively with community stakeholders is the design and implementation of the Impact Project. As Fellows work on this project, they engage in a set of practices that help them make taking an inquiry stance a habit. In the first sessions during the summer of 2019, the Fellows brainstormed a problem they faced in their school setting relating to that year’s focus, which was on how to provide EE and EL students with equitable access to Tier 1 instruction, or grade-level curriculum. This step served to give them practice observing

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and describing current challenges around obtaining an instructional aim. Fellows then conducted a needs assessment in the early fall to determine barriers for diverse learners accessing high-quality, grade-level curriculum and what the root causes of these barriers were. Through this practice, they gained experience interpreting and theorizing problems.

Conducting the needs assessment and root cause analysis required ongoing communication and meetings with administrators and other stakeholders, and this collaboration continued as they researched possible interventions to remove barriers that led to poor outcomes for diverse learners. Once they determined the barriers and gathered research on possible solutions, the Fellows created a plan for how to implement interventions within the context of their school. This plan included ongoing data collection and analysis so that Fellows and other school leaders could measure the effectiveness of the project. As they completed the Impact projects, Fellows wrote about their findings and their reflections, which were then published and made accessible to the general public in the Teacher Leader Fellowship Report on the DLC’s website. The Fellows planned to present their projects and findings in person to one another, school leaders, and community stakeholders at an End of Year Expo. However, due to COVID-19, the Expo became a virtual event in which Fellows presented to a slightly smaller audience of their school leadership and other stakeholders and did not include other Fellows. The collaborative practices embedded within the Impact Project served to sharpen the Fellows’ skills and confidence engaging with stakeholders to produce effective change for the EE and EL students they serve. The formal presentation of their projects helped develop the Fellows as teacher leaders who value sharing new knowledge and understandings with their school communities.

An additional characteristic practice of the kind of teacher leader the Fellowship aims to develop is seeking self-improvement and regularly reflecting on one’s work. Ideal teacher

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leaders actively seek feedback from those with whom they have built trusting relationships, and they respond to this feedback rather than becoming defensive or maintaining the status quo. One Fellow mentioned that he applied for the Teacher Leader Fellowship because he is a self-proclaimed “lifelong learner” who strives to be the best teacher he can be for his students. An important component of the Fellowship that fostered growth for the participants in this area of self-improvement and continuous learning was the one-on-one coaching. This coaching occurred at a minimum of once per quarter, but Fellows were able to request coaching more often. Fellows worked with a coach from the DLC leadership who was an expert in their specific field (either EE or EL) with prior teaching experience in that area. The coach and the Fellow began coaching cycles by agreeing on a date and time for the coach to observe a class and provide feedback. Feedback usually focused on instruction, the Fellow’s Impact Project, or a combination of the two but always began by the Fellows stating a specific area in which they wanted support. The coaches focused their feedback on those pre-determined areas of need. This practice aimed to develop teacher leaders who set explicit and measurable instructional goals, seek feedback from others around progress made towards these goals, and engage in self-reflective behaviors.

Finally, ideal teacher leaders connect with other educators across schools to share resources and ideas. They work together rather than in isolation and understand the significance of networking in their professional lives. The Fellows initially connected with one another during the in-person meetings and professional development sessions. The Fellows continued networking with one another outside of the formal meetings of the Fellowship through phone calls, video calls, text messages, and emails in order to exchange challenges they were facing and brainstorming solutions together. One veteran teacher discussed how she connected with a younger Fellow who worked in a different school and often called him when she needed technology support. They developed a strong, collegial relationship over the course of the

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Fellowship and found that even though they worked in very different contexts, they faced similar issues and benefitted from brainstorming solutions together.

Additionally, Fellows connected with the DLC leaders and the guest speakers who presented at their sessions. One Fellow explained how he saved resources that the DLC leaders disseminated weekly through an email newsletter, and now he often shares these resources with other teachers at his school. While no Fellow mentioned reaching out to guest speakers outside of the sessions, one talked about how she feels that she has connections now at local universities and non-profits and feels that she can contact the guest speakers through email as needed. Introducing the Fellows to EE and EL teachers and leaders in the broader Nashville community served to expand the teacher leaders’ networks because an ideal teacher leader reaches out beyond his own school to seek best practices.

Research Question 2

In what ways does the Fellowship provide affordances for the Fellows to become teacher leaders who serve diverse learners?

Finding 2

The Fellowship supports the development of teacher leaders through three categories of affordances: institutional affordances, artifactual affordances, and interactional affordances. Intentional planning of professional development, coaching, and learning tasks afford the fellows the opportunity to become ideal teacher leaders.

Institutional Affordances

The Fellowship fosters the development of teacher leaders of diverse learners through institutional affordances that provided Fellows the opportunity to participate more fully in professional learning, exchange ideas with other educators of diverse learners, and utilize a variety of resources that are not necessarily present in their school buildings. In this paper,

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institutional affordances refer to those affordances provided by the context itself; the Fellows act on the available affordances in different ways because of the context in which they are situated. Some of the institutional affordances that the Fellowship provides include the availability of and introduction to a wide variety of instructional resources, the collection of a targeted group of educators who serve EE and EL students, and the design of the physical space in which the Fellows met.

Many Fellows applied to the Teacher Leader Fellowship because their schools did not have the resources to be able to support them. One Fellow shared, “I was the only EL resource teacher for kindergarten through eighth grade. So I knew I really wasn't going to be able to find someone at school that was specifically, you know, focused on what I was doing, because no one else was doing it...there was no one at school that I could go to, for exactly what I was working on.” A common theme was that schools struggle to provide affordances that EE and EL teachers can act on because these educators teach specialized populations. As a result, there are fewer EE and EL teachers, especially in schools with limited numbers of EE and EL students. Some of the Fellows’ principals knew their schools were not supporting EE and EL teachers well and encouraged their teachers to join the Fellowship for this exact reason. Several Fellows expressed their awareness of how their school lacked support for their specialized areas of expertise, explaining that “There has not been like a professional learning community, there's not been, you know, an opportunity...to like build a network of people who do exceptional education in the same way that there, there is for contents.” In school-based or district-based professional development, most Fellows reported less participation and less motivation to engage with the learning tasks because the school or district did not design the tasks for a specific EE/EL audience. Instead, many school and district PDs focus on general education, meaning classes that are not targeted for a specific population of students. Fellows had to work to make the learning

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relevant to their content. Most Fellows did not blame their schools for this issue, knowing that “it is really hard to get something that feels really purposeful for everybody” in the context of a large staff teaching different subjects. In contrast, Fellows reported higher levels of participation, engagement, and motivation in the context of the Teacher Leader Fellowship because they were learning alongside others who teach specialized groups of students, and the PD topics and practices aligned with their specific content. One Fellow illustrated this point well, commenting that, “...being with teachers who, again, like had very similar roles as I did, like also made me want to participate more. Um, especially if it's like at our school a lot of times, you know, I just, I feel like it doesn't always feel super relevant to special ed teachers or, um, so I'm sort of sitting and listening—I'm sitting, and I participate where I can, but it doesn't feel as relevant right so I'm not like, really giving all my thoughts.” Being surrounded by other teachers of diverse learners brought the Fellows out of their isolation, which provided them with the affordance to share their experiences, resources, and ideas with one another.

One of the other limitations of the affordances that the Fellows’ school contexts provide is that teachers are in their own classrooms teaching throughout the day and are therefore unable to observe other teachers and connect with them to share ideas. A Fellow stated, “You're kind of siloed either in your own class or with your own groups. And you don't get out every day and kind of see everybody working in their own room.” The Fellowship meetings allowed the participants to be surrounded by others who could share knowledge and resources. Additionally, most of the Fellows were able to engage in peer observations with other Fellows to give and receive feedback on their teaching. In a typical school day, Fellows’ schedules do not allow for peer observations and feedback. When Fellows met formally, they used professional development leave and met for an entire school day. In this way, the schedule of the Fellowship

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meetings afforded them time, a precious commodity in education, to learn from one another’s teaching across different schools in the greater Nashville area.

Artifactual Affordances

In addition to institutional affordances, the DLC also supports the development of teacher leaders of diverse learners through artifactual affordances. Artifactual affordances refer to those affordances that physical objects, tools, and resources provide. The DLC provides artifactual affordances through the design of purposeful tasks and shared resources. Some of the artifactual affordances the DLC provide include books and research articles, structures and templates for data analyses and the impact projects, lesson plan templates, and questions to guide self-reflection during coaching cycles. The DLC leaders rarely provide artifactual affordances in isolation but rather deliberately pair them with interactional affordances, such as a structure for discussion or a group task. In other words, the artifacts acted as initiation points to interact with other Fellows or the DLC leaders. One Fellow described this overlap of affordances when she explained, “We had like a bag with different books that we had to read. And then there was engaging conversation the next day, about, you know, the materials.” While the books or articles provide affordances for the Fellows to self-teach and learn new strategies, the structures for discussion about the texts afford the Fellows opportunities to deepen their understanding of the texts by sharing insights with one another.

Of all of the tasks that the Fellows engage in, the most common one mentioned in the interviews as being the most influential was the Impact Project. The Impact Project is an ongoing project throughout the school year in which the Fellows identify a need related to EE or EL outcomes and work to create and test a solution for that need. It is a rigorous project in that it involves deep understanding of a problem and possible solutions through research and asks Fellows to meet and work with the leadership at their school sites to implement their ideas for

“They Speak the Same Language as Me!” change. At the conclusion of the school year, the Fellows present their projects and findings to their school leadership and other Fellows.

The design of the Impact Project provides Fellows with the opportunity to see how research-backed best practices actually look in their own classrooms. One Fellow expressed her revelation that “these research-based practices—like they work if we try them. Because sometimes you read, and you're like, ‘Oh yeah, it's supposed to be, supposed to be effective,’ but it's hard to actually just like get the ball rolling and implement it.” The DLC leaders guide the Fellows through this work, using a template they designed (see Appendix B). This template provides the Fellows with a structure to complete a full inquiry cycle, which affords them the capacity and accountability to enact change within their buildings. Many of the Fellows mentioned how they continue to employ this research-driven thinking this year. As one Fellow reflected on the work of the Impact Project, “I think it gave me like a mental muscle of how to observe my classroom with a lens of problem solving and thus a lens of advocacy.”

Upon analyzing the artifactual affordances, I noticed how they often overlap with institutional affordances. The context influences the type of task or tool with which the Fellows engage. In their school sites, the Fellows described how they lack access to resources and tools that promote their professional growth. One Fellow, in her reasoning for joining the Teacher Leader Fellowship, explained how she wanted to strengthen her teaching, “but I don't know what to do to make it better because I'm like kind of at the end of like, my resources here.” Other Fellows expressed how their school leadership lack the knowledge and experience of working with EE and EL students and therefore cannot offer as meaningful resources or tools as those available to them through working with the DLC. This lack of understanding results in less artifactual affordances available for Fellows to act on during school professional learning sessions in comparison with the sessions they attend as part of the Fellowship. As one Fellow

“They Speak the Same Language as Me!” explained, “It just made it so like there is something for it to stick to in your practice as opposed to like, oh, I’ll never open this book or get around to this because it’s so different from what I’m doing.”

Interactional Affordances

Finally, the Fellowship promotes the development of teacher leaders through interactional affordances. Interactional affordances refer to those affordances that cooperating and working with other individuals provides. The DLC leaders intentionally design structures to encourage interaction among the Fellows, and these structures afford the Fellows the opportunity to build and strengthen their professional networks. One of the ways the DLC leaders provide these interactional affordances is by assigning where Fellows sit during meetings. The DLC leaders assign seats depending on the purpose of the PD or meetings so that sometimes EL and EE teachers sit separately while other times EL and EE teachers sit in mixed groups. They sometimes group Fellows from the same school together while separating them at other times. These assigned groups encourage Fellows to act on the provided interactional affordances, leading to an expanded network of teacher leaders of diverse learners.

Most of the Fellows expressed how helpful it was to be surrounded by other teachers with similar background knowledge and experiences. Because the Fellowship is a collection of teachers of diverse learners, the participants form bonds and networking alliances quickly. As one Fellow explained, “They speak the same language as me... because we are educators in special education and ELs, I feel like, you know, we get each other... it’s kind of it’s like a comradery because of our background of our experiences. And it’s kind of because there are some terms and there’s some things that are like you would have to then explain it to other people but like with, with like the fellows it’s like they understand you, like, so that’s why I like to say like they speak the same language. So, that trust is already there. That trust or like the

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whether there’s like vulnerability...I feel like that’s already like set. It’s like an unspoken thing.”

Many Fellows reported feeling less isolated or “siloed” when they were with the other members of the Fellowship, which helped them feel more comfortable sharing ideas and voicing questions around challenges they were facing in their classrooms.

The one-on-one coaching protocols provide interactional affordances for the Fellows to self-reflect and act on given feedback. The instructional feedback always focuses on a goal the Fellow set. As one Fellow explained when discussing his experience with his DLC coach, “She would ask like, ‘Hey, what are you wanting me to look for, what are you wanting me to look at?’ And then she would kind of focus her, you know, grows and glows based upon that.” By asking targeted questions around a specific goal, the coaches afford the Fellows the opportunity to process externally with an expert in their field and reflect upon both their instruction and the progress they make on their Impact Projects.

The DLC leaders want to provide affordances that, if acted upon, ensure that all of the cohort members are able to get to know one another instead of gravitating only towards those who teach similar classes (EE or EL). To accomplish this goal, the DLC leaders assign seats or tables each time the Fellows meet. Their tables or “shoulder partners” work together on tasks during the sessions such as discussing a shared reading, analyzing student data, and giving and receiving feedback on one another’s Impact Projects. Intentionally assigning seats and designing tasks that require the Fellows to work together affords them the opportunity to build a robust network of likeminded teacher leaders from outside of their school buildings. While they often feel isolated in their schools, meeting the other Fellows affords them regular access to a community they can tap into for resources as needed. One of the Fellows mentioned how she often calls another Fellow at a different school to share her challenges and ask him for advice.

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She had never met him prior to the Fellowship but said he has been an ongoing source of support for her ever since.

Many Fellows discussed how interacting with other EE and EL teachers expanded their knowledge of effective instructional practices and gave them ideas for solutions to problems they had in their individual sites. One Fellow discussed how listening to others and hearing their ideas helped her learn. She said, “I don't know what I don't know, and so wanting to build that network of other people who either are doing similar things but might be doing them slightly different, or doing things that I never thought of, and be like, ‘What, what do you know? How can we learn together?’” Interacting with the other Fellows helps the teachers gain more resources that they can take back to their classroom and provides them with professional support.

Interactional affordances provided through the Fellowship often overlap with artifactual affordances because the DLC designs their tasks to be collaborative. All of the Fellows mentioned the usefulness of being able to discuss what they were doing with each other. For example, one Fellow discussed participating in a “data dive” in which Fellows looked at their own school data surrounding EE or EL students and their academic outcomes. She said that the data dive itself was meaningful, but it was even more helpful to be able to interpret the data with others and make sense of the numbers together.

The DLC leaders also provide interactional and artifactual affordances through the Impact Projects as they incorporate structures for Fellows to both give and receive feedback on their projects. As one Fellow stated, “It's not our impact project but through the conversations about the impact project” that she developed as both a teacher and a leader who values constructive criticism from other educators who are knowledgeable in her content area. Another Fellow explained how she did not realize how influential her project had been until she debriefed the work she had implemented with the leaders of the DLC and the other Fellows. The

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collaborative aspect of the projects affords the Fellows to expand their thinking, making their projects stronger than had they carried them out in isolation. One teacher mentioned how “anytime that we were kind of able to collaborate with others, and kind of share where we were with our project, and then get feedback from other people about, like, ‘Oh, have you thought about doing this? Or have you thought about this question? How are you addressing this?’ was really helpful, too. So just the opportunity to kind of work with peers while working on that project was really nice.”

The one-on-one coaching also includes an overlap of interactional and artifactual affordances that provide Fellows with the opportunity to discuss research-based practices with others within their field of education of diverse learners. The coaches often offer resources such as lesson ideas or templates, instructional strategies, and articles or books relating to the individual needs of the Fellows. The resources themselves afforded the Fellows the chance to self-teach and have a toolbox to refer to as needed. Additionally, discussing these resources and analyzing them with the support of the coaches allowed Fellows to deepen their knowledge and understanding by sharing insights with an expert and being able to ask questions.

Research Question 3

How does participation in the Teacher Leader Fellowship influence the fellows’ identities as teachers who serve diverse learners?

Finding 3

The Fellows reported gaining more confidence and self-agency, feeling better-equipped to teach and advocate, and increasing their feelings of connectedness as a result of participating in the Teacher Leader Fellowship. Their changes in identities were related to the types of affordance they acted on during their time in the Teacher Leader Fellowship.

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Hand and Gresalfi’s (2015) definition of identity is “one’s participation in and across activities and the sense one makes of oneself in relation to these activities,” (p. 191), and all of the Fellows reported a change in their self-perceptions as a result of participating in the Teacher Leader Fellowship. The changes they felt were in relation to the available affordances.

Many Fellows explained how they gained more confidence as a result of being in a space where they were surrounded by other teachers of diverse learners instead of isolated in their own schools. One Fellow explained how “sometimes you feel like you're holding your breath when you're at your school because you feel like nobody else understand you or what, what you're going through.” She felt that her voice was stifled in her school setting because she was not with others who truly understood her teaching role and context. This feeling that she and other Fellows shared impacted their identities across the two contexts of their school sites and where they met as a Fellowship as they felt more confident to ask for advice and ideas in the Fellowship than they did at their schools.

The artifactual affordances also impacted the identities of the Fellows. Many Fellows discussed the lasting influence of engaging with the Impact Projects on their learning. For example, one Fellow explained that “that was really helpful for me to see like that something that I had planned and identified as a need could be addressed and, and like, improved. Um, and that was something that I think was kind of new to me...it like kind of built up my confidence a little bit.” Others mentioned how completing the Impact Projects now helps them in the 2020-2021 school year because they are able to apply the same thinking structure to their current situations or are able to continue solutions they implemented last year to improve outcomes for the EE and EL learners at their schools.

Lastly, the interactional affordances impacted the Fellows’ identities and learning. As one Fellow stated, “I've consistently been the person in my building who knows the most, which is

“They Speak the Same Language as Me!” cool, like I was helpful. Um, but that doesn't allow me to like learn more either.” Many other Fellows expressed similar thoughts about how they felt stuck in their learning until they were able to interact with the other educators and be able to share best practices and resources. One Fellow talked about the importance of creating what she referred to as “shared knowledge” which allowed her to “add tools to my toolbox.” The interactions also increased many of the Fellows’ participation in the PD sessions offered by the DLC. A Fellow contrasted her level of engagement at her school versus in the Fellowship, explaining how “There's only me and one other person and we're the only ones who really are masters of the, of our job description so it's like a lot of our teammates don't really understand. So it's really limited versus to the DLC when you're working with a group of people who are working with that specific group and you're like, ‘Oh, girl, I get you! I know where you're coming from, that just happened to me last week. I know! I can relate!’ And it makes the engagement so high because it’s like, oh hey, we’re dealing with our colleagues who are also experiencing the same things.”

Recommendation

Design a Teacher Leader Fellowship alumni group in order to sustain Fellows’ identities as teacher leaders of diverse learners beyond the eleven months in the Fellowship.

Overall, I found the Teacher Leader Fellowship made available affordances that allowed the Fellows to engage deeply with content, enact target practices, and build a network with other teachers of diverse learners, all of which resulted in the Fellows’ confirmation of their identities as teacher leaders of diverse leaders. As Hand and Gresalfi (2015) remind us, however, “who we ‘are’ is always viewed in relation to the practices, roles, and expectations of a particular

“They Speak the Same Language as Me!” activity.” Therefore, I was left wondering what will happen to the identities of the Fellows after the eleven months the of the Fellowship come to a close. I worried that the Fellows could lose momentum and confidence if they began feeling isolated and misunderstood once again, a common phenomenon in off-site teacher education and professional development (Zeichner, 2010).

Currently, there is not a formal structure in place to encourage a continuation of the learning that was so valuable for the Fellows during their time together. Creating an alumni program would ensure a more lasting impact on the Fellows and keep them from returning to feelings of working in isolation after their time in the Fellowship ends.

Studies of the use of cohort models in educational leadership preparation programs report positive effects, yet there is little research on the endurance of these effects once the program concludes (Browne-Ferrigno and Muth, 2003). Therefore, finding research-based examples of ways to sustain the benefits of being in a cohort after a program ends proved a difficult task. However, research stemming from social capital theory provided promising practices that are likely to strengthen educator networks and learning communities.

Social capital refers to competencies that are formed as a result of relationships within social networks (Coleman, 1988). A recent study that examined a cohort of teachers who progressed through a two-year professional development program suggested that multi-year programs should focus more heavily on increasing human capital, or skills and knowledge, in the first year while focusing efforts more on developing social capital in subsequent years (Yoon, 2018). Structuring programs this way allows participants to rapidly increase their skill sets in instruction initially and then expand their social networks in the second year once they have a foundation of trust with other members of their cohort from the first year together. Interventions aimed at increasing social capital will expand the Fellows’ access to strong relationships with

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other experts in their fields and instructional resources. The alumni program should include network and social capital interventions that encourage the alumni to tap into their already established networks when needed. As part of the program, the DLC leaders could guide the alumni through network reflections in which the alumni map their current networks and reflect on whom they could reach out to based on the needs they might have in the months and years to come. The more aware individuals are of their social network, the more likely they will be to act on this interactional affordance (Van Waes, S., et al., 2018).

Another way to increase the alumni’s social capital is through cross-cohort networking and relationship building. Although the 2020-2021 Teacher Leader Fellowship cohort never came to be due to COVID-19, there will be a 2021-2022 cohort starting in July. There are a variety of ways alumni can connect with this new cohort. One way is by partnering with a new cohort member to act as mentors for the new members’ Impact Projects. The DLC leaders could pair the new Fellows with the alumni based on similar topics and similar contexts so that the alumni continue to build leadership skills, and both current Fellows and alumni expand their networks beyond their cohorts. The leaders could also provide a contact list of alumni and their areas of interest or expertise so that the new Fellows could reach out to the alumni as needed throughout their eleven months in the Fellowship.

Lastly, encouraging alumni to lead professional learning opportunities and share what they learned throughout their time in the Fellowship will continue to expand the Fellows’ social capital with other teachers in their buildings. This practice will both strengthen the alumni’s leadership skills and foster collegial relationships, and it will also help bridge the learning from the context of the Fellowship to the Fellows’ schools. As Van Waes and others (2018) report, “If what is learned during the professional development program is not supported or is contradictory

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to what happens at the workplace, transfer will be less likely,” which could cause the Fellows to return to the status quo.

Conclusion

The Teacher Leader Fellowship aims to develop an ideal teacher leader of diverse learners. An ideal teacher leader of diverse learners is one who takes an inquiry stance, seeks to self-improve, and values exchanging ideas and resources with other educators rather than working in isolation. The Fellowship supports the development of teacher leaders through three categories of affordances: institutional affordances, resource affordances, and interactional affordances. The intentional planning and design of the meeting spaces, professional development, coaching, and learning tasks afford the fellows the opportunity to become ideal teacher leaders of diverse learners. As a result of acting on these available affordances, the Fellows reported shifts in their identities as teacher leaders within their school communities. Engaging in the practices of the Fellowship developed their identities as advocates for diverse learners and their teachers, capable agents of strategic change, and vital members of a professional network of like-minded individuals.

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Appendix A

Codebook

Code	Definition	Example
Institutional Affordances	Affordances that the context or environment of the organization provides	“I was the only EL resource teacher for kindergarten through eighth grade. So I knew I really wasn't going to be able to find someone at school that was specifically, you know, focused on what I was doing, because no one else was doing it. Really, there was no one at school that I could go to, for exactly what I was working on.”
Artifactual Affordances	Affordances that physical tools and resources provide	“Working on that project kind of led me to kind of assess like you know what are the needs at my school? And what, you know, and what could I personally do to fill in those gaps?”
Interactional Affordances	Affordances that interacting with other individuals provide	“I think it's always nice to get perspectives from like other networks, or other even like, schools, just because you know, every school is a little bit different. Everybody does things a little bit differently. And maybe there's something that the school is doing, and then we would hear that and be like, ‘Oh, that's interesting. We should try that in our schools.’ And so you know, I think it's, it's good to connect with people kind of in your own circles, but it's also good to expand because you can always learn from what others are doing.”

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Appendix B

Impact Project Template



The DLC Teacher Leader Fellowship Impact Project

STEP 1: ASK A CENTRAL QUESTION		
<p>BRAINSTORM: Review the following “buckets” or topics into which you could possibly dive deeper for a needs assessment. Write notes about the current state of this topic at your school. Draft a question. Not all buckets/topics need to be filled out.</p>		
BUCKET/TOPIC	CURRENT STATE	CENTRAL QUESTION
Suspensions	The suspensions rates are low at our school, not a concern at this time.	What will we do as a team to continue having great outcomes in this area.
Failing Grades		
Retention		
Tier 1 Behavior		
Tier 3 Behavior		
Academic Growth Math		
Academic Growth Reading		
Achievement on State Assessments		
Compliance Concerns		
<p>Key Topic to Focus On (Choose 1):</p>		

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<i>Central Question(s):</i>		
<i>Rationale:</i>		
With which high level practices (HLPs) is this topic and central question aligned?		
Why is this project important to our school?		
How does this affect diverse learners at our school?		
Who is involved in this project?		
How will I know it is successful?		
STEP 2: ORGANIZE YOUR APPROACH		
<i>Measurable Data to Track. Choose 3 data sources to review. These may be revisited throughout the year as you monitor the project's success. These data sources should directly relate to the central questions.</i>		
Data Source 1	Data Source 2	Data Source 3
RATIONALE:	RATIONALE:	RATIONALE:
STEP 3: CONDUCT BACKGROUND RESEARCH		
<i>Document your research and data in the "Needs Assessment Organizational Tool Template." If you have any graphs or synthesizing of this research, can be presented in a table or graph here, or as an appendix.</i>		
STEP 4: ANALYZE FINDINGS		
<i>Review the trends you noticed in these data. Based on the trends, establish 1-3 key findings.</i>		

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KEY FINDING #1:		
KEY FINDING #2		
KEY FINDING #3:		
STEP 5: IDENTIFY SOLUTIONS		
<i>For each established key finding, identify a solution or a few solutions to address the concern. Make sure the key solution is directly linked to the key finding.</i>		
SOLUTION FINDING #1:		
Date to Begin Implementation:		
Key Next Steps:		
SOLUTION FINDING #2		
Date to Begin Implementation:		
Key Next Steps:		
SOLUTION FINDING #3:		
Date to Begin Implementation:		
Key Next Steps:		
<i>Identify a time to meet with your school leader to present this information.</i>		
Meeting Date with Leader:	Key Next Steps from Meeting:	
STEP 6: IMPACT PROJECT EXECUTION		
<i>Begin impact project execution. Document adjustments below at specific times throughout the year.</i>		
Date	Data Reflection	Action

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ONGOING: REVIEW & REFLECT

Reflect on your experience with this impact project. Answer the following questions in your response:

- *How did results shift from the beginning of the year to the end of the year as you targeted this specific concern?*
- *What did you learn from conducting this process?*
- *What do you find helpful about this process?*
- *What about this process presented challenges?*

FINAL PRESENTATIONS

The final step in the impact project is to create and present your findings and experience with the impact project. Guiding questions and framework will be provided for you later in the year.